NASET Special Educator e-Journal

AUGUST 2019

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Special Education Legal Alert

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This month's update concerns issues that were subject to recent federal appeals court decisions and are of general significance: (a) the application of *Endrew F.* and PRR, and (b) a surprising and puzzling wrinkle in tuition reimbursement jurisprudence. Both of these cases relate to other items available on my website **perryzirkel.com**.

In *Albright v. Mountain Home School District* (2019), the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals addressed various claims that a parent brought on behalf of her child with autism. Reflecting her highly contentious relationship with the district, the parent filed a series of due process hearings challenging the child's IEPs. The first two complaints resulted in settlement agreements. Arising from the third hearing, which consisted of 11 sessions, the claims in this case included (a) a substantively inappropriate fourth-grade IEP, (b) the use of sensory integration techniques in the BIP, and (c) lack of meaningful parental participation.

The hearing officer concluded that the IEP met the *Rowley* standard for substantive appropriateness. The parents contended that the IEP did not meet the Supreme Court's revised standard in *Endrew F.* in light of her child's "true" potential. The Eighth Circuit ruled that "however regrettable the disagreement between [the parent] and the remainder of the IEP team on this matter,"

Further extending the two-year post *Endrew F.* case law analysis available on my website, this published Eighth Circuit ruling illustrates that *Endrew F.* has not had a significant outcomes effect in the courts. Rather than resolving the issue of the child's potential as one of the presumably pertinent circumstances, the court merely repeated the *Endrew F.* dictum that the IEP need only be reasonable,

the child "made progress in a curriculum that was appropriate in light of her circumstances."	not optimal. Similarly, the court responded to the parent's four-year test score evidence by limiting its focus to the year in question, concluding that "although the test scores varied within the period, in total they demonstrate academic improvement."
The parent argued that the BIP's sensory integration techniques were pseudoscientific in violation of the IDEA requirement for services "based on peer reviewed research [(PRR)] to the extent practicable." The Eighth Circuit concluded that "alongside the 'extensive' use of peer-reviewed practices, the use of sensory integration techniques, which were recommended by [the child's] occupational therapist, did not deny [the child] FAPE."	Again consistent with the general, although not uniform, trend of judicial case law for (a) the application of the IDEA to BIPs, including but not limited to their appropriateness, and (b) the interpretation of the IDEA's qualified PRR requirement, this Eighth Circuit ruling was relatively relaxed and district-deferential in contrast with academic and professional norms. Note too that the court again did some deft ducking, avoiding directly addressing whether sensory integration techniques fulfilled the IDEA's PRR provision.
Faced with evidence of hundreds of pages of e-mails and transcripts of IEP meetings, the parent pegged her participation-violation claim on the district holding one of the meetings without her. However, the court concluded that (a) she chose not to attend the meeting despite the district's erstwhile efforts and (b) even if it was a violation, it did not result in substantive harm to her child.	The court's ruling in response to this third claim is in line with the majority of the parent-participation cases. However, the court's fallback, harmless-error approach missed the provision in the 2004 amendments of the IDEA requiring at the second step of procedural FAPE cases the alternative to substantive loss to the child—loss to the parents in terms of significantly impeding their right to participate in the IEP process. The outcome could have been different or the same, but failure to apply this alternate prong is clearly subject to question.

The bottom line to this case, which is unfortunately typical of many cases that reach the judicial level, was

"a profoundly toxic lack of trust" that had developed between the parent and the district.

In *Steven R.F. v. Harrison Central School District* (2019), the Tenth Circuit addressed the appeal of a lower court decision that my December 2018 monthly legal alert summarized. Finding fatal procedural violations, including failure to comply with a complaint procedures corrective action order, the lower court reversed the hearing officer. The lower court concluded that the district had denied FAPE to the child with autism and ordering tuition reimbursement and attorneys' fees. The school district appealed this lower court decision. In the meanwhile, the district provided the reimbursement pursuant to the IDEA's stay-put provision. Surprisingly, the Tenth Circuit dismissed the appeal and vacated the lower court decision without addressing the merits of the case.

The Tenth Circuit did not address the "merits," which for tuition reimbursement cases typically includes whether the district had provided FAPE and, if not, whether the parents' unilateral placement was appropriate. Instead, agreeing with the parents' initial argument, the court concluded that the case was moot, because the district had already provided the relief that the parent sought in this case.

Although mootness occasionally arises in other IDEA cases, this is the first published appellate case that has done so in a tuition reimbursement case. The court's ruling poses major questions and concerns for this high-stakes remedy. First, although stay-put applies upon a hearing officer or, in two-tier state, a review officer reimbursement order, does it also arise, without such an agreement on behalf of the state, upon a judicial order?

The school district counter-argued that the case fits the well-established exception to mootness, which is for cases that are capable of repetition and yet—due to the prolonged period for litigation—escape judicial review. In response, the Tenth Circuit agreed that this situation met the first required element for this exception—the challenged action expires prior to full litigation, because an IEP is for one-year and this appeal was well after the 2016-17 year. However, the Tenth Circuit concluded that

This part of the ruling is the second and stronger potentially limiting factor in the effect of the Tenth Circuit decision on other tuition reimbursement cases. The specific procedural violations in this case, as identified in my December 2018 legal alert, were quite unusual and specific to the year at issue. Would the Tenth Circuit reach the same conclusion about the mootness exception for a more typical FAPE challenge to a proposed IEP when in the course

the district did not meet the second prerequisite—a reasonable expectation that the complaining party would be subject to the same action again. Here, the court reasoned that even if the district had reasonable expectation that the parent would challenge the child's most recent IEP, the procedural FAPE claims that the parent raised were specific to 2016–17 without proof that any future challenges would be the same.	of litigation, the district proposed an IEP for the subsequent year that was similar to the originally challenged one and the parent promptly files or is reasonably expected to file for a second hearing? The answers to such questions are unclear for the Tenth Circuit, which encompasses the six states from Oklahoma to Utah. The effect of this ruling is subject to even less clear for jurisdictions outside the Tenth Circuit, which are not bound by its possibly narrow scope. The underlying concern is how to reach the merits upon appealing tuition reimbursement orders.
Not so oddly, the parents also argued that the exception applied, but the Tenth Circuit disagreed for the same reason—lack of likelihood that the district would subject the parents to the same alleged procedural violations, with reasonable likelihood of parental challenge.	The parent's reason and the court's rejection illustrate another concern. Although receiving the reimbursement (which they likely do not have to refund to the district), the parents lost not only the precedent in favor of their procedural claims but also their prevailing status to qualify for recovery of their attorneys' fees.
This case is a real head scratcher, raising various perplexing and practical questions for both districts and parents as to its legal effect. Stay tuned.	

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Buzz from the Hub

All articles below can be accessed through the following links:

https://www.parentcenterhub.org/buzz-june2019-issue2/
https://www.parentcenterhub.org/buzz-june2019-issue1/
https://www.parentcenterhub.org/buzz-may2019-issue2/

Tips for Parents: Summer Provides Time to Reinforce Positive Behaviors at Home

Emotional meltdowns can douse a family during summer break. Read this article from PAVE for tips to create a positive home environment that encourages expected behaviors.

14 Ways to Help Older Kids Build Motor Skills

Children develop gross and fine motor skills at different rates. And while there are many activities to help younger kids work on fine and gross motor skills, they're not generally aimed at older kids who struggle with these skills. Here are 14 fun activities suited for older kids to help them build gross and fine motor skills without making it seem like more work. **Also available in Spanish** *(14 formas de ayudar a chicos más grandes a desarrollar habilidades motoras).*

Summer Reading with Bookshare

Bookshare's *Summer Reading Lists* provide enriching level-appropriate tales of fantasy, science fiction, #ownvoices, STEM, and other interesting topics. Combined with Bookshare's helpful audio, word-level highlighting, braille, and customizable text and color features, summer reading could not be easier. Explore fantastic titles handpicked for young readers, middle school students, teens, and adults.

Why We Should Let Our Kids Be Bored

When her child complains, "I'm bored," this mom no longer suggests activities to cure the ennui. Here, she explains why those moments should be treasured. "That's great you're bored. That's when people have the best ideas!"

Intervening to Prevent a Dropout | Video

Research has shown that middle school is the key moment when, absent effective intervention, students can fall into the patterns that lead them to drop out during high school. Identifying the risk factors associated with students who drop out of high school is featured in this 6-minute video excerpt from *FRONTLINE: "Middle School Moment."*

Young Children Exposed Prenatally to Substances

This new ECTA web page provides key research, policy, state guidance and examples, and evidence-based practices for supporting families and young children exposed prenatally to substances.

Federal Data and Resources on Restraint and Seclusion

This 12-page report from the Government Accountability Office (GAO) discusses (a) how the Department of Education collects data on the use of restraint and seclusion, (b) what the Department's data tell us about the use of restraint and seclusion in public schools, and (c) resources and initiatives at the federal level to address the use of restraint and seclusion. A 1-page ***Highlights*** is also available, as is an *accessible PDF* version.

Students Most at Risk of Getting Spanked at School Are Black or Disabled, Data Show

Nineteen states, the vast majority in the South, permit school personnel to strike students with belts, rulers, homemade wooden paddles, or bare hands in the name of discipline. Whether a student is actually at risk of physical punishment often depends on race, geography or disability status, according to a new analysis of 2013-14 federal education data by the Southern Poverty Law Center.

Improving Federal Programs that Serve Tribes and Their Members: High Risk Issue

Concerns about ineffective federal administration of Indian education and health care programs and federal mismanagement of energy resources held in trust for tribes and their members have resulted in the designation of federal management of these programs as "high risk." The link above takes you to the GAO report on this issue. There's also a ***2-minute video summary*** available, *High Risk: Programs That Serve Tribes and Their Members*.

A Year in the Life 2018: Parent Centers in Action | Here's the infographic CPIR produced after the data were in and crunched. It's 2 pages (designed to be printed front/back to become a 1-page handout or mini-poster), in PDF format (1 MB), in full color. It's a stunning portrait of what can be achieved by a few, extremely dedicated people for the benefit of so many.
Adaptable Infographic for Parent Centers to Use | This infographic is designed so it can be easily changed, inserting your Center's numbers and data results into key blocks of information. It's provided as a PowerPoint file and results in an infographic that's 1-page long. Easy to insert your Center-specific accomplishments, and add your logo and contact information.
Quick Guide to Adapting the Infographic | Also download this 2-page guide that will show you, with screenshots, where your Center-specific information needs to be inserted. We provide this guide just in case having such a "checklist" would be helpful.

Reinforcing Your Child's IEP Goals Over the Summer

If your child has an IEP, it may or may not cover summer. Some kids get extended school year services built into their IEPs, but many don't. If your child isn't attending a summer learning

program, you may worry about how she'll keep up while school's out. But you can help reinforce her goals, even if she doesn't have school services in the summer. This article offers how-to's. And it's available in Spanish, too (*Reforzar los objetivos del IEP de su hijo durante el verano*).

Living with Spina Bifida: Series

Here's an article series from eparent.com on living with spina bifida, with separate articles on infants | toddlers and preschoolers | school-aged children | and young adults.

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Evaluation of "The Effects of Screen Media Content on Young Children's Executive Functioning"

By Samantha Beverly

Abstract

In this paper, the research article "*The effects of screen media content on young children's executive functioning*" will be analyzed. The author's research problem, measurement of the experiment, research design, sampling, data collection, data analysis and results will be discussed throughout this article analysis.

Keywords: executive functioning, screen media, educational applications, educational television, cartoons

Research Problem

Executive functioning is the higher order thinking processes that are responsible for negotiating goal directed behavior within the cognitive mind. The goal directed behaviors that are included in executive functioning are self-regulation, working memory, inhibition, and attention. Huber (2018) conducted this experiment to determine how executive functioning in young children is immediately affected by screen media of different types (Huber, 2018). Huber conducted extensive research on existing research experiments that have been done on the effects of screen media on young children. In the past, the research has mostly been based on the use of television and the effects that it has on the brain, however being in the electronic age that we live in, Huber decided to research specifically how touchscreen affects executive functioning verses the effects of television on young children. She was specifically interested on the effect of media exposure on the executive functioning on children younger than four years old as there is little research done in this specific area. Huber was also very interested in looking specifically at working memory and response inhibition being effected by screen media due to the instant gratification that screen media provides for us today. Huber was interested in examining the way that delayed gratification was affected by an app and by a cartoon. She began this project wanting to explore the possibility of the new age of apps affecting young children's delayed gratification more than watching cartoons. Prior research indicates that exposure to educational or child/directed programs had no effect on executive functioning at either 12 months or 4 years of age.

Huber and the other researchers determined that identifying the factors that affect the executive functioning in the performance of children is important. The researchers identified two executive functioning areas, hot and cool. Hot executive functioning is activated during emotive or heightened social situations. The researchers measured this by tasks with intrinsic reward such as delay of

gratification. Cool executive functioning is during emotional neutral cognitive skills. The researchers assessed this by abstract tasks that were related to children's social and emotional readiness. Both the hot and cool executive functioning skill sets are essential to children's daily functioning and are directly related to children's academic success now and in the future.

Measurement

Participants' baseline scores were recorded through a series of task analysis tests, then the screen intervention materials were administered to each participating child. After the baseline for executive functioning was established the children's behavior was coded through a trained coder who looked at video of the participating children. For reliability purposes, the researchers set it up so that a random subset of cases were coded by an additional observer who was unaware of the conditions of the experiment so that biases could be avoided. Huber reported that the coder's reliability was assessed with Krippendorff's alpha (Hayes & Krippendorff, 2007). Coder's reliability was assessed for the Spin the Pots task as well as the Reverse Categorization task.

Each task's goal was to accurately measure different sections of executive functioning. The Spin the Pots task that measured working memory was measured by the total number of possible trials, which was 16, minus the number of errors the participating child made through the task. In the Reverse Categorization task that measured task switching and response inhibition, the total number of correctly sorted objects in the reverse categorization trial calculated the children's actions. For Gift Delay task, the participants' scores were measured on whether the bag was touched or not. If the bag was touched, the child did not receive a successful delay of gratification score.

Huber and the other researchers who worked on this research paper conducted three different screen conditions through an iPad 2. In the first condition named, EduApp, a child plays with an app that is designed to assist children in learning shapes and complete a puzzle. The second screen condition was the cartoon condition. Children watched part of an episode of a popular child's cartoon program, and the final condition was called EduTV where the children watched an episode of an educational children's program. For this stage two coders were assigned to assess the videos in the EduTV and the cartoon conditions. The coders were measuring the pace of each program by looking at the complete scene changes per minute within the shows and the fantastical events per minute. The researchers defined fantastical events as events that defied the laws of physics. The coders determined that the cartoon program displayed 2.99 fantastical events per minute and the EduTV program had a rate of 1.40 per minute. As for the pace of the two television programs, the cartoon program displayed 3.18 scene changes per minute and this surpassed the EduTV program by 2.30 changes per minute. Based on assessing the EduApp condition, it was not possible for the researchers to assess the app in the same way. However, based on the narrative of the app, there was

1 fantastical event per minute and about two and a half scene changes per minute. Based on this analysis, the researchers did not find EduApp to be classified as fantastical.

Research Design

For this study, executive functioning was measured through multiple tasks. Some tasks targeted working memory, a major function within executive functioning, another targeted task switching and response inhibition, while others specifically targeted delay of gratification. Executive functioning was also measured through screen intervention materials. "Spin the pots" was one of the tasks that measured visuospatial working memory in the participating students. The Spin the Pots task is identified as a "cool" executive functioning task where students helped the experimenter hide stickers in six of eight small boxes where two of the boxes remained empty were placed on a Lazy Susan. The experimenter covered all the boxes with a towel and rotated the lazy Susan all the way around. The experimenter then lifted the towel and asked children which box they wanted to open. This task's goal was for the participant to find all six stickers one at a time with as many errors as possible. This was assessing the children's working memory before exposure to the screen media. The participating students were given a maximum of 16 trials to find all of the stickers within the boxes. The scores were recorded and then calculated as the total number of possible trials, meaning 16 minus the number of errors each child made.

