Title: Nature and Predictors of Parent and Student Participation During IEP Meetings

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Introduction: Despite being critical stakeholders, parents and students rarely participate in Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings (Martin et al., 2006). While some benefits and barriers of parent and student involvement during the IEP meeting have been identified, little is known about the discrete areas of input that comprise participation. This study addressed the following 3 questions, as seen from the perspective of the parent respondent: (1) What is the nature and extent of both parent and student participation in IEP meetings?; (2) What are the similarities and differences in parent and student participation?; and (3) What are predictors of parent and student involvement?

Method: Participants included 240 parents of children with disabilities ≥ 14 years of age who responded to a national, web-based survey related to their experience at their child’s most recent IEP meeting. Respondents were predominantly female, White, and well-educated. As potential correlates, we examined parent and student characteristics, the parent-school partnership, and factors within the IEP meeting. Outcomes concerned the extent to which school personnel asked parents and offspring about: (1) school courses; (2) classroom placement; (3) strengths; (4) areas of need; (5) IEP goals; (6) transition goals; (7) post-school employment; (8) post-school living; and (9) post-school education. For both parents and students, we first separately factor analyzed the 9 items, after which we compared parent and student participation. We then identified the correlates of parent and student participation.

Results: For both parents and students, factor analyses revealed that the 9 items constituted two factors, one related to input concerning school issues (64.94% of variance for parents; 61.34% for students), the other to transition-related input (11.67% for parents; 12.73% for students). Both parents and students contributed more toward school- vs. transition-related areas, $F(1, 239) = 75.25$, $p < .001$. In addition, parents gave more input than students across all areas, $F(1, 239) = 32.66$, $p < .001$; this disparity in input was greatest in school-related areas (interaction effect, $F(1, 239) = 41.77$, $p < .001$). Better parent-school relationship and factors related to the IEP meeting (prior input, presentation of student data during the meeting, family-focused relationships) correlated with both parent and student participation ($r$’s = .35 to .66). In addition, greater parental knowledge of adult services predicted their transition-related contributions. For students, IEP activities such as introducing IEP team members, stating the purpose of the meeting, and closing the meeting predicted involvement across all areas, with better parent-school relationships and higher percentages of time the student attended their IEP meeting predicting student transition-related contributions.

Discussion: For IEP meetings involving a transition component, school personnel might consider structuring IEP meetings so that sufficient time is specifically allocated to both school-related and transition-related considerations. Given that transition-related input was low for both parents and students, practitioners should especially be proactive in soliciting feedback in these areas, as family and student involvement are important elements of effective transition programs. In addition, given that student contributions were low, we need to develop interventions that facilitate meaningful student contributions. This study also highlights the importance of strong family-school partnerships. Given that the family-school partnership was strongly associated with both parent and student participation, both researchers and practitioners should consider how to strengthen relationships with parents.


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