The second trial that was used to evaluate students executive functioning was called "Reverse Categorization". Reverse categorization measured the children's ability to task switch and their response to inhibition, and this task also fell into the cool executive functioning category. In this task, children were asked to first sort 6 objects into the corresponding bins that were based on size. After sorting all the big objects into the big bin and the small objects into the small bin, the examiners reversed the rules and asked the children to sort 12 objects incongruently. The researchers state that the two-year-old children were able to complete the task using large and small blocks, and the three-year-old children were able to sort "mommy" and "baby" animals that the children would have found typical into buckets that were labeled with an image of a human mother on one bin and a human baby on another. In the forethought of internal validity and addressing student misconceptions, the researchers established that the participating children could in fact differentiate between big and little objects previous to implementing this task. The children's scores were calculated as the total number of items that were correctly sorted in the incongruent trials, which was 12. The objective of this task was to test if the children had the ability to properly switch from one task (sorting objects into alike bins) to another task (sorting objects into opposite bins).

Gift Delay was a task designed to measure the participating children's tolerance for delayed gratification. In this task, a gift box was given to the children who were seated at a table, but the examiner had "forgotten" to get the bow for the preset. The children were asked to wait in their

chairs until the examiner got the bow and the children were not to touch the box until the examiner returned. The examiner waited a total of three minutes to return to the children. The children's performance was scored based on if the bag was touched. If a student did not touch the gift box, then the students were labeled has having a successful delay of gratification. A total of 13 participants were removed from the Gift Delay analysis due to experimenter error as reported by the researchers. The screen intervention materials were introduced to the participating children through three different condition areas. EduApp was an app that the children manipulated through the use of an iPad 2. EduApp was classified as non-fantastical by the researchers that administered this study, through EduApp the children used a specific app called *Shiny Party*. *Shiny Party* is an app that presents young children with the opportunity to learn to complete puzzles and shapes through a narrative that was interesting to the participating children. The content of this app is deemed educational by the developers of *Shiny Party*on the app store, and also is physically interactive as it is to be played on a touch screen. This app is appropriate for the age of the participants.

The next screen intervention material was the cartoon condition and the EduTV condition. For the cartoon condition, examiners had the participating children watch a part of an episode of the cartoon *Penguins of Madagascar*. The *Penguins of Madagascar* is a cartoon program meant for enjoyment and is not educational as determined by the researchers and advertisements. In the EduTv condition, children watched a portion of *Sesame Street* where self-regulation was being taught during that particular episode. In the episode, Cookie Monster was faced with achieving a clear goal where he had to "stop and think" and use problem solving skills. Due to the content within this television program, EduTV condition was determined to be of high quality standards due to the fact that there was a learning goal that was clearly stated to the viewers.

Sampling

The researchers had a total of 96 children age 24-48 months participating in the study. 54 of the children participating in the study were boys, and 42 were girls. Of this sample, the researchers reported that 9 children were excluded from the study due to their unwillingness to complete all of the executive functioning tasks in the study. Previous touchscreen usage was quantified by whether parents indicated that their children had ever used a touchscreen to watch videos or play games. Previous touchscreen usage was found to be common among participants at 93 percent. The sample group was composed of participants who came from middle- to upper middle-class homes where the median range of annual household income was reported $1000,000 - $150,000 (AUD) as reported by Huber (2018). The families were recruited from the surrounding suburbs in Swinburne University of Technology's greater metropolitan area in Australia. This research was targeting young children who would have access to touchscreen devices; therefore this sample population is accurate to the overall population.

Data Collection

Throughout this research paper data was collected in multiple areas to establish a baseline and then again to determine an effect size of the screen interventions that were put into place. Throughout the three screen interventions trained coders were recording the children's behavior during the tasks. As mentioned previously within this article analysis, for assurance of reliability of the coders, additional observers who had no biases due to ignorance of the experimental conclusions were brought in to assess randomized trials. The research article expressed that there was a robust agreement on the ordinal scores for each task that the participants completed.

A statistical analysis using binary logistic regression in order to study the effects of the three different screen activity interventions and the effects that it had on the participants delay of gratification was compared to the likelihood of the child not touching the gift in the Gift Delay task. The cool executive functioning scores were calculated by subtracting the baseline data from the post-screen activity scores. This data for both the pre and post-screen activity tasks were charted on a bar graph to show the significance between the pre and post task scores, if a change was recorded. Baseline performance on the executive functioning tasks was included in the analysis of each task as a control as there was a potential for ceiling effects in a subset of the participants from the group.

Results

The preliminary analysis of the data revealed no significant effect from gender of the participant or previous exposure to screen media. Due to this analysis, Huber did not consider these factors in the official results within the study. As mentioned previously, executive functioning in this study was split into two categories; hot and cool, to assess separate executive functioning categories.

The results for hot executive functioning skills indicate that out of the participating children who passed the Gift Delay task, scored 84 percent for EduApp, 63 percent for EduTV, and 61 percent for cartoons. These percentages were calculated by a binary logistic regression to compare the effect of the screen conditions on children's Gift Delay task performance. The results of the screen based interventions show that the participating children's executive functioning in delay of gratification was more likely after playing the educational app than after the children watched the cartoon. After watching the educational TV program, the children showed no significant change in their delay of gratification. This data indicated that parents and guardians should consider educational apps differently than cartoons in respect to the effects on young children's executive functioning. Research still shows that the longest delay of gratification was found to be after extended physical activity as per Lillard and Peterson (2011).

The results for cool executive functioning showed that the baseline for executive functioning showed that children within EduApp, EduTV and Cartoon groups would not differ significantly, and these same participants did not show any significant difference in the Spin the Pots performance and

Reverse Categorization as the dependent variable. This research article reports that, under certain circumstances, children's cool working memory part of their executive functioning is also affected through the viewing of screen media. Overall, there was no significant evidence of cool executive functioning being influenced by the three screen media interventions conducted through this research.

The key finding in this study was that compared to watching a cartoon, using an educational app on the iPad had beneficial effects on children's hot and cool executive functioning performance. The researchers found this finding to be consistent in two of the three measures of executive functioning skills that were assessed. The most impressive, over all three executive functioning tasks, the *shiny Party* educational app never showed an unfavorable affect on the participating children's executive functioning. The screen interventions had a significant effect on the participating children's delay of gratification and performance within working memory. When the educational TV program was excluded, the researchers had a better understanding of what features of the screen-based media interventions were effecting the executive functioning the most and what specific tasks within executive functioning were targeted significantly.

Conclusion / Reviewer's Contribution

If the reviewer of this article were to conduct this study again, she might consider adding an additional screen media intervention. The screen-media that the reviewer might consider adding to the study would possibly be the effect of playing non-educational games on the iPad on young children's executive functioning. The reviewer has taken interest in this topic of executive functioning and its connection to screen-media due to the fact that the reviewer has observed many young children become pacified through smart devices and receive instant gratification through an enjoyable activity. The research conducted in this study was found to be very detailed and points where validity of the experiments might have been threatened were addressed and dealt with appropriately in this study. Due to the attention to detail in which this research was conducted, the reviewer would keep all of the data presented in this research article. The only portion of the research article that the reviewer might change would possibly be the Gift Delay task because 13 participants were removed from the analysis due to an experimenter error. The reviewer found that the results from the Gift Delay task were the most important baseline scores as a majority of the screen-media interventions were compared to delay of gratification. The reviewer might delete the reverse categorization due to the fact that task switching was not assessed as heavily as the other executive functioning skills.

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Establishing a Framework of Effective Communication with Families of Students from Diverse Cultures

By Alicyn Fifield

Abstract

The United States is known to be one of the most culturally diverse countries in the world. Although this can add richness and strength to the country, it also can lead to errors in judgement because of a misunderstanding of cultural perspectives and norms. In education an error in judgement can cause a student to suffer academically and ultimately not reach his/her potential. This is an error that can be avoided when schools and families become educational partners and engage in effective communication practices for the benefit of the students being educated. It needs to be the goal of all educators to establish a community wherein they can engage in effective communication practices with families of all cultural backgrounds.

Developing a philosophy that demonstrates respect for cultural differences and regards a student's culture as an asset to their education is the first step to developing a multicultural framework that maintains high expectations for every child (Gallegos, 2017). It is imperative that educators start early in establishing an atmosphere of trust between home and school. In order to have positive outcomes for students, schools must reach out to families of diverse cultures and build culturally responsive collaborative partnerships (Rosetti, Sauer, Bui, & Ou, 2017). Since it is not possible to be family-oriented without being culturally responsive, educators must work to develop both their cultural competence and cultural responsiveness (Povenmire-Kirk, Bethune, Alverson, & Kahn, 2015).

Early Intervention

Early intervention and communication with families is critical. New Mexico School of the Deaf, NMSD, employs early intervention specialists that live within the community. This leads to frequent interaction within the community (Gallegos, 2017). Interaction between diverse cultures reduces prejudice and leads to more empathy (Perrigrew, Tropp, Wagner, & Christ, 2011). The community in which the school is based has a high population of Native American and Hispanic heritages. NMSD strives to hire early development specialists and deaf mentors that are not only fluent in American Sign Language, but also Native American and Spanish. They also provide opportunities for their employees to interact with their students and their families. NMSD provide academics in a culturally responsive educational framework (Gallegos, 2017).

Building a Collaborative Partnership

The special education system can be daunting for any parent but parents from culturally diverse backgrounds experience even more difficulty. They often attend more IEP meetings but have less opportunity to provide any meaningful input into their child's education. Often assessment results are not translated into the family's native language and there is a lack of skilled interpreters present (Rosetti, Sauer, Bui, & Ou, 2017). Educators should not discourage use of the family's native language. Medina and Salamon found that using both home and school languages with children diagnosed with ASD led to growth in both expressive and receptive language skills (2012). Teachers can utilize "cultural brokers" to bridge the gap between home and school and foster better home school relationships. Cultural brokers are people who are bicultural with the culture of the student's family. These could be other staff members already present at the school or parent liaisons. It will be imperative to build trusting relationships with parents by involving them and other important community members in school activities (Povenmire-Kirk, Bethune, Alverson, & Kahn, 2015).

Creating a Multicultural Classroom

Teachers must begin by first examining their own cultural biases and perceptions (Taylor, Kumi-Yeboah, & Rinlasben, 2016). Educators can have cultural biases toward students who are different than the typical student they are used to teaching (Abou-Rjaily & Stoddard, 2017). They can develop their cultural awareness by attending diversity trainings and community events where they can interact with diverse cultural groups (Povenmire-Kirk, Bethune, Alverson, & Kahn, 2015). Teacher can incorporate cultural experiences into educational experiences while maintaining strong academic content. In a study by Sosin, Bekkala, and Pepper-Sanello, students were asked as part of an art project to learn about the effects of culture from various cultures and time periods. The students assessed at the end of the semester had some of the highest gains in creative and mental growth (2017). Effective teaching is a process that looks at every aspect of instruction when choosing the subject matter, lessons planning, and different methods and strategies Ajongakoh Bella, (2016). It is also essential that the teacher foster a classroom atmosphere of tolerance and respect for all students and their cultures. Demonstrating an attitude that is positive and non-judgmental to all students will lead to students feeling accepted and safe (Kulikova, Shalaginaova, & Cherkasova, (2017).

Effective Communication: The Key to Student Success

It is important to develop practices early on that will lead to working collaboratively with families from culturally diverse backgrounds in order to ensure that their students receive a high quality educational experience. Establishing as atmosphere of trust is essential in order to build this partnership (Rosetti, Story Sauer, Bui, & Ou, 2017). Teachers must be willing to examine their own

cultural backgrounds and biases in order to actively learn and develop a more culturally responsive framework to base their relationships with their students and their families.

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Impact of Disability on the Families of Special Needs Students and Advocacy

By Carolina Fonseca

Abstract

Having a child can be one the greatest joys parents and families share throughout their lives. However, for some families, the joy quickly turns into fear, anxiety and confusion when they are told their child was diagnosed with a disability. Many emotions come into play when raising a child with special needs and this can impact families in many ways, including their involvement in their education and advocating for services. The research studied focused on the effects special needs children have on their families, the roles families play in advocating for their family members, the services provided to special needs children and the transitioning process. It is evident that students with special needs have a deep impact on their families and the roles they play as primary advocates and caretakers. However, there is conflicting data on whether families consider the impact to be negative or burdensome. Research conducted also seems to be limited to school age children and not on those transitioning into adulthood with aging parents. This warrants for further research on the impact that disability has on families of special needs students and parental advocacy, specifically those with aging parents.

Caring for a child with special needs can be a difficult task to undertake as no parent is ever prepared for the unique needs children with disabilities face. Many of the same issues parents of a typical child has to face, are also experienced by parents of special needs children, however, they may be more frequent and more intense. Caring for a child with special needs often requires specialized knowledge and collaboration with healthcare professionals, both of which fall out of the norm for typical caregiving (Leiter et al., 2004). Some areas that can warrant extra care and attention include areas such as personal care and hygiene, medical care, management of behaviors and financial and social needs (Kishore, 2011). In addition to the emotional aspect of caring for a child with a disability, parents must also undertake the role as primary advocates for their child. The support and guidance of caretakers and parents are long-term and necessary throughout the life of the individual with a disability. As individuals with disabilities age, so too do their parents, which changes the dynamics of the family and the way they advocate as roles change and responsibilities are shifted (Grossman & Magaña, 2016).

Effects on Family and Caregivers

Families of individuals with special needs are greatly affected by the care they must provide for their family members. This involves emotional support, financial support, and often times medical support. In a study by (Vohra et al., 2013), it was found that marital stability was negatively impacted in families with special needs individuals in comparison to those without. It was also noted that

financial burden was higher specifically in parents of children with ASD versus parents of children with other developmental disabilities. Similarly, family members of individuals with ASD also reported they had more difficulty accessing services and quality care than those with other developmental disabilities. According to (Leiter et al., 2004), employment is also affected by having a child with a disability as many caretakers reduce their workload or completely leave the workforce to care and advocate for their children. As the children with special needs go through adolescence and transition into adulthood, the roles of their parents as primary caretakers and advocates often shift on to siblings who must now care for their aging parents as well as their family member with special needs. It is important to note that not all families are impacted in the same manner.

Advocating

The roles of family members in regard to education has changed as well, as it now focuses and emphasizes on their decision-making and empowerment in advocating for their family members. Advocating for a child or adult with special needs has now become the primary focus of many caretakers. According to (Starr et al., 2010), it was found that many families of children with special needs are reporting that they feel schools and teachers are lacking training and knowledge when it comes to specific disabilities such as ASD. More students are being homeschooled due to perceptions that schools are not meeting their needs or negative experiences that they have had with schools. In another study however, after conducting research and gathering data through questionnaires, it was found that many families generally had positive perceptions about schoolteachers and described them as "caring" and "supportive" (Siddiqua & Janus, 2017). The conflicting results in these studies further strengthens my belief that more research should be conducted in this area. It was noted by (Hess et al., 2006), that family input and support are crucial in effectively meeting the needs of special needs learners.

Difficulties with Advocacy

Many families become overwhelmed with resources and struggle to advocate for their children, often turning to educators for advice. The primary context in which educators are used in the advocacy process is through the Individualized Education Program (IEP) process (Burke et al., 2016). During this time, they meet with families to coordinate services to best meet the needs of the family members. It was noted by the author, that during these meetings families often keep their comments and speaking to a minimum while allowing the teacher to make all the calls. This causes a lack of communication and does not allow for parents to become familiar with key terms or to fully understand the purpose of the IEP. In this particular study, it was found that these five components were necessary to overcome the barriers in advocacy: develop rapport, establish clear expectations,

learn about the child and family, educate and empower, and participate in IEP meetings. (Burke et al., 2016)

Planning for the Future and Transitioning

As children with disabilities go through different stages of life and transition from adolescence to adulthood, their families also play a big role in planning for the future and the transition process. The overall goal of family members of special needs children is to assist them in living meaningful lives and ensuring they go on to live as independently as possible. In a study by (Betz et al., 2015), the focus was on the transition for adolescents and emerging adults with special needs in regard to health care. Based on this study, some common themes were found when discussing the transition process with families of individuals with disabilities. They included changing expectations in parental planning, changing expectations pertaining to future planning, changes in the parental role, changes in the children's roles, exploration of parental perspectives of the transition experience, parent stressors, perspectives about helpful support and services, and parent's perceptions of the child's experience. (Betz et al., 2015). In regard to transitioning out of the school system, in an article by (Cavendish et al., 2016), it was recommended that students and families are present during IEP development and transition planning. This promotes quality collaborations between school teams, families and students. Three phases were recommended to ensure the best possible outcome in the transition process: Pre-IEP, IEP and Post-IEP meetings. During Pre-IEP teachers build rapport and trusting relationships with families and allow students so self-advocate by being present in meetings and becoming familiar with the IEP process. During the actual IEP meeting, students are encouraged to speak up, advocate for themselves and to be able to self-evaluate. It also allows for parents to have input and to collaborate on goal and objective writing. Post-IEP meetings allow for students to provide feedback, for parents to follow up and for future vocational programs or transition centers to be aware of all the items and goals set in place on the IEP.

Conclusion

Based on the articles reviewed, it is evident that families are deeply impacted by disabilities of their family members with special needs. It affects several areas of their lives and becomes a life-long endeavor. The literature suggests that families are an extremely important part of the advocacy process and care of those with special needs. There was conflicting data on whether families would consider themselves negatively affected by their family member's disability. I believe there should be more research done on the aging population of special needs individuals and the care they receive when family members are no longer present or involved in their advocacy and/or caretaking. This research should focus on the care, advocacy and transitioning process of adults with special needs

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Comparing: The End of Molasses Classes and Leading a Culture of Change

By Deborrah L. Griffin

Abstract

With the passage of P.L. 94-142, also known as The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA), in November 1975, parents of children with disabilities were granted specific rights in regard to their children's education (Valle, 2011). The passage of IDEIA, should have improved the education needs of children with disabilities and ensured that parents have an active voice in their child's education. Unfortunately, parents today feel as though they are not able to fully advocate for their children and their educational rights. As educators, it is important to ensure that we are doing the best for the students and families we teach and come into contact with.

Comparing: The End of Molasses Classes and Leading a Culture of Change

Parents always want the best for their children, especially when it comes to their academic careers. Parents who have children with disabilities are not any different. In fact, there are federal laws that ensure they are active members in their child's academic career (Valle, 2011). Parents were legally given rights to advocate for their children and the educational choices almost 45 years ago, yet very few parents are able to understand what those rights are or have the courage to truly advocate for their children against the school systems (Brown, et al., 2011). Parents, especially those who have children with autism, feel that their educational needs are not being met or taken seriously (Starr & Foy, 2012). It is imperative that school systems, teachers and parents are able to work together and create the best future for children with disabilities.

Parents Negative Issues with School Systems

Though researchers are just beginning to examine how parents' rights and the educational needs for the children are being met (Brown, et al., 2011), it is obvious that it is a topic that requires greater insight. According to Starr and Foy (2012), a major factor that cause parents to have negative feelings towards their children's' education is the lack of knowledge teachers and staff members have with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and being able to utilize the proper interventions. When teachers and staff members are not trained properly to teach students with autism, it can create a negative learning environment for the student, which can ultimately lead the parents to homeschool their children to prevent future negative interactions through the educational setting (Starr & Foy, 2012). Students who have autism often times have a wide variety of needs that require support inside and out of the school system. This can be said for student who have high functioning, moderate functioning, or even low functioning autism, and unfortunately, parents at each functioning level feel as though certain needs are not being met (Brown, et al., 2011).

Teachers and staff need to have the understanding that students with autism need direction instruction with social skills and often times thrive and require structure to prevent negative behaviors (Starr & Foy, 2012). It is unfortunate that when parents try to fight for their children's educational rights, that they are seen as difficult parents and are given a negative reputation when they are just trying to do the best for their child (Starr & Foy, 2012). When effective collaboration and communication exist between homes and schools, the educational teams are able to make decisions that are putting the needs of the students ahead of any other external forces or agendas.

Advocacy

Prior to IDEIA, public schools did not have to provide services to students with disabilities. Since then, students with disabilities are guaranteed to have free, appropriate, public education (FAPE)

provided to them (Burke, 2013). Part of FAPE also allows students who have a disability to have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) which contains the any related services, classroom testing and instruction accommodations and modifications, as well as state testing accommodations and modifications. Parents must be provided with notices to attend each IEP and have procedural safeguards to ensure their children's IEPs are being followed and their rights are not being infringed upon. The biggest struggle comes when parents do not understand their rights or are too afraid to act on their rights. A recent study concluded that 70% of parents who have children with disabilities feel that services are lost or not being given to their children properly because they do not fully understand their rights (Burke, 2013). The National Council on Disabilities documented that more than 400 parents have attended IEP meetings where IEPs were pre-prepared making them feel left out of the process and often confused due to the amount of technical and educational terms used during the meetings (Valle, 2011). Far too often, the input of parents are pushed to the side and not actually taken into account when discussing the educational future for students with disabilities (Burke, 2013) (Valle, 2011), since they are just parents and do not have the expert input for creating and implementing IEPs. When this happens, the relationship between home and school is destroyed and can increase the stress level for the parents (Burke, 2013).

One way to help parents ensure that their voice is being heard and that their educational rights are not being infringed upon is to hire advocates who are trained to navigate the relationship between parents, school systems, and the special education process. Advocates have knowledge of special education laws and are able to work as an unbiased middle man, so to speak, that is wanting what is truly the best option when it comes to education and educational services for students with disabilities. Advocates have the ability to improve collaboration between parents and schools (Starr & Foy, 2012). Unfortunately, there are very few training programs for advocates, which can hinder the access parents may have to advocates. There is also not a clear cut best way to train advocates, since there are not enough studies conducted to determine the efficacy of the different training programs (Burke, 2013).

Parent-School Collaboration

When parents, teachers, and other school staff members are able to effectively collaborate, all parties will experience success. It is even more important because the students are the ones who are able to benefit the most from the positive interactions (Starr & Foy, 2012). Teachers who understand and truly value where the parents are coming from, both academically and culturally, are able to foster academic and social success for the students (Gimbert, Desai, & Kerka, 2010). Parents should a true voice that is respected and listened to since they have first-hand experience dealing their children and are able to provide additional context and a different viewpoint for specific situations. They are direct source of information that teachers should utilize to ensure all decisions are made in the best interest of the child (Valle, 2011). Parents are a part of the IEP team and should be viewed and

treated like an equal team member, not just a person that is legally required to participate and a check list person.

Possible Solutions

Parents have been trying to properly advocate for their children's educational rights and futures, but sometimes are still met with great difficulties. One possible solution would be increasing the number of advocacy training programs that are already established and have seen positive results through their training programs. Another possible solution would to ensure that teachers and preservice teachers are trained on the best ways to handle children who have autism to avoid any unwanted and negative interactions in the classroom. Teachers and preservice teachers also need to proactive in making sure parents are truly included in the IEP process. Parents deserve the right to have their voices heard and any questions answered. Parents can feel intimidated to question teachers and can feel intimidated to ask questions about special education. Teachers need to do all they can to easy those feelings and work together to ensure success for the children they work with. Finally, teachers need to be aware that cultural differences and bias can unintentionally create negative relationships between parents, staff, and school systems. They need to be sure that they are leaving out their personal cultural views at the door.

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Bridging the Opportunity Gap in Special Education: Mastering the Florida Alternate Achievement Standards Through the Use of General Education Resources in a 3rd-5th Grade Self-Contained Classroom for Students with Mild to Severe Intellectual Disabilities

By Marissa Desiree Pardo

Abstract

As special education practices have evolved over the course of recent decades under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), many educators have sought to remedy the learning gaps that exist between students in general education and students in special education, particularly regarding students who are identified as having mild to severe intellectual or cognitive disabilities. Many methods have been introduced to close this gap, such as inclusion teaching methods, in which special education students spend most or all of their time in a general education classroom receiving assistance from a special education teacher, resource room teaching, a remedial and separate classroom in which students with educational disabilities are given specialized instruction in some content areas, and the self-contained or special separate classroom setting in which students with severe intellectual disabilities spend the entire day in the same classroom receiving specialized instruction from a special education teacher in all content areas. Despite the ever-evolving practices in the continuum of special education services being used to increase access to the grade-level text and curriculum for students with intellectual disabilities, minimal academic progress has taken place.

Many students with disabilities are served in a general education classroom, yet there are still questions raised on how to best close the knowledge gap for students with intellectual disabilities being served in a self-contained or separate special classroom setting. According to statistics from the National Center of Education Statistics (IES-NCES; 2018) completed in 2015-2016, 60% of students with disabilities between the ages 6–21 spent 80% of their school day or more in a general education classroom, whereas 20% of students with disabilities spent less than 40% of their day in general education classrooms. According to Siperstein, Glick, and Parker (2009), despite 30 years of legislative policies that were enacted to create an inclusive setting for students with cognitive disabilities, most students with intellectual disabilities are still excluded from general education classes and from the general social community within their schools. In fact, a national survey conducted by Siperstein, Parker, Noris Bardon, and Widaman (2011) of more than 5,000 students reported that only 10% of the students surveyed had a friend with intellectual disabilities. Based on these statistics, it is implied that students with intellectual disabilities are not being given a fair opportunity to meet certain academic standards based on youth and adult attitudes towards their inclusion in the general education populace or towards their participation in the general education

curriculum. Unfortunately, the lack of appropriate educational provisions for these students based on the way they are perceived through these studies implies that they will be ill-equipped to navigate the real world upon completing school, which can be detrimental to their adulthood.

With such large gaps of knowledge in education and with inferior educational opportunities to promote academic growth for this population, many teachers, administrators, parents, and educational policy-makers have been challenged with the task of better accommodating students with intellectual disabilities for them to meet the rigorous academic standards of education. The goal was to reduce the number of students with disabilities (SWDs) in the self-contained special class setting and increase the number of SWDs in an inclusive setting.

The Miami-Dade County public school system implemented the Florida Alternate Achievement Standards, commonly referred to as Access Points. Access Points were educational standards that were academically challenging and provided accountability to the state regarding providing a free and appropriate education (FAPE) for students with significant cognitive disabilities. These standards mirrored the general education standards and their core intents and objectives for students of each grade level but were reduced in levels of complexity to serve the many needs of students in special education. Although these standards have given teachers a blueprint to better serve SWDs on a modified curriculum, it was the responsibility of the teacher to implement modifications and adaptations for each unique student to increase student academic achievement. The goal of these policies and laws were to implement the least dangerous assumption, or the idea that students with significant disabilities had the competency to learn, because to assume otherwise would result in less educational opportunities and expectations, inferior practices as compared to those in general education, and less opportunities for SWDs to attain an appropriate education (Jorgensen, 2005). Given the least dangerous assumption, it was possible that students with severe intellectual disabilities could make significant learning gains towards meeting the Florida Alternate Achievement Standards in counting money and calculating the value of money because of the study.

The purpose of this study was to determine whether the use of general education textbooks, resources, and grade-level texts, supplemented by classroom assignments that were tailored to the instructional levels of each individual student, would help students with mild to severe intellectual disabilities meet the Florida Alternate Achievement Standards in money and calculating the value of money. According to Hudson, Browder, and Wakeman (2013), access to grade-level texts for beginning readers or non-readers helped promote student engagement for students with moderate to severe intellectual disabilities, given that they were provided with accommodations and adaptations when necessary. While accommodations and modifications have been provided because of their Individualized Education Plans (IEP) and their current self-contained classroom placement, the 2018-2019 school year was the first year in which this student population was exposed and taught using the general education curriculum, textbooks, and resources alongside modified and leveled assignments. For this purpose, it was necessary for the action research to take place to measure whether the use of Mathematics general education textbooks from the *Go Math!* G3-G5 Student

Edition series and other modified assignments from the Unique Learning System would increase student academic achievement towards meeting the Florida Alternate Achievement Standards.

Context

The action research took place in a Miami-Dade County public elementary school. Three third-grade students, two fourth-grade students, and three fifth-grade students identified as having mild to severe intellectual disabilities on their IEP's participated in the study. The teacher progress monitored these students in the core content academic area of Mathematics. The standards being addressed in this study were based on acquiring the skills to comprehend the worth of United States dollars and cents and complete addition and subtraction problems involving money within a real-world scenario. The objectives of the instruction were to teach the students how to recognize that a decimal in money numbers indicated dollars and cents and that money can be calculated in dollars and cents in a real-world scenario. Despite the study including participants from three different grade levels, the Access Points standards correlated to one another.

The special education teacher conducting the study worked with another special education teacher who was currently teaching kindergarten through second-grade students with mild to severe intellectual disabilities in a self-contained setting. This teacher utilized the same practices used in this study and was responsible for implementing the use of the general education textbooks and resources while modifying the curriculum through the Florida Access Points Standards within their classroom. Both teachers convened weekly to discuss the findings and results of student academic progress throughout the study.

The school principal was notified, and permission was sought for this action research study. Parents were also informed about the action research plan and the focus on bridging the opportunity gap for students with mild to severe intellectual disabilities to increase academic achievement towards mastering the Florida Alternate Achievement Standards in Mathematics.

The necessary resources for conducting this action research included the physical or online versions of Miami-Dade County Public School's general education Mathematics textbooks (Go Math! Student Edition) and other resources for grades 3-5. These resources were utilized to plan lessons and present instruction to the students. The teacher used the general education textbooks and resources for at least one-third of each lesson, for at least 20 minutes during the Mathematics block. For the remainder of each class period, the special education teacher used assessments and activities, primarily found in the Unique Learning System: Special Education Curriculum website (2018). The assignments, materials, and resources found on this website were provided at the instructional level of each student, meaning the objectives of the assignments were the same, but the presentation and the complexity varied from student to student. The supplementary tasks and resources found on the Unique Learning System were used to provide differentiated instruction for the students based on varying instructional levels.

Literature Review

As special education practices have evolved over the course of recent decades under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), many educators have sought to remedy the learning gaps that exist between students in general education and students in special education, particularly regarding students who are identified as having mild to severe intellectual or cognitive disabilities. According to the *Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children (PARC) v. Pennsylvania* (1972), a free and public education was provided for students who are intellectually disabled in the state of Pennsylvania because of parents challenging the exclusion of these students from public education. In the same year, a case titled *Mills v. Board of Education* (1972) arose and the district court found that violating due process and equal protection rights was a punishable offense. They ordered the provision of a free and public education to "exceptional children" after it became apparent that seven students of African-American descent and varying exceptionalities were denied access to education. Years later in 1997, IDEA was amended, highlighting the need for students to be in their least restrictive environment and mandating greater access for students with disabilities into the general curriculum. Changes were made to every student's Individualized Education Plan to include a statement addressing how the student's disability affected their involvement or participation in the general education classroom to prevent students from being staffed into special education without a probable cause. Despite the progress made in special education services and policies to increase access to the general education curriculum, especially for students with intellectual disabilities (InD), minimal academic progress has taken place to bridge learning gaps that exist. Although many students with disabilities are primarily served in a general education classroom for most or all the school day and various studies have been conducted to highlight their success in inclusion classrooms, there are still questions raised as to how to best close the knowledge gap for students with InD being served in a self-contained or separate special classroom setting. According to Etscheidt (2011), IDEA laws and accountability laws that are meant to ensure that teachers are providing students with disabilities a free and appropriate public education are insufficient, citing that district-wide accountability, higher standards for teachers and students, and an individual responsibility can determine whether the education is appropriate and can benefit students with disabilities in accessing the general curriculum.

The purpose of this study was to determine whether the use of general education textbooks, resources, and grade-level texts, supplemented by modified classroom assignments from the *Unique Learning System: Special Education Curriculum* website tailored to the instructional levels of each individual students, helped students with mild to severe InD meet the Florida Alternate Achievement Standards. The action research will take place in a public elementary school located in Miami-Dade County. Three third-grade students, two fourth-grade students, and three fifth-grade students identified as having mild to severe InD on their IEP's participated in the study. The teacher progress monitored these students in the core content academic area of Mathematics. Through this research, it was determined whether the use of these materials narrowed the achievement gap between

students with mild to severe InD in the self- contained classroom setting and their non-disabled peers in a regular classroom setting, as monitored by monthly pretests and posttests.

Qualitative Perceptions of Teachers About Teaching Students with Intellectual Disabilities

To begin to unravel why the deficits in learning are more prominent for students with InD in a self-contained classroom setting as compared to their non-disabled peers in the general education setting, it is important to consider whether these students are being effectively served in their current placements. A study conducted by Kahn, Sami and Lewis (2014) measured teacher perceptions and preparedness for teaching students with disabilities. These perceptions and preparations were ultimately deciding factors in the success or failure of these students in a general education science classroom. A national survey was conducted with 1,088 K-12 science teachers as participants (Kahn, Sami & Lewis, 2014). Throughout the study, it was agreed upon that the participating science teachers felt as if they were ill-prepared to teach students with disabilities, ultimately resulting in average or poor instructional knowledge. This unpreparedness stems from gaps in their own knowledge in effective teaching strategies to utilize when working with students with disabilities in their classrooms, along with certain barriers that possibly inhibited students with disabilities from succeeding in a general education setting, such as the need for a lower pupil to teacher ratio, the need for modifications, and the extensive time it takes to create materials for each student that is tailored to their needs. It was concluded that a lack of training and preparation, a lack of support, and pressure for students to do well on state assessments ultimately facilitated negative attitudes from science teachers working with students with disabilities. It was believed by all the participating pre-service and in-service teachers involved that more training on working with students with disabilities would bridge their own gaps of knowledge and increase the rate of success for these students within their classrooms (Kahn, Smai, & Lewis, 2014). Through this support and training, teachers can effectively provide explicit and systematic instruction to their students with InD. Explicit and systematic instruction is defined as a practice that is evidenced-based in increasing the reading and math levels through activities that build foundational skills, having a large impact on student outcomes and academic progress (Gersten et al., 2008, 2009).

Another study conducted by Lika (2016) discussed teacher attitudes toward the inclusion of students with disabilities in regular schools in general education classrooms. Similar to the study by Kahn et al. (2014), Lika (2016) asserts that the academic success of the inclusion of students in general education classes and schools typically depends on pupils and teachers, especially when considering the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms. One-hundred and forty-six teachers, 30% female and 70% male, participated in this study and were chosen because of having at least two years of teaching experience or more in 9-year schools. It was believed that teachers who have been trained in the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom and inclusive strategies would also have more positive attitudes toward including students with InD

in the general education classroom. It was determined that students with disabilities should be included in the general education classroom to be provided with the same education and equal opportunities as their non-disabled peers. Teachers who attend training about inclusive practices for students with InD also maintain close relationships with student parents and school psychologists, which can ensure the academic success of students with disabilities by identifying their strengths and their needs when navigating through the general education curriculum. This kind of coexistence and involvement between students with InD, their non-disabled peers, and the school community can help all students thrive in the general education setting academically and socially (Lika, 2016).

These perceptions are substantial because it is difficult to ensure and measure success for students with InD when a teacher is unprepared or inexperienced in the appropriate methodology that can best serve each student according to their needs. Without the proper support and training for teachers, a student identified as having an InD may not be receiving the most appropriate education or accommodations that could allow them to attain success in the classroom. These studies mirror the sentiment of many teachers who struggle to promote access to the general curriculum for students with InD in their classrooms. As part of this study to bridge the knowledge gap between students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers, it is important to emphasize that an acute awareness of these perceptions within oneself will reduce the likelihood of underestimating the academic capabilities of each student participating, while also increasing the ability to seek information to more effectively provide a pedagogical learning environment suitable for every learner. This self-awareness can also increase the likelihood that there will be a strong focus on methods in which to deliver instruction that is appropriate for each student, measure how students respond to the learning to alter interventions and methodology, identify what internal and external factors affect access to the general curriculum, and measure how interactions between the students and the teacher can impact their learning and success. Most importantly, the level of the success or failure of each student when providing access to the general curriculum is determined by how prepared the teacher is and their attitudes towards teaching students with InD.

While it is important to discuss the perceptions of teachers and what their needs and concerns are to best serve students with InD, the perceptions of parents of students with InD must also be considered. It is not only essential to measure where teachers of students with InD feel limited in their abilities to provide access to the general education curriculum for students with disabilities but also where parents feel limited in their abilities to provide support as well. In a study conducted by Jacobs, Woolfson, and Hunter (2015), it was determined that a student's behavior, a parent's behavior, and parental cognitions are closely related and that any change in either of these variables can affect the other variables. Interviews were conducted with 10 parents of students with InD in a special education school between the ages of 6-12, in which they reported that their student's disability was linked to their problem behaviors that impede their learning, as well as other environmental factors. A student's lack of understanding of core academic content, limited attention

span throughout the day in the classroom, boundary-pushing or attention-seeking behaviors, the classroom environment, and parental responsibility were all factors in the student

The parents concluded that problematic behaviors were a result of the disability itself and exterior factors that are out of the parent's control, which can help parents of students with InD more effectively promote prosocial behaviors (Jacobs et al., 2015). These findings imply that the behaviors of the participants are directly affected not only by their disability but by other factors that are very typical in students, such as limited attention span, limited knowledge of certain topics, or unfavorable classroom settings and conditions. Like teachers, the parents of students with InD participating in this study also felt that supports and information were needed for them to not only become more effective parents but also ensuring that they can help reduce problem behaviors that may impede on the student's learning. While this study focuses primarily on controlling classroom behaviors, it was mentioned that to more effectively reach parents of students with InD must also play a role in helping their child achieve success in school (Jacobs et al., 2015). When the perceptions of parents of students with InD are considered and examined, it is much easier to identify where the gaps of knowledge exist for the teachers attempting to provide general education access to students with InD and how to best foster a more synergetic school community to increase the rate of success for the students with InD. It is impossible to meet the needs of students while being ill-equipped and lacking a positive support system. To begin the process of including students in special education in the general education curriculum, a teacher must be aware of their own deficits, biases, and gaps in knowledge, while also seeking out the appropriate training and support to create a conducive learning environment where the needs students with disabilities can be met. Involvement from parents of students with InD can only strengthen the support system any student may need to succeed. By being aware of what environmental or internal factors exists that cause problem behaviors for students with InD, parents of students with InD can find ways to provide instruction and support in a manner that is appropriate and effective for the student.

Common Behavioral Patterns of Students with Disabilities Observed Within the Classroom

When considering the applications of this study, there were observable behaviors within the classroom that affected instruction and the student's ability to retain information when exposed to the general education curriculum. Although these articles do not directly pertain to bridging the knowledge gap for students with InD, they can remedy the knowledge gap that the observer may have when facilitating a lesson during episodes of problem behaviors. Behavior plays a major role in whether the student is attentive to a lesson or compliant when given a classroom task. By identifying the underlying causes of these behaviors, there is a large possibility that problem behaviors can be reduced to maximize the impact of every lesson.

According to Farmer et al. (2014), students and adults identified as having InD, particularly those with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) have a risk factor of aggression, including behavioral and

emotional problems that affect conduct. Physically aggressive behavior in students with InD has been notably associated with certain risk factors, including being young, being biologically male, having a low IQ, lower verbiage or verbal abilities, and certain family issues such as lower socioeconomic status or jarring parental practices (Lahey et al., 1999; Nagin and Tremblay, 2001; Network, 2004; and Tremblay, 2000). The study conducted by Farmer et al. (2014) aimed to compare two groups of students aged 1-21, including a group of 414 students diagnosed with an ASD label and 243 Non-ASD students in a clinical referral group with no formal ASD diagnosis but was referred for ASD or other behavioral and psychological labels. All the students within this study have been labeled with InD. The observers sought to compare aggression within the two participating comparison groups, but no hypothesis as to who exhibited more problem behaviors was made considering the lack of data to make an informed hypothesis; however, inquiries arose as to whether age, sex, cognition, the ability to adapt, and language, have any correlation to aggression within the study groups. Based on previous research, the observers believe age and sex are unrelated to all types of aggression for individuals with ASD. Using multiple forms of assessments, the observers measured five subscales including verbal aggression, bullying, covert aggression, hostility, and physical aggression. They found that gender had no effect on aggression. IQ determined what kinds of aggression the students would exhibit, such as high IQ leading to sophisticated aggression, whereas lower IQ resulted in more physical aggression. Students that also lacked verbal skills exhibited more physical aggression and bullying (Farmer et al., 2014). These findings are significant considering many students within this study to bridge the achievement gap have ASD and all of them are labeled as InD. It is also important to emphasize that four of the eight students with severe InD being monitored currently exhibit physical aggression towards their peers or adults, while the other four have moderate to mild InD had instances of covert aggression towards their peers and adults. These behaviors directly affect instruction and impede the learning of all of the students. This study helps differentiate why certain students behave the way they do within the classroom and which groups they typically fall into. It also implies that by bridging the gap of knowledge for these students, aggression can be reduced since the findings stated that IQ determined aggression for the two control groups in the study by Farmer et al. (2014).

The Inclusion of Students with Special Needs in the General Education Classroom and its Implication

To immerse students with InD into the general education curriculum, it is important to investigate the success rate of students enrolled in general education classes. A study conducted by Lyons, Huber, Carter, Chen, and Asmus (2016), measured the social skills and problem behaviors in 137 students in high school learning with severe disabilities in a general education classroom from the perspective of their parents and their special education teachers. A Social Skills Improvement System was used to measure two domains in each student, including social skills (communication, cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy, engagement, and self-control) and problem behavior (externalizing bullying, hyperactivity/inattention internalizing, and autism spectrum). According to

the parents and the teachers of these students, the studies showed that social skills were considered below average for students with severe cognitive disabilities as well as problem behaviors being above average. Students diagnosed with autism, students with greater support needs, and students with low levels of overall adaptive behavior were found to have the lowest social skills rating. It was concluded that the social needs and behavior profiles of students with severe cognitive disabilities directly affected their access to and provisions of the general education curriculum (Lyons, Huber, Carter, Chen, & Asmus, 2016). It is often cited that challenging behaviors are a reason for not providing inclusive educational experiences for students with cognitive or intellectual disabilities; however, the exposure or inclusion to a general education classroom or curriculum provides much greater social and behavioral strengths for students with InD than a self-contained special education setting (Carter, Hughes, 2006).

Because of the perceptions that inhibit teachers from providing true access to the general education curriculum for students with InD, little to no research has been done in order to determine whether the use of general education textbooks and materials for students with mild to severe InD on a modified curriculum would narrow or bridge the knowledge gap for these students. Fortunately, there has been a variety of studies conducted regarding students with varying or severe cognitive disabilities being served in general education classrooms, citing that there has been an identifiable success when the needs of students with disabilities were being met effectively and with fidelity. According to a study conducted by Ysseldyke et al. (1982), students that are considered low performers with or without high-incidence disabilities labels could benefit from "inclusive practices", claiming that no differences were observed in the academic performance between a group labeled as learning disabled (LD) and non-LD students. Fuchs et al. (2015) mirrors this sentiment, stating that students receiving specialized or inclusive instruction can benefit from it academically, despite their disability label.

To address the needs of the students in this study, it is important to highlight where students with the most significant cognitive disabilities are being taught and what that classroom setting implies as far as creating open access to the general curriculum. A study conducted by Kleinert et al. (2015) monitored 15 states including 39,837 students, who were observed to determine what classroom setting students with significant cognitive disabilities were placed in because of alternate state assessment scores. Teachers were to report the educational setting as "separate school", "regular school in a self-contained special education classroom", "inclusion in the general education classrooms for less than 40% of the school day", a "regular school resource room setting with participation in general education for 40% or less of the school day", and a "general education setting for 80% or more of the school day" (Kleinert et al., 2015, p. 316-137). Knowing where students with the most severe cognitive disabilities are being served is significant when considering how to increase access to the general education curriculum when some of these settings completely exclude students with disabilities from the general student populace. The study conducted by Kleinert et al. (2015), states that data collection included the students' primary school setting, expressive

communication, reading levels, and mathematics levels and how it determined classroom placement. The studies found that based on the data, 93% of the students tested spent their school day in a self-contained special classroom setting, separate school setting, or home setting, whereas 7% were served in regular classrooms or resource classrooms. The study also mentions that most of the students that represent the 93% of students with severe cognitive disabilities typically do not have one disability under the IDEA but several that fall under the disability categories, which would place them under being identified as having an InD. The observer concluded that students with the most severe InD can effectively learn academic content within a general education setting, despite growing numbers of placements in self-contained or separate school settings. (Kleinhert et al., 2015). This study implies that not only is it difficult to find the least restrictive environment for students within general education settings, but that providing them with general education access using modified materials is an effective provision of a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). It can expose the student population to the curriculum in a manner that is tailored to their needs and can guarantee generalization and transfer of knowledge because of the accommodations and modifications that are a part of the self-contained or separate classroom setting.

In comparison to the last paragraph, a study conducted by Fuchs et al. (2015) cited that achievement gaps for very-low-performing students who receive either specialized instruction in fractions or inclusive fraction instruction can be bridged for both groups if a combination of grade level and out-of-grade-level skills are addressed to narrow the achievement gap. In the study, there were three randomized control tests that were done over the course of 3 years on 203 students at the start of their fourth-grade year, who were at or below the 10th percentile. The observers used the first year of the study utilizing the state standards to provide instruction for both the specialized instruction and inclusive instruction groups, while the second and third year of the study the observers transitioned to using the Common Core State Standards. The data had shown that specialized fraction instruction created stronger learning gains than inclusive fraction instruction, however, both groups had achievement gaps that grew over time because of more rigorous and in-depth fraction curriculum (Fuchs et al., 2015). The implications of this study strongly indicate that the mastery of the common core state standards in students with LD or InD will be attained through specialized instruction, seeing as students will be requiring it as the rigor of instruction increases. Access to the general education curriculum is possible for students with InD who are provided with small group sizes, appropriate accommodations, validated interventions, and most importantly both grade level and out-of-level explicit instruction to effectively address deficits in knowledge and bridge the knowledge gap.

It is important to consider what student and teacher variables contribute to the access of the general education curriculum, especially when considering students with mild to severe InD in a special separate classroom setting who have limited access to this curriculum. In a study conducted in 2008 by Lee, Soukup, Little, and Wehmeyer 19 elementary-school students between Kindergarten and sixth grade with intellectual and developmental disabilities receiving science and social studies

instruction, were examined for 1,140 minutes cumulatively as measured by the *Supports Intensity Scale (SIS)* to determine how much support each students needed in a general education setting, a special education setting, or another educational setting (e.g., the library), with a score 1 being the equivalent of no support needed to a score of 5 meaning full support needed. The results of this scale determined that moderate to heavy supports were needed for all the participants involved. Data was collected over the course of 3 months during the spring semester of the school year by the special education teachers using a data collection sheet that had questions about the lesson of the day, task objectives, classroom activities, and any modifications for target students. During the study, it was determined that student variables for accessing the general education curriculum were their response to an academic task, the way they manage to complete the tasks and competing for response to tasks (unacceptable behaviors during academic instruction). Teacher variables for providing access to the general education curriculum included the instructional behavior of the teacher, including giving students attention or asking academic questions, how well the teacher manages behaviors, and teacher focus towards target students. It was concluded that both teacher and student variables affect the access to the general education curriculum for students with InD. These variables directly correlate and are not independent. These variables are also affected by environmental factors, such as the difficulty of the tasks and classroom setting (Lee, Soukup, Little, & Wehmeyer, 2008). It is important to consider how the relationships between students with InD, their teachers, and certain environmental factors affect student access to the general education curriculum and how these factors can contribute to student progress or regress. This can allow educators to identify obstacles pertaining to providing general curriculum access.

To elaborate on what needs, exist for students with mild to severe InD, it is essential to determine what the needs are for each student involved and what obstacles prevent full access. According to LeDoux, Graves, and Burt (2012), students currently placed in the inclusion setting are cited as not being sufficiently served in the general education classrooms by their teachers because of a lack of differentiated instruction, appropriate instructional practices, and a lack of knowledge about the IDEA. Inclusion is defined as a student in special education spending most of their day in a general education classroom, only being removed to be provided specialized services not otherwise available in the general education setting. This can imply that there is an advantage to the separate classroom setting, seeing as the lower pupil to teacher ratio can create ease when individualizing and differentiating instruction for each student. The goal of the study is to determine what needs and challenges teachers to face when preparing to effectively meet the needs of their special education students and how the administration of the Title I elementary school in Texas can best meet the needs of the teachers as well (LeDoux, Graves, & Burt, 2012). During the study, 6 teachers with 2-15+ years of teaching experience and at least a bachelor's in elementary education or special education were chosen as participants for the study, citing that communication, collaboration vs. disconnect, and lack of professional development were common themes when addressing the difficulties of teaching special education students (LeDoux et al., 2012). If communication, collaboration with the special education team and administration, and professional development are in place at the school,

the general education teacher can successfully manage an inclusion classroom with special education students. While most students with severe cognitive disabilities are not served within the inclusion setting, similar obstacles exist for teachers within the self-contained or separate school setting. By addressing these deficits in teacher knowledge, the ability to provide an appropriate access to the general education curriculum across all classroom settings is possible and can be effective.

Universal Design for Learning: Inclusion of Students with Intellectual Disabilities and Their Non-Disabled Peers

The previous studies discussed that the inclusion of students with mild to severe cognitive disabilities or InD had positive results when increasing access to the general education curriculum and general education settings. Through provisions of appropriate modifications and inclusive practices, educators can provide a universal design for learning. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is simply an educational framework that provides teachers with methods in which to teach to reach every student with or without disabilities. The UDL aims to provide all students with equal access to education in order to achieve academic and social success. Though this study primarily focuses on academic inclusion and access to the general education curriculum, it is significant to discuss how social inclusion can increase this access, thus allowing students with InD to further benefit from interactions with their non-disabled peers and UDL. According to a study conducted by Siperstein, Glick, and Parker (2009), the social inclusion of students with InD and their non-disabled peers in a recreational setting has increased social interaction between the two groups, creating an inclusive setting that is otherwise non-existent in the public-school system. The goal of the study is to document how students with mild intellectual disabilities participate and socialize with other non-disabled students in a recreational setting where all activities were structured in a way that allowed all students to participate (2009). This study can transfer to classroom practices, where ideally UDL practices can allow all students to learn in an inclusive setting alongside their non-disabled peers. Forty-two students between grades 3-6 with InD were chosen for this program if they had Individualized Education Plans (IEP's) which specified that they had an InD label with an IQ of 50 to 75 and physical or sensory issues that inhibited their participation in sports programs. Forty- two students without disabilities were chosen from an applicant pool that includes the same gender, grade level, and school district as the students with disabilities. A unified sports program was utilized within a 4-week (Monday -Friday from 8:30 AM- 2:30 PM) period to allow non-competitive and all-inclusive sports to be at the core of the program, including multiple teams of 12 students with an equal ratio of students that have or do not have InD, given many opportunities to socialize with members from other teams. At the end of the study, 95% of the students without InD enjoyed the company of at least 1 student with an InD, whereas most of the students with InD stated that they made at least one new friend with a student with an InD (Siperstein, Glick, & Parker, 2009). The study emphasized the importance of UDL using inclusive practices and activities that were accessible to students with InD and their non-disabled peers. Furthermore, this study highlights that the inclusion of students with InD is possible when practices are inclusive for all students involved.

These practices often increase their access to activities and non-disabled students they are otherwise not exposed to in more restrictive settings. When considering increasing access for students with InD in the general education curriculum, it is important to use the UDL framework to provide instruction to students with InD and their non-disabled peers in an effective and inclusive manner that can foster a successful transfer of knowledge.

In conclusion, the literature that has been reviewed strongly supports the proposed action research that will explore whether the use of the general education curriculum, textbooks, and resources, including modified assignments at the instructional level of each student, can create learning gains in mathematics for students with InD in grades 3-5 in a self-contained setting, as monitored by monthly pretests and posttests. In the introduction, laws were defined that made it possible for students with InD to have access to the general education curriculum, but certain limitations exist that prevent appropriate access to that curriculum. The perceptions of special education teachers in general education settings, inclusion settings, and parents of students with InD have been considered when considering how access can be provided. Generally, with administrative, teacher, and parental support, and training in teaching students with InD, the teacher of students with InD felt better equipped to teach them and provide an appropriate access to the general curriculum. Some studies indicated why students with InD exhibit certain problem behaviors and methods in which to diffuse and lessen problem behaviors that will be evident throughout the study to effectively provide the maximum amount of access possible to the participants. Pros and Cons between inclusion and specialized instruction were discussed. While specialized instruction in a self-contained setting can cause exclusion from the general education population, the lower pupil to teacher ratio can allow the observer to make the proper accommodations and modifications so that they are providing an appropriate education for the participants. Finally, UDL was briefly discussed in a recreational setting in order to highlight the positive effects it had on the participants with InD and their non-disabled friends. By using the UDL framework throughout the study to address the needs of every student, while highlighting their strengths, the students can benefit from access to the general curriculum in a manner that is inclusive. The observer must understand how to implement inclusive practices, what setbacks exist when conducting the study, what information is needed to perform inclusive teaching strategies effectively, and what steps must be taken to ensure that the students are being provided with the most appropriate access to the general education curriculum as possible.

Action Plan/Methods	
Name: Marissa Pardo	**School**: Tropical Elementary School
Research Question(s): What was the effect of the use of Mathematics general education textbooks, resources, and grade-level texts, supplemented by classroom assignments tailored to each student's differentiated levels, in helping students with mild to severe intellectual disabilities meet specific third through fifth-grade Florida Alternate Achievement Standards?	

Intervention: The teacher used the general education textbooks and resources from the *Go Math!* Series for at least one-third of each lesson, or at least 20 minutes during a Mathematics period. For the remainder of each class period, the special education teacher used assessments and activities, primarily found in the Unique Learning System: Special Education Curriculum website (2018) to supplement the learning based on each student's individual differentiated levels and needs. The standards being addressed dealt with money and its use in real-world situations. This included learning about the worth of different forms of U.S. currency (dollars and coins), adding money, and subtracting money.

Data Collection:

Data Source 1: Before implementing the intervention, the teacher assessed each student to gauge their differentiated levels using the Unique Learning System K-12 Student Learning Assessment. This pre-assessment allowed students who had varying developmental levels to be able to participate in the same standards-based activities, while addressing the appropriate learning goals suited to their unique needs. This served as a baseline to determine what academic differentiated level each student fell under. There were three differentiated levels including participatory, supported, and independent. This allowed the teacher to deliver lessons with varying levels of difficulty and supports that were tailored to each individual student.

Data: Analysis of students' academic differentiated levels based on a predetermined rubric

Data Source 2: During the first 2 weeks, students were given a pretest, followed by instruction in the areas of money and calculating dollars and cents. During this period the teacher monitored where each student was having the most trouble based on the correct number of responses in the pretests. The goal was for students to be able to learn how to read money numbers containing a decimal to indicate dollars and cents and to be able to calculate several dollar bills and coins within a real-world scenario. Although the grade levels varied, students were held accountable for meeting the same objective and standard, the only exception being how instruction was delivered for varying differentiated levels. After two weeks have passed, the teacher asked the students to solve money problems on their own, given the appropriate accommodations and supports. Samples of work were collected once a week.

Data: Weekly Description of displayed work sample differences from week to week based on number of correct responses (progress or regress in mastery of applied standards).

Data Source 3: During the final 6 weeks of the study, students were administered a pretest at the beginning of each week, offered instruction following the pretest, and administered a posttest at the end of the week to monitor understanding or mastery of the content.

Data: Number of correct responses on a weekly assessment.

Action Plan/Methods: Timeline

Tasks	Timeline	Resources
1. Informed the Principal and Parents 2. Collected assessments for each week	December 2018	1. Letter 2. Go math! Teacher Edition, G3 3. Go math! Teacher Edition, G4 4. Go math! Teacher Edition, G5 5. *Unique Learning System*assessments: 8 (Two for pre-assessment and 6 for intervention)
1. Administered a pretest about money and money calculations at the beginning of each week (Two pretests total) 2. Collected data based on number of correct responses at the end of each week to check for gaps in knowledge 3. Recorded the number of correct responses for each student and took note of existing areas of difficulty	January 11th, 2019 January 17th, 2019 (Friday is a Planning Day)	1. Go math! Teacher Edition, G3 2. Go math! Teacher Edition, G4 3. Go math! Teacher Edition, G5 4. *Unique Learning System*Number sense assessments 5. Pencils 6. Supports and accommodations as needed
1. Administered a pretest about money and money calculations at the beginning of each week 2. Provided instruction in money and money calculations following the pretest each week 3. Administered a posttest at the end of each week to check for understanding of content 4. Recorded the number of correct responses for each student and took note of areas of difficulty	January 25th, 2019 February 1st, 2019 February 8th, 2019 February 15th, 2019 February 22nd, 2019 March 1st, 2019	1. Go math! Teacher Edition, G3 2. Go math! Teacher Edition, G4 3. Go math! Teacher Edition, G5 4. *Unique Learning System*Number sense assessments 5. Pencils 6. Supports and accommodations as needed

Findings, Limitations, Implications

Findings: Unique Learning System K-12 Student Learning

The data collected were analyzed by comparing the results from three different measures. The data were visually displayed through bar graphs and tables to show whether the intervention was effective or ineffective. The visual data also showed how consistent the intervention was and how students'

progress varied because of outside circumstances such as private therapy during school hours, sicknesses, and excessive absences.

Each student was assessed to measure his/her differentiated support levels to provide them with assignments and instructional practices that were appropriate for them. As a result, students were divided into one of three learning groups: Independent, supported, and participatory differentiated levels. The Unique Learning System K-12 Student Learning Assessment was completed by the teacher. The teacher organized and collected data by administering the exam online through the Unique Learning System website. The scores were recorded for each student's individual student profile. The overall differentiated learning scores took into account the number of incorrect responses in multiple content areas, including math (number senses, number calculation, money, time, and measurement) and use of technology. The differentiated learning scores were organized on a bar graph in descending order and used a minimum score of 1 and a maximum score of 4, level 1 being participatory and level 4 being independent (Figure 1).

According to Goff, Houston, Allman, and Friend (1999) students that functioned at an independent level were typically able to meet their own needs but may have had some limitations in the generalizations and transfer of knowledge, requiring some resources and supports to access their learning environment. Students in the supported group required supervision, more supports, and would require support throughout the remainder of their education. Students functioning at a participatory level were identified as having significant cognitive and/or physical limitations, requiring a dependency on others for most or all their daily lives (Goff, Houston, Allman, & Friend, 1999).

Independent Group

Based on Unique Learning System: K-12 Student Learning Profile (2018) and teacher observation, the students were placed in one of the three differentiated support groups based on a numerical score between 0 and 4 (Figure 1). One student was placed in the independent group, a fourth- grade student identified as Student MA. This student received a score of 3.38 out of 4, which is considered differentiated level: 3 or the independent differentiated support level. Students in the independent group completed tasks independently with minimal to partial teacher assistance. The student was assessed solely on content knowledge. By the end of the study, students in the independent group would be able to read money numbers that contain decimal points indicating dollars and cents. They would also be able to independently calculate coins and dollar bills in word problems imitating real-world scenarios (Figure 1).

Supported Group

Two students were placed in the supported group (Figure 1). One of the students, referred to as Student LG, is in fourth-grade and scored a 1.55 out of 4, or differentiated level 2: participatory. Although this level was participatory, the teacher felt that this student was able to work at the

supported level based on classroom performance and teacher observation. The other student, referred to as Student JS, is a third-grade student who scored a 1.36 out of 4 or differentiated level 1: participatory. This student was also placed in the supported group because of teacher observation and classroom performance. Students in the supported group completed tasks with partial or continuous teacher assistance depending on the task. Students were frequently tested on content knowledge assessments given money manipulatives (play money). Students were tested on content knowledge or participation response depending on the task. By the end of the study, students in this group were expected to match a decimal money amount to a figure representing the same value in cents and dollars. Students were also expected to be able to select coins or bills to match prices in a hypothetical real-world scenario (Figure 1).

Participatory Group

Five students were placed in the participatory group (Figure 1). Student BA was a third-grade student who scored a 0.42 out of 4 or differentiated level 1: participatory. Student MS was a third-grade student that scored a 0 out of 4 or differentiated level 1: participatory. This student was excluded from the study because of leaving the school. Student CB was a fifth-grade student that scored a 1.06 out of 4 or differentiated level 1: participatory. Student JC was a fifth-grade student that scored a 0.82 out of 4 or differentiated level 1: participatory. Finally, student JG was a fifth-grade student that scored a 0 out of 4 or differentiated level 1: participatory. Students in the participatory group answered questions using active participation response with continuous teacher or paraprofessional assistance for 50% or more of the time. Accommodations included errorless choices when completing assignments for their grades. After the study, students in this group were expected to be able to select a money amount containing a decimal to be able to demonstrate the act of making a purchase. Students in this group were expected to use play money or visual aids to make a hypothetical purchase (Figure 1)..

Academic progress was measured by weekly instruction for six weeks at the beginning of each week and a test at the end of each week. For at least 20 minutes of each class period, students received instruction using grade-level texts and resources from the *Go math!* Series for third through fifth grade. Afterwards, modified tests and assignments were provided to students using the Unique Learning System to measure whether each student was meeting the Access point standards at the end of each week of the study.

This weekly assessment of skills allowed for data-driven teaching by providing the teacher with objectives for the student's current performance levels, summative testing data, informal data regarding the student's individual skills, and data to compare the student's academic progress from week to week. The tests also highlighted what weaknesses or deficits each student had in the content areas being addressed. This allowed the teacher to be able to see what each student's academic needs

were and adjust instructional presentation. At the end of the study, it was predicted that learning gains would be made and that the students were able to effectively meet the Florida Alternate Achievement Standards or make significant progress towards meeting those standards.

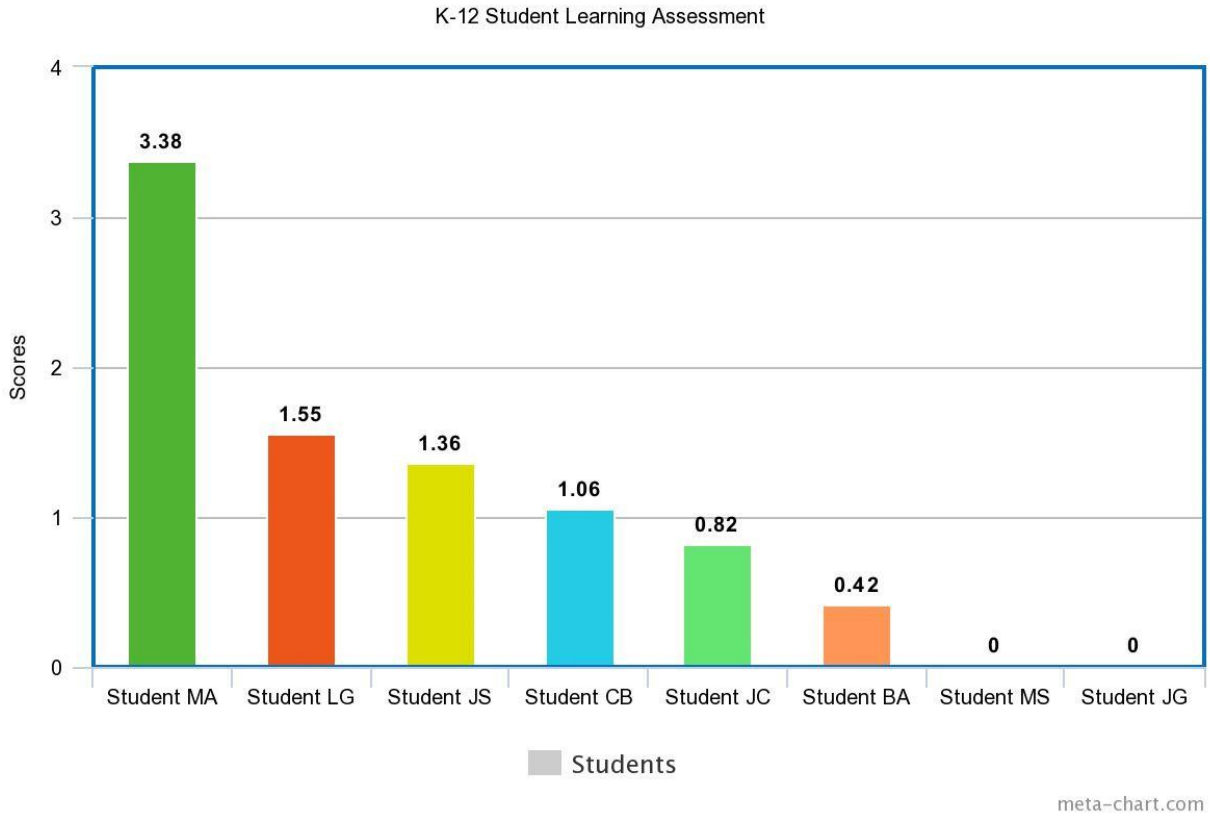

Figure 1. Unique Learning System: K-12 Student Learning Profile.

Findings: Unique Learning System Diagnostic Tests

Following the collection of data from the *Unique Learning System K-12 Student Learning Assessment*, students were administered the Unique Learning System Diagnostic Tests on money. This took place during the first two weeks of the study. The teacher organized and collected data by obtaining student work samples. The teacher measured work sample differences for two weeks and began to find areas of weaknesses, based on number of correct responses to measure how much of the content the students understood. To display the data, a data chart was created to show the scores of each student. The average of the two learning scores were organized on a table using a minimum score of 0% correct responses and a maximum score of 100%.

Following the completion of the Unique Learning System Diagnostic Tests on money, the students were then given instruction from their *Go Math!* G3-G5 Student Edition series at the beginning of each week and administered instructional work from the Unique Learning System. Each week the posttests and the instruction had the same number of problems in the same format. The only thing that changed was numbers for each problem.

For the students in the independent and supported groups, numerical and percentage scores were used to measure the Unique Learning System weekly pretest and posttests about money. The differentiated tasks and benchmarks the independent group had to achieve included recognizing and counting coins and bills for an amount discussed in a real-world scenario, read money numbers containing a decimal to indicate dollars and cents, and to calculate an amount of coins and bills to solve within a real-world scenario. The differentiated tasks and benchmarks the supported group had to achieve included using coins or bills to match a price within a real-world scenario, matching a decimal money amount to the same figure in cents, and selecting coins or bills to match a price within a real-world scenario. For the students in the participatory group, numerical and percentage scores could not be used to measure the Unique Learning System weekly pretest and posttests about money. The differentiated tasks and benchmarks the participatory group had to achieve included selecting a money amount containing a decimal to demonstrate making a purchase, using money to make a purchase, and selecting coins or bills within a real-world scenario through an active participation response (e.g., voice output device, eye gaze, or choice board).

The teacher organized and collected data by obtaining student work samples to progress monitor learning gains. The teacher compared students' pretest and posttest responses to gauge any possible learning gains or improvements in money (progress or regress in mastery of applied standards). For students in the independent and supported groups, scores were organized on a bar graph in chronological order (from week to week) using a minimum score of 0% correct responses and a maximum score of 100%. The data table will have columns for each week to measure each student's individual scores (See *Figures 2, 3,* and *4*). For students in the participatory group, numerical and percentage scores were not used to measure the Unique Learning System weekly pretest and posttests about money. The teacher instead made a checklist of the differentiated tasks and indicated yes or no if the student was able to perform the task through active participation response (See tables 1, 2, 3, and 4).

Independent Group: Student MA

Student MA was challenged with completing work independently with little to no assistance. This student had some prior knowledge of that value of some coins, but often could not remember the names of the coins. She could not add and subtract money independently. As she was measured weekly, her scores remained relatively the same, the highest score being an 85% on week 5 and her lowest score being a 0% on week 4 because she was absent. By the last three weeks, she expressed disinterest in working on money math and her scores dipped several percentage points. By the end of the study, this student was able to read money numbers containing a decimal to indicate dollars and cents, calculate the amount of coins and bills to solve a problem within a real-world scenario through adding, and could recognize and count coins and bills for an amount discussed in a real-world scenario. Student MA continued to struggle with calculating the amount of coins and bills to solve a problem within a real-world scenario by subtracting values throughout the study (Figure 2).

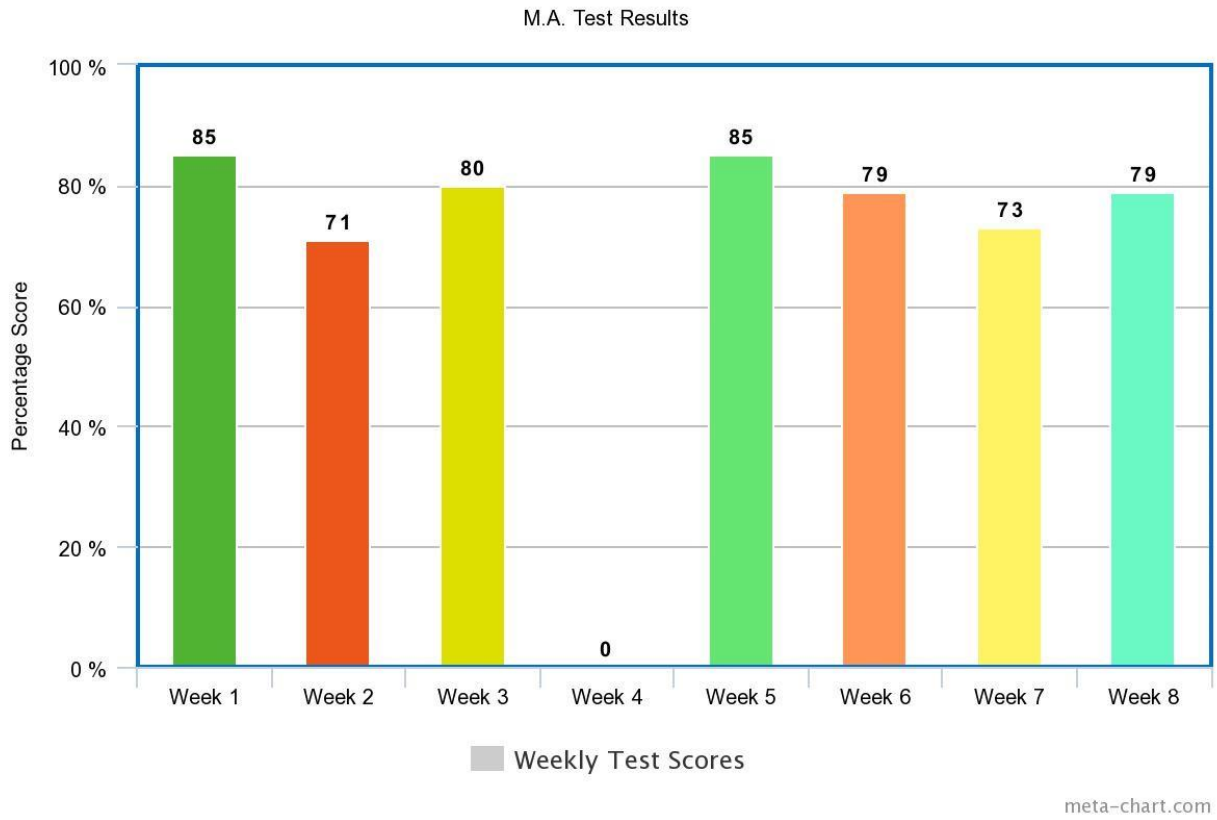

Figure 2. Unique Learning System posttest for Student MA.

Supported Group: Student LG and Student JS

Student LG was tasked with completing work somewhat independently with little to moderate assistance. This student had some prior knowledge of that names of some coins, but often could not consistently remember the values of the coins. He could not add and subtract money independently. As he was measured weekly, his scores would vary from week to week, the highest score being an 61% on week 7 and his lowest score being a 25% on week 1. By the last week, he expressed disinterest in working on money math and his scores dipped several percentage points from a 61% to a 41%. By the end of the study, this student was able to read money numbers containing a decimal to indicate dollars and cents and could recognize and count coins and bills for an amount discussed in a real-world scenario. He was also able to name coins and identify their value. Student LG continued to struggle with calculating the amount of coins and bills to solve a problem within a real-world scenario by adding and subtracting values throughout the study (Figure 3). Student LG needed to be administered instruction and the tests in the morning, as he is given a medication that causes drowsiness in the afternoons, which impacts his ability to test

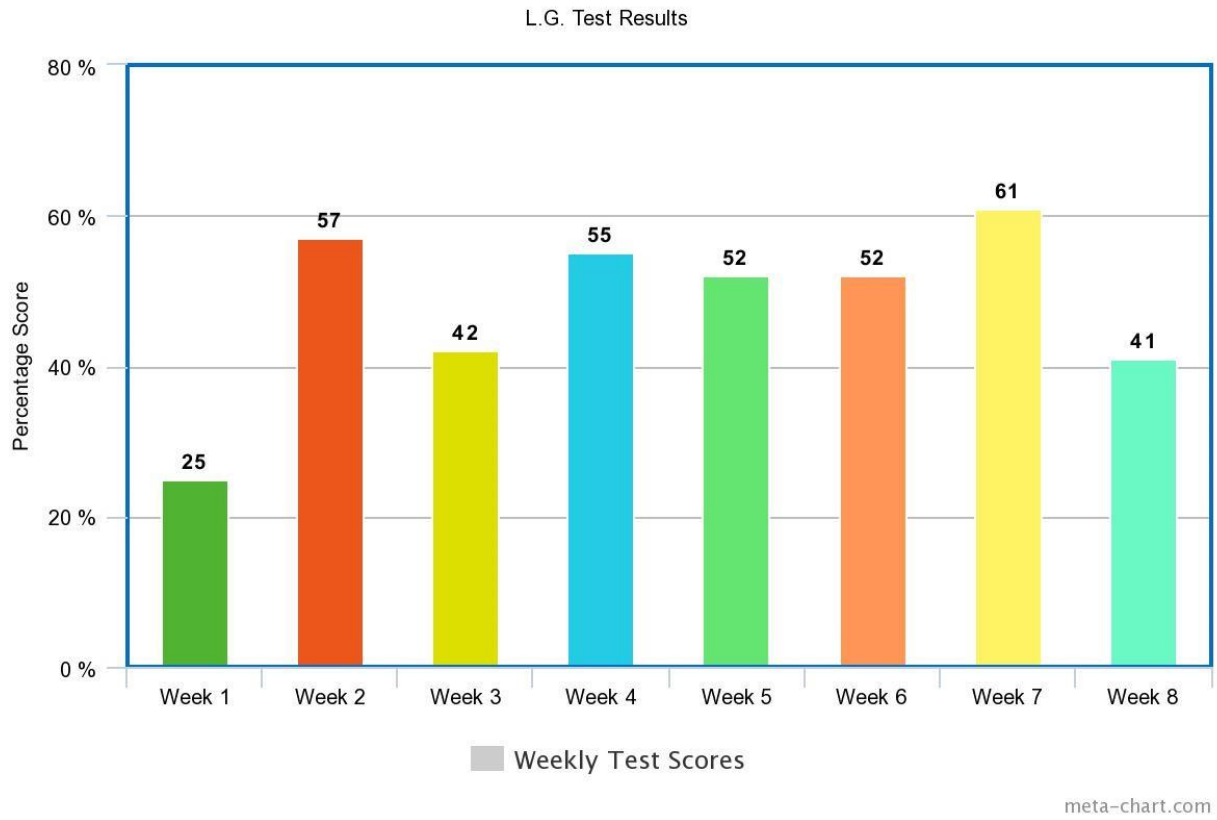

Figure 3. Unique Learning System Posttest Scores for Student LG.

Student JS was also tasked with completing work somewhat independently with little to moderate assistance. This student had no prior knowledge of coin names or their value. He could not add and subtract money independently. As he was measured weekly, his scores would increase slightly from week to week, the highest score being an 73% on week 7 and his lowest score being 45% on week 2 and week 3. Throughout the study, he expressed strong disinterest in working on money math, often requiring frequent breaks and redirection to complete a task; however, using the manipulatives his scores showed a steady increase. By the end of the study, this student was able to read money numbers containing a decimal to indicate dollars and cents and could recognize and count coins and bills for an amount discussed in a real-world scenario. He was also able to name coins and identify their value. Student JS continued to struggle with calculating the amount of coins and bills to solve a problem within a real-world scenario by subtracting values throughout the study; however, he was able to add two different values by week 4 as indicated in the spike in percentage points. (Figure 4).

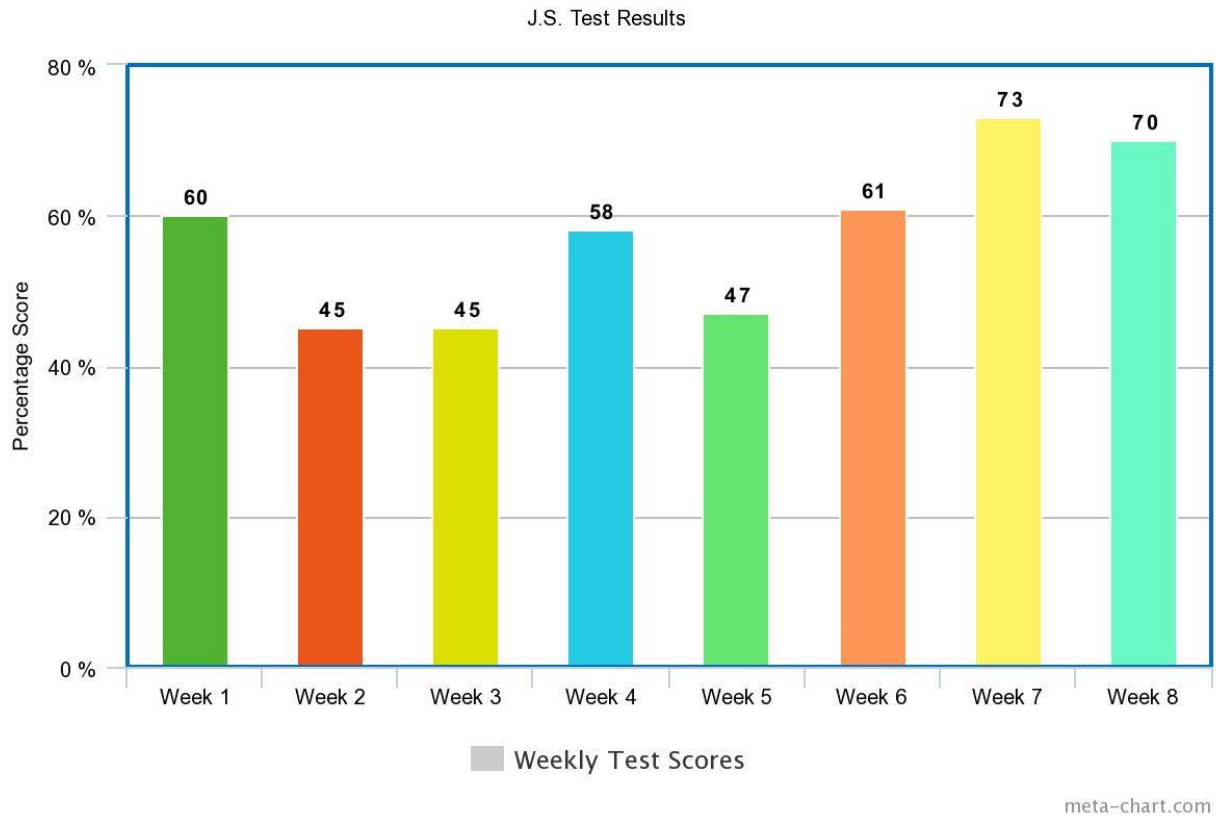

Figure 4. Unique Learning System Posttest Scores for Student JS.

Participatory Group: Student BA, Student CB, Student JC, and Student JG

Table 1

Unique Learning System Posttest Scores for Student BA

Assessment and Observations	Scores and Observations
Pretest One	10%
Pretest Two	65%
Posttest Week One: Had paraprofessional/teacher support but did not actively attempt to complete tasks. Student often refused hand over hand	Selected coins or bills within a real-world scenario through an active participation response (choice, board, eye gaze, or pointing): **No**

assistance and did not appropriately use manipulatives provided.	Selected money amount containing a decimal to demonstrate a purchase: **No** Used money to make a purchase: **No**
Posttest Week Two: Student was absent due to sickness.	Selected coins or bills within a real-world scenario through an active participation response (choice, board, eye gaze, or pointing): **No** Selected money amount containing a decimal to demonstrate a purchase: **No** Used money to make a purchase: **No**
Posttest Week Three: Had paraprofessional/teacher support. Student began showing emerging interest in money manipulatives but did not use them appropriately. Student is beginning to choose coins and dollars to observe and exchange. Student is refusing hand over hand assistance.	Selected coins or bills within a real-world scenario through an active participation response (choice, board, eye gaze, or pointing): **Yes** Selected money amount containing a decimal to demonstrate a purchase: **No** Used money to make a purchase: **No**
Posttest Week Four: Had paraprofessional/teacher support. Student began showing more interest in money manipulatives but did not use them appropriately. Student is beginning to choose coins and dollars to observe and exchange. Student understands that money can be placed in a cash register. Student is refusing hand over hand assistance.	Selected coins or bills within a real-world scenario through an active participation response (choice, board, eye gaze, or pointing): **Yes** Selected money amount containing a decimal to demonstrate a purchase: **No** Used money to make a purchase: **Yes**
Posttest Week Five: Had paraprofessional/teacher support. Student began showing more interest in money manipulatives but did not use them appropriately. Student is beginning to place coins in a cash register and take them out. Student is choosing coins and dollars to observe and	Selected coins or bills within a real-world scenario through an active participation response (choice, board, eye gaze, or pointing): **Yes** Selected money amount containing a decimal to demonstrate a purchase: **No** Used money to make a purchase: **Yes**

exchange. Student understands that money can be placed in a cash register. Student is refusing hand over hand assistance.	
Posttest Week Six: Student was absent due to sickness.	Selected coins or bills within a real-world scenario through an active participation response (choice, board, eye gaze, or pointing): **No** Selected money amount containing a decimal to demonstrate a purchase: **No** Used money to make a purchase: **No**

Table 2

Unique Learning System Posttest Scores for Student CB

Assessment and Observations	Scores and Observations
Pretest One	14%
Pretest Two	39%
Posttest Week One: Had paraprofessional/teacher support but did not actively attempt to complete tasks.	Selected coins or bills within a real-world scenario through an active participation response (choice, board, eye gaze, or pointing): **No** Selected money amount containing a decimal to demonstrate a purchase: **No** Used money to make a purchase: **No**
Posttest Week Two: Had paraprofessional support/teacher but did not actively attempt to complete tasks. Did not complete the portion for	Selected coins or bills within a real-world scenario through an active participation response (choice, board, eye gaze, or pointing): **Yes**

adding and subtracting dollars and cents in decimal form because of sickness.	Selected money amount containing a decimal to demonstrate a purchase: **No** Used money to make a purchase: **No**
Posttest Week Three: Had paraprofessional/teacher support. Student began showing emerging interest in money manipulatives and a calculator. Student is beginning to choose coins and dollars to match to a value.	Selected coins or bills within a real-world scenario through an active participation response (choice, board, eye gaze, or pointing): **Yes** Selected money amount containing a decimal to demonstrate a purchase: **No** Used money to make a purchase: **Yes**
Posttest Week Four: Had paraprofessional/teacher support. Student began showing more interest in money manipulatives and is using a calculator more frequently. Student is more accurately choosing coins and dollars to match to a value. The student is accurately demonstrating which value is more than, less than, or equal to.	Selected coins or bills within a real-world scenario through an active participation response (choice, board, eye gaze, or pointing): **Yes** Selected money amount containing a decimal to demonstrate a purchase: **Yes** Used money to make a purchase: **Yes**
Posttest Week Five: Had paraprofessional/teacher support. Student began showing more interest in money manipulatives and is using a calculator more frequently. The student can now use a calculator if told which numbers and symbols to press. Student is more accurately choosing coins and dollars to match to a value with little correction. The student is accurately demonstrating which value is more than, less than, or equal to.	Selected coins or bills within a real-world scenario through an active participation response (choice, board, eye gaze, or pointing): **Yes** Selected money amount containing a decimal to demonstrate a purchase: **No** Used money to make a purchase: **Yes**

Posttest Week Six: Had paraprofessional/teacher support. Student began showing more interest in money manipulatives and is using a calculator more frequently. The student can now use a calculator by looking at the problem and typing in the numbers and symbols. Student can do this with no assistance or redirection. Student is more accurately choosing coins and dollars to match to a value with little correction. The student is accurately demonstrating which value is more than, less than, or equal to. Did not complete the portion for adding and subtracting dollars and cents in decimal form because of sickness.	Selected coins or bills within a real-world scenario through an active participation response (choice, board, eye gaze, or pointing): **Yes** Selected money amount containing a decimal to demonstrate a purchase: **No** Used money to make a purchase: **Yes**

Table 3

Unique Learning System Posttest Scores for Student JC

Assessment and Observations	Scores and Observations
Pretest One	14%
Pretest Two	45%
Posttest Week One: Had paraprofessional/teacher support. Student refused to participate in the test-taking process.	Selected coins or bills within a real-world scenario through an active participation response (choice, board, eye gaze, or pointing): **No** Selected money amount containing a decimal to demonstrate a purchase: **No** Used money to make a purchase: **No**

Posttest Week Two: Student was absent due to sickness.	Selected coins or bills within a real-world scenario through an active participation response (choice, board, eye gaze, or pointing): **No** Selected money amount containing a decimal to demonstrate a purchase: **No** Used money to make a purchase: **No**
Posttest Week Three: Had paraprofessional/teacher support. Student refused to complete the test. The portion he did not complete included adding and subtracting dollars and cents in decimal form.	Selected coins or bills within a real-world scenario through an active participation response (choice, board, eye gaze, or pointing): **Yes** Selected money amount containing a decimal to demonstrate a purchase: **No** Used money to make a purchase: **Yes**
Posttest Week Four: Had paraprofessional/teacher support. Student refused to complete the test. The portion he did not complete included adding and subtracting dollars and cents in decimal form.	Selected coins or bills within a real-world scenario through an active participation response (choice, board, eye gaze, or pointing): **Yes** Selected money amount containing a decimal to demonstrate a purchase: **No** Used money to make a purchase: **No**
Posttest Week Five: Had paraprofessional/teacher support. Student began showing emerging interest in money manipulatives. Student is beginning to choose coins and dollars to match to a value	Selected coins or bills within a real-world scenario through an active participation response (choice, board, eye gaze, or pointing): **Yes** Selected money amount containing a decimal to demonstrate a purchase: **Yes** Used money to make a purchase: **Yes**

Posttest Week Six: Had paraprofessional/teacher support. Student began showing more interest in money manipulatives compared to week five. Student is choosing coins and dollars to match to a value.	Selected coins or bills within a real-world scenario through an active participation response (choice, board, eye gaze, or pointing): **Yes** Selected money amount containing a decimal to demonstrate a purchase: **Yes** Used money to make a purchase: **Yes**

Table 4

Unique Learning System Posttest Scores for Student JG

Assessment and Observations	Scores and Observations
Pretest One: Student was absent due to sickness outside therapy on instruction/test days.	n/a
Pretest Two: Student was absent due to sickness outside therapy on instruction/test days.	n/a
Posttest Week One: Student was absent due to sickness outside therapy on instruction/test days.	n/a
Posttest Week Two: Student was absent due to sickness outside therapy on instruction/test days.	n/a
Posttest Week Three: Student was absent due to sickness outside therapy on instruction/test days.	n/a
Posttest Week Four: Student was absent due to sickness outside therapy on instruction/test days.	n/a

Posttest Week Five: Student was absent due to sickness outside therapy on instruction/test days.	n/a
Posttest Week Six: Student was absent due to sickness outside therapy on instruction/test days.	n/a

Limitations

This action research plan was created specifically to increase administration flexibility for students who were absent, attended field trips, had to take standardized tests, or for teacher planning days. Unfortunately, despite the careful planning there were many unforeseen circumstances that affected the outcomes of the results. A major factor in the collection of data was attendance issues, tardiness, and frequent absences. Seven of the eight students who participated in the action research process had in-school and out-of-school private therapy in the mornings and afternoons at varied times. This affected how much content they were present to retain. The students who attended out-of-school therapy were tardy or picked up early daily, whereas the students who attended in-school therapy lost at least 30 minutes to at most two hours a week. Every student was absent at least one or more days of each week because of flu, fever, doctor's appointments, or outside therapy, some missing the posttest dates and instruction. This affected the learning outcomes because every week we learned a new lesson that should have increased learning gains for the end-of-the-week posttest. This meant that for some students, no data were recorded for them that week. Had there not been as many interruptions, tardiness, absences, and events planned by the school, more consistent data could have been collected. Student MS also left the school halfway through the study, therefore her scores were not considered for this research.

On the days that students were all present or mostly present, the students had to attend holiday events, field trips, or in-school events. This created great disruption to the learning process and oftentimes lessons were cut short or moved to other days altogether. Since the first day since school has commenced following the winter break, the classroom had full attendance for only 8 days cumulatively. This not only hindered the progress each student could have made, but it also implied that one student had to be dropped from the study altogether because of frequent absences.

The length of the study limited the progress each student could have made when completing the assessments. Each test took close to 45 minutes to complete in full and each student had to complete it individually or with a paraprofessional. This meant that after a few weeks of completing each port-test, the students would attempt to rush through the assignments. This also implied that students who required paraprofessional assistance would take much longer than an hour to complete each posttest because of the need for breaks and hand over hand assistance. If this study were to be replicated, it would be more beneficial to create posttests and lessons that can be cumulatively

completed within the 60-minute block. This ensures that students are not overworked or disillusioned when it comes time to be assessed.

Student behavior heavily impacted student progress in the study. Negative student behaviors increased the amount of time it took to complete tasks and lesson. For students that wanted to complete the assessments, negative student behavior affected their ability to focus and retain as much information as possible. Moreover, this increased the number of interruptions per lesson. Despite having a behavioral plan in place since the beginning of the school year, non-compliance was still very common throughout the study among some students, affecting every student involved.

A major limitation of this study was measuring each student's ability to perform differently. For students who had severe intellectual disabilities and worked within the participatory group, the ability to demonstrate the learning gains in the same way that students in the supported and independent group demonstrated them was not possible. Although learning gains were apparent, such as the emerging use of a calculator and the ability to exchange currency in a real-world scenario, the students in the participatory group could not calculate the adding and subtracting of dollars and cents. To remedy the issue of how to collect data for these students, charts indicating "yes" or "no" were created to measure whether the students met some of the goals of the differentiated tasks assigned to that group. Not only did this make it easier to observe learning gains, but each student was able to better demonstrate their knowledge of the content. Data would then be collected in an anecdotal fashion, rather than through percentages.

For teachers of students with intellectual disabilities, this study can be applied to their classroom, however it will be difficult to conduct this study with fidelity if the same circumstances that affected this one exists. If conducted at the beginning of the school year where attendance is more consistent and student motivation is high, any teacher can yield better results. Also, take into consideration that students may get sick or attend regularly scheduled therapy. This was a major factor that hindered consistent posttest results and should be considered when lesson planning. Because of the different learning styles students have, providing them with an opportunity to exhibit their knowledge in a variety of ways can impact the classroom in a positive way and surely create a pedagogical environment where students can succeed.

Suggestions for Future Research and Implications for Practice

For future studies, posttests should be more compatible to the weekly lessons. Each posttest had three individual differentiated tasks to accomplish per group, which meant lengthier test time and higher frustration levels. Each task should be more evenly spread out throughout the entirety of the study so that the students could more easily master the target benchmark and standard. This would increase the reliability of the test scores and consume less time to administer and teach, making the data more consistent as well. It would also be beneficial for the study to be condensed to a smaller number of weeks. Students were losing motivation to complete tasks, because they were bored after

four weeks. By shortening the study and the length of time it would take to complete tasks, planning would be simpler, which is helpful in reducing interruptions.

Another implication of the study is creating a better way to differentiate tasks more efficiently for each student. While each student was administered the same posttest, it was ineffective in measuring numerical scores for the participatory group. While each student did make learning gains, it was difficult to measure in which ways they met the differentiated tasks. Rather than measure each student solely using a numerical score, it would be more beneficial to measure whether the target objectives were met, provide anecdotal progress monitoring data alongside the checklists the participatory group had, and use numerical scoring when applicable (within the supported and independent groups). In this way, data can more accurately cater to the individual learning styles of each student.

To conduct this research with fidelity and accuracy, the teacher needs to be flexible with scheduling, as students are often tardy, absent, in therapy, or attending an in-school event. Also, the teacher needs to establish an efficient behavioral management system to be sure that all students can complete the lessons and the tests with as little distractions as possible. If a student is unable or unwilling to complete a lesson because of the listed circumstances, be sure that there is time for them to make up the tasks later or the next day. Frequent breaks are crucial to boost student motivation to complete tasks. Be sure to provide breaks when necessary to allow students the time they need to destress and reduce frustration levels. This will decrease non-compliance or refusal to complete a task. Most importantly, it is imperative that you understand how each student can produce work, be it orally, written, through eye gaze, or participation response. Students do not fit into a uniform mold and no two students are alike. Before administering this type of study, the teacher must be fully aware of the differing learning styles and how progress can be measured through the strengths of each student.

Dissemination

The results of this intervention were shared with the school's administration, including the special education department and teachers of students who utilized the Unique Learning System. In the future, other teachers of students with special needs in the school where the study took place would like to model some of their lessons after this study, in the sense that they can collect data through the Unique Learning System K-12 Student Learning Assessment to place students in the appropriate differentiated levels and progress monitor them effectively by providing them the appropriate the differentiated tasks for their subject area and grade level. The school aims to departmentalize in the upcoming 2019-2020 school year, which would create uniformity in the way each special education teacher implements instruction since all special education instructors at the school have access to the Unique Learning System. This model of teaching and differentiating assignments for other lessons and subject areas could be further studied to see if the results are similar or different from this study. The research will also be shared with faculty members at Florida International University during the

annual 2019 Graduate Student Appreciation Week (GSAW) and with students pursuing a bachelor's or master's degree in special education.

To: Bouza Debs, Viviana;

Good evening,
I am completing my master's degree at FIU and as part of the requirements, I will be using activities in my classroom to help your child improve his/her math skills. Some of these activities include play money and adding and subtracting monetary value. I hope to share the success of these activities with other teachers at Tropical Elementary as well as my professors at FIU. All students will be participating in these activities.

Thanks in advance to your attention to this matter.

Marissa Desiree Pardo
SPED- Intellectual Disability Teacher
Tropical Elementary School
305-221-0284 Ext. 171

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To top

The Significance and/or Effects of Parental Advocacy for Minorities and Students with Disabilities

By Loydeen Thomas

Abstract

Parent advocacy is the voice of the child with the inability, due to various factors, to make decisions, choices, and express views and opinions for themselves. This article focuses on the parents of minorities and children with disabilities and examines the parents' roles as advocates, the voices of children, giving them a chance to be heard. A study was conducted to parents of minorities and children with ASD to determine whether they feel they need to advocate for their child. Results suggest that the majority of parents of students who are considered ELLs do not feel the need to advocate for their child, as long as their child is happy.

Literature Review

When it comes to education, parental involvement is necessary. It is important to examine this topic because parents can be that small difference that can motivate and add fuel to the fire of learning and lead to student success. For minorities and students with disabilities, parental involvement is multiple times more impressionable and impactful. For these students, the parents are not only involved with just assignments and activities, but they become the students' voice. The majority of these students cannot identify their needs or even voice their opinions whether for fear or inability due to psychological reasons or physiology. Parental involvement has been reflected to be an important factor against negative educational, social, and employment outcomes in young adulthood for children and youth with disabilities (Mandic, Rudd, Hehir, and Acevedo-Garcia, 2012).

Parental advocacy can range from accommodations needed, assistive technology options, goals and objectives, curriculum decision, to difficulty with assignments, bullying, and more. In the end, parents' attitudes, effort, motivation, and involvement may determine whether a child will achieve success or not. For this piece of literature, parent advocacy refers to the parents' involvement in their child's education and making decisions on the academic, behavioral, and the legal aspects. Multiple studies have been found to address the topic of self-advocacy. There is research on the minority and culturally linguistically diverse angle, as well as the side dealing with students with disabilities.

Starr and Foy say that in a survey of parents who homeschooled their children with special needs (the greatest proportion of whom were parents of children with ASD), negative experiences like bullying was the number one reason for choosing to home-school, as well as the fact that the school did not have a suitable program (2012).

A study was conducted, Starr and Foy explored parents' perspectives concerning the education of their child with ASD. Parents were asked open-ended questions to reflect their survey responses in a forum. The participants included 144 parents, the majority of surveys were completed by the mothers (89.9%), whereas 3.5% were completed by fathers and 5.6% were completed by both parents. All except 14 families resided in Ontario. 82.6% of the children were male, and 17.4% were female. The children were between 4 and 18 years of age, with a mean age of 8 years 9 months. 81.0% of the students were in elementary school and 17.4% were in middle and high school (Grades 7–12). Most of the children were in kindergarten to third grade (60.9%), and 20.1% were in fourth to sixth grade. A total of 99.3% (143 of 144) of parents of children with ASD either responded to the open-ended questions or wrote additional comments. Thus, virtually all parents wrote comments regardless of the level of overall satisfaction with the education their children were receiving, indicating that it was not just dissatisfied parents who were responding to the questions (2012). Common themes emerged across all questions. Results from parent comments indicated that the parents' perceptions of their children's education experience were impacted by the teachers' ability to manage children's behavior, teacher knowledge and understanding of the disability, and the quality of collaboration and communication.

Another study focused on barriers when it comes to literacy and understanding the rights of students with disabilities and their parents within the special education system. Evidence from other renown studies of students with disabilities implies that parents of children with disabilities who are most vulnerable to poor educational, social, and employment outcomes, are those from disadvantaged backgrounds—may also be those most likely to experience difficulty being involved in their children's education.

Also, a study has shown that there is a high number of low-income parents and non-White parents of students with disabilities who reported that there is a huge gap between their desired and actual levels of involvement in decisions where the individualized education program (IEP) is concerned. Research on parental involvement suggests that these gaps may be because of multiple factors, including lack of paid leave and flexible work schedules, family–school relationship dynamics including discrimination and cultural divides, and parental literacy- and language-related barriers (Mandic et al., 2012).

The law requires that the Procedural safeguards associated with the IEPs must be written in a language understandable to the general public and must be provided in the native language of the parent. One study using the Flesch grade level formula, found that the majority of documents assessed required a 12th grade education. Another research compared that the readability of special education documents and forms used by one elementary school in Tennessee, including a procedural safeguards document, to the readability levels of 30 parents. It was determined that the reading difficulty of the documents and forms averaged Grade 12. Finally, Additional research conducted a readability assessment of parental rights manuals used by 25 state educational agencies, using four different readability formulas. Results suggest that parents needed at least a sixth-grade education to

be able to understand the manuals. Mandic et al. (2012) conducted a study for the Readability assessment using the SMOG formula and it required the taking of three samples of 10 sentences each from different parts of the text, counting the number of polysyllabic words contained within each sample of 10 sentences, and adding the total number of polysyllabic words across the three sections.

In terms of the revised scores, Mandic et al. stated that 6% scored in the high school reading level range (10–12), 55% scored in the college reading level range, and 39% scored in the range considered graduate or professional with 17 or more (2012). One test indicates that an average of 11.5% of U.S. adults between the ages of 25 and 49 scored "below basic," 26.0% scored "basic," 46.0% scored "intermediate," and 16.5% scored "proficient" when it comes to literacy. These findings suggest that a majority of U.S. adults have difficulty reading and understanding the Procedural Safeguards. Some evidence from special education research reflects literacy-related features of special education systems that may hinder parental involvement (Mandic et al., 2012). Other research suggests that instead of participation, parents' advocacy efforts are frustrated because of the need to focus on documents and the use of jargon, amongst other things.

As stated by Mandic et al., data indicates that 14% of students with disabilities speak a language other than English at home; this increases to 20% of low-income students, 54% of Asian or Pacific Islander students, and 67% of Hispanic students with disabilities (2012). It was also found that very low-income Hispanic parents of children with learning disabilities were less likely to have their rights explained to them in their native language (Spanish for 70% of parents), less likely to be asked whether they understood their child's IEP, and less likely to understand the content of the IEP and services available to their children in comparison to the non-Hispanic parents in the study.

The purpose of the article is to examine the experiences of parents of students with disabilities and the education system itself. Valle (2011) explained that mothers of children with disabilities were often coerced into agreements with the professionals at IEP meetings because they themselves did not have the professional knowledge of the education system for students with disabilities. Based on interviews and narratives from mothers of students with learning disabilities, these mothers believe they were made to go on this journey called special education and they did not choose it. So why should they be subjected to criticism and scrutiny for trying to advocate for their child? The idea of mothers enduring turmoil and struggles going back and forth from different professionals hoping to understand their child's symptoms, before their child is finally diagnosed makes them defend more quickly and fight to be heard and understood. Most of these mothers explain their feelings of guilt, shame, and failure.

According to Valle, the parents gain some grip after their child receives a diagnosis, only to be thrust along the journey of special education even more. At IEP meetings, the parents (mostly mothers,) meet with teachers and other professionals who bombard them with a series of questions as if they are on trial and take turns throwing jabs at the mom puzzled by the laws, jargon, and testing results.

In addition, parents who attempt to explain, justify, seek clarification and understanding are considered resistant and are said to be in denial.

In an article written to assess parents' unmet needs in comparison to children's functioning, a study was conducted with 97 families of students with autism. 101 participants came from families of students with disabilities. The children with ASD were between the ages of 6 and 13. The participants were given surveys that included 4 different questionnaires. The questions consisted of whether or not needs were met, the frequency and severity of challenging behaviors, and assessing the impact of a child's disability on the family. Based on results, families with older children appears to have a greater risk for unmet needs than younger children (Brown et al., 2011). It also shows that parents' perceived unmet needs can be affected by the child's functional independence and how the parents view the impact on the family and their needs.

Another study suggests that immigrant students experience a lower special education placement in earlier grades in comparison to non-immigrant students. There is a greater risk for placement as the students go to higher grades. They are also significantly less considered for special education until after the third grade. Teachers and administrators may attempt to delay learning disability (LD) assessments until the students can be examined in English, but this may lead to increased disadvantages and higher risks of failure (Hibel & Jasper, 2012). Research has indicated that immigrants have equal need for LD as non-immigrants. In cases like this, parent advocacy could come in very handy. As a result, immigrant students would not need to keep failure before being identified for special education.

Research

A study was conducted to determine parents' need for advocacy. A survey was given to 11 parents of students with ASD in a second-grade self-contained class. In addition, 8 of the 11 parents have students in ESOL (Hispanic), while of the remaining 3, 1 was white/ Caucasian and the other 2 were from mixed races (non-Hispanic). The survey had 3 questions: Are my child's needs being met? Do I need to advocate for my child? Are there noticeable flaws in the education my child is receiving? There was also a space for comments.

Data shows that of the 11 parents of students with ASD, only 4 strongly feels like they have to advocate for their child, either by ensuring that each accommodation and goal is being reviewed, assistive technology is considered, the curriculum is appropriate, and more. 2 of these 4 parents are non-ESOL and non-Hispanic. The remaining 7 parents who completed the survey showed low levels of self-advocacy need. Low levels refer to them just wanting their child to be happy and to learn.

Results

The study suggests that the majority of Hispanic parents of children with ASD are content as long as their child is able to come to school, be happy, and do their work. The other percentage, non-

Hispanic advocate for their child using what seems to be knowledge of the education laws, IEPs, the curriculum, the school system, the disability of Autism, and their experience in special education.

Limitations

A variety of factors has been seen to affect parents' involvement and advocacy in a negative way. Parents' views of the teachers and their lack of knowledge when it comes to educating and dealing with the behaviors of children with disabilities. Another factor is the parents' own inability resulting from fear of views and opinions from the teachers and other parents, lack of time, money, or scheduling, lack of literacy abilities, and much more.

Conclusion

According to Starr and Foy, it is important to investigate and respect the parents' perspectives regarding their child's education, because parents know their own children best and can be experienced working collaboratively with school personnel (2012). According to Mandic, Rudd, Hehir, and Acevedo-Garcia, in the fields of early intervention and primary and secondary education research has shown that parental involvement in education and child development is an important determinant of cognitive and social-emotional development and academic achievement (2012).

Even though teachers may want to design learning goals and interventions using evidence-based research, schools may also need to take parent views into consideration. Parent can participate and advocate by in assiting with the development of IEP goals and by being an active participant in their child's education. Parents still encounter many difficulties in achieving. The climate of the school, as well as the teacher's culturally responsive practice, effective collaborative, and attitude will benefit all, especially the child with ASD.

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Latest Employment Opportunities Posted on NASET

*** Special Education Teacher** - Newark Board of Education (NBOE) is now accepting applications for Special Education Teachers for the 2019-20 school year. Certified teachers, career changers, and recent graduates should apply today to be considered. Completing the central application will give principals the ability to access your resume and invite you to interview for open positions in your subject area. To learn more – Click here

*** ESE Teacher** - Pasco County Schools is looking for qualified individuals to join our team in providing a world-class education to all students. This highly rewarding work assists students with Autism to gain valuable social and vocational skills, achieve academic success via access points, and prepares students for a successful life transition. To learn more - Click here

*** Special Education Teacher, Teaching Assistant -** The California Montessori Project seeks both Special Education Teachers and Special Education Teaching Assistants. These postions are available at multiple locations in California. To learn more - Click here

*** Math and Science Teacher** - The Katherine Thomas School in Rockville, MD seeks to hire full-time high school Special Education Math and Science teachers for 2019/2020 school year. Responsibilities include: implement content area curricula, provide necessary accommodations to meet individual, group, and program needs, write and implement IEPs, create a supportive learning environment, implement Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and create partnerships with parents and The Katherine Thomas High School Community. To learn more - Click here

*** Chief Clinical Officer** - Criterion Child Enrichment is conducting a search for a Chief Clinical Officer (CCO). Founded in 1985 as a not-for-profit organization, Criterion has served families for over 30 years and is a leading provider of early childhood education and early intervention services in Massachusetts. Each year the agency serves over 7000 families with a staff of over 400 through a program network that extends throughout the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. To learn more - Click here

*** Rivermont Schools - Special Education TEACHER positions available!** - Now is a great time to join Rivermont Schools. Currently offering a $2,000 sign-on bonus and reimbursement of relocation expenses for Special Education Teachers! Rivermont Schools are private, nonprofit, special education day schools with campuses across Virginia. Rivermont's mission is to help students learn to manage their behaviors so they can return to their home schools, graduate and become productive citizens. To learn more - Click here

*** Lead Teacher** - Cupertino Power Learning Academy is a private nonprofit school dedicated to equipping students with autism to build on their strengths, overcome their challenges and reach their full potential in a safe, supportive environment. The Lead Teacher is responsible for developing and delivering student instructional plans through small group and individual instruction. Responsibilities include training and directing a team of paraprofessionals and collaborating with a variety of special education and therapeutic professionals. To learn more - Click here

*** Head Teacher** - Integrated nursery school in Riverdale looking for a head teacher for a Threes Class. Hours are 8:30 to 12:15 Monday through Friday. Must have certification in early childhood education and preferably a masters degree in special education (or in progress). To learn more - Click here

*** Special Education Teacher** -Performs responsible professional instruction to students receiving special education; develops and carries out the provisions of an Individualized Education Program (IEP); does related work as required. Work is performed under general supervision. To learn more- Click here

*** Special Education Teacher (Multiple Openings)** -We are recruiting for several Special Education Teachers in Southwest Washington state for the 2019-20 school year. All positions are full time, 184 contract days, school year schedule. We provide a professional yet family-friendly work environment. To that end, our benefits are designed to meet the individual needs of our employees and their families. Full-time or part-time positions working at least 20 hours per week are eligible for our standard package of benefits. To learn more- Click here

*** Director of Pupil Services and Special Education**- The Delaware County Intermediate Unit (DCIU) is pleased to conduct the Director of Pupil Services and Special Education search on behalf of the Chester Upland School District (CUSD). The Director of Pupil Services and Special Education shall perform those central office duties necessary to support the overall instructional mission of the school district. Departmental responsibilities include services provided to all district buildings, hospitalization programs and other outside agencies. To learn more- Click here

* **Early Childhood Educational Diagnostician/Assessor** - is responsible for accurately assessing a child's needs after s/he is referred to Early Stages through the administration of the appropriate screenings and educational assessments. The Coordinator functions as part of a multi-disciplinary team that collaborates to determine eligibility for special education services and is responsible for leading the team's collaboration and composing IEPs for children with special needs. To learn more- Click here

* **Director of Education** - At Kennedy-Donovan Center (KDC), everything that we do is tied to our mission. No matter your role at KDC, we are all working together to support individuals with developmental delays, disabilities, or family challenges to pursue their personal potential and success in the community. To learn more - Click here

* **Special Education Teacher - Chicago, IL** - The Invo-Progressus Team has incredible opportunities for Special Education Teachers…or, as we like to call them, Superheroes. If you use your super powers to help ensure that children have access to the best education possible in the least restrictive environment, we would love for you to join the Invo-Progressus team! To learn more - Click here

* **Special Education Teacher - Wilmington, DE** - We are currently seeking full-time Teachers with a Certification in Special Education in Wilmington, DE to provide services during the 2019-2020 School Year. The Invo-Progressus Team has incredible opportunities for Special Education Teachers…or, as we like to call them, Superheroes. To learn more - Click here

* **Special Education Teacher - Philadelphia, PA** - The Invo-Progressus Team has incredible opportunities for Special Education Teachers…or, as we like to call them, Superheroes. If you use your super powers to help ensure that children have access to the best education possible in the least restrictive environment, we would love for you to join the Invo-Progressus team! To learn more - Click here

* **Special Education Teacher** - Desert Choice Schools is looking for a Special Education Teacher or Teacher Intern at multiple locations including Buckeye, AZ - Tempe, AZ - Phoenix, AZ - San Tan Valley, AZ - Queens Creek, AZ and Yuma, AZ for the 2019/2020 school year. Being a special educator with Desert Choice Schools is unlike any other opportunity. To learn more - Click here

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Acknowledgements

Portions of this or previous month's ***NASET's Special Educator e-Journal*** were excerpted from:

- Center for Parent Information and Resources
- Committee on Education and the Workforce
- FirstGov.gov-The Official U.S. Government Web Portal
- Journal of the American Academy of Special Education Professionals (JAASEP)
- National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth
- National Institute of Health
- National Organization on Disability
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
- U.S. Department of Education
- U.S. Department of Education-The Achiever
- U.S. Department of Education-The Education Innovator
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
- U.S. Department of Labor
- U.S. Food and Drug Administration
- U.S. Office of Special Education

The **National Association of Special Education Teachers** (NASET) thanks all of the above for the information provided for this or prior editions of the Special Educator e-Journal