PARENTAL UNDERSTANDING OF DISCIPLINE ISSUES, FUNCTIONAL BEHAVIORAL ASSESSMENT, AND BEHAVIORAL INTERVENTION PLANS: USING A STATE-WIDE SURVEY TO EXAMINE PARENTS’ REPORTS RELATED TO DISCIPLINE

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The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandated that each child who qualifies for special education must have an individualized education program (IEP). Disciplinary issues and procedures under IDEA have been a source of concern among parents, schools, and advocates from disability groups. At issue are fundamental concerns about the protection of rights for students with disabilities, which must be balanced with the ability of school personnel to maintain safe school environments that benefits all students.

This research examined the four survey questions related to discipline from a state-wide survey conducted by Education Service Center (ESC) Region 9 through a comparison of selected disability categories as they compare to the responses received from parents of students with the disability category of emotional/behavioral disorders (E/BD). In addition, the research examined the open-ended questions from surveys to determine the types of concerns reported by parents. Data accrued from a focus group of parents receiving special education services are also reported.

Parents of students identified as having an E/BD rated their understanding of the school’s discipline policy lower than parents of students from other eligibility categories. Almost 67% of parents of students identified as having E/BD stated that they knew that their child might be eligible for alternative discipline procedures. Parents of students identified as E/BD reported at a much higher percentage that they were aware that services must be continued if the child was removed from the instructional setting for discipline problems. In a focus group discussion, a
majority of the parent’s (67%) responded that they felt like they understood the school’s discipline policies. When given a chance to respond through an open-ended questionnaire, parents addressed a variety of problems, such as children being continually suspended for behaviors related to their disability or the behavior intervention plan not being implemented.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (Public Law 105-17, IDEA 1997) mandated that each child who qualifies for special education must have an individualized education program (IEP) (Smith, 2000). This has been reconfirmed recently by the reauthorization known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (H. R. 1350, IDEA 2004). The IEP team who writes this program consists of the parents, an administrator, a general education teacher, and any special education teacher who has tested the student or is providing services for the student (Lytle & Bordin, 2001). That both parents and professionals face challenges and barriers to the IEP process such as finding time to meet and coordinating schedules is well documented (Butera, Klein, McMullen, & Wilson, 1998). Parents can also feel frustrated by a perception of inequality on the team since they are often unfamiliar with school and legal policies and procedures and the terminology and jargon that special education personnel often use (Lytle & Bordin, 2001). Despite these barriers and challenges, IEP team members are mandated to work together closely as part of the special education process.

Disciplinary issues and procedures under IDEA have been a source of concern among parents, schools, and advocates from disability groups. At issue are fundamental concerns about the protection of rights for students with disabilities, which must be balanced with the ability of school personnel to maintain safe school environments that benefits all students (Boehner & Castle, 2005). The inclusion of functional behavioral assessment (FBA) and the resulting behavior intervention plan (BIP) in regards to school discipline was a very important aspect of IDEA 1997 (Gresham, Watson, & Skinner, 2001) that was reconfirmed by IDEA 2004. The 2004
Improvements to IDEA continue to be explicit in the requirements for an IEP team addressing behavioral problems of children with disabilities:

1. The team should explore the use of positive behavioral interventions and supports, and other strategies, to address any behavior that may impede the learning of the child with the disability or the learning of his or her peers (614 (d) (3) (B) (i)); and

2. In response to disciplinary actions by school personnel, the IEP team should meet to conduct a FBA and implement a BIP, or if a BIP already exists, the team must review and revise it, to ensure that it addresses the behavior upon which disciplinary action is predicated (615(k) (1) (F)) (IDEA 2004).

Although being introduced recently to education, FBA has always been an integral component of applied behavior analysis (Shriver, Anderson, & Proctor, 2001). A FBA is generally considered to be a problem-solving process for addressing student problem behavior. It relies on a variety of techniques and strategies to identify the purposes of specific behavior and to help the IEP teams select interventions to directly address the problem behavior (Miller, Tansey, & Hughes, 1998). The data collected during the FBA is used to develop the BIP and to determine the discrepancy between a student's actual and expected behavior (Salend & Taylor, 2002). It may be more appropriate to view the IDEA mandates on FBAs and BIPs as a single, continuous process rather than as a separate process and a subsequent product. This view helps to ensure that the FBA (a) is not considered to be an intervention in itself, (b) does not occur without the intention of developing a BIP, (c) incorporates data into an actual BIP, and (d) is integrated, along with the BIP, into the student's IEP (Nelson, Roberts, & Smith, 1999). BIPs
which are tied to the function maintaining the student's behavior as identified through the FBA, and which are consistently implemented and continuously monitored, increase the student's repertoire of appropriate behaviors, and are more likely to have positive effects on the student's educational outcomes (Jolivette, Scott, & Nelson, 2000).

Given the complex and multifaceted nature of FBA/BIP, as well as the lack of regulatory guidelines and standards of professional practice, some authors (e.g., Conroy, Clark, Fox, & Gable, 2000; Stichter, Shellady, Sealander, & Eigenberger, 2000; Yell & Katsiyannis, 2000) express concern that the FBA/BIP process might have become a matter of paper compliance of meeting the legal imperative to do some sort of the BIP rather than fulfilling the more complex spirit or intent (Quinn, 2000). As educators and other related service providers continue to define and delineate what BIPs will involve for their school districts, it will be necessary for them to look to the applied behavior analysis literature for empirically supported methods and technology in FBA in order to understand and utilize the process more effectively in decreasing problem behaviors. Although the intent of federal legislation is to provide a balance between the legal rights of a student with disabilities and the need for schools to be free from violence and drugs, the primary reason to discipline should be to help the student, and discipline should be applied in such a way that it aids the student’s ability to function and learn (Bock, Tapscot, & Savner, 1998).

Recent court decisions have underscored the right of all children to a free appropriate public education, and schools are being required to serve students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment; however, almost 20% of students with a special education eligibility and over 30% of students with an emotional and behavioral disorder are educated outside of the general education setting for most of their day. Statistics show that almost 33% of all students
with disabilities and nearly three quarters of students with emotional or behavioral disorder (E/BD) have been suspended or expelled from school. This is extremely high when compared to a 22% rate of suspension or expulsion for same-age students in the general population (Bradley, Henderson, & Monfore, 2004) and considering that discipline procedures that result in a change of placement for more than 10 days should not be implemented if the infraction was a direct result of a child’s disability (Boehner & Castle, 2005). Although students receiving special education services comprise about only 12% of the total school population, they represent more than 25% of the students who are removed from regular classrooms and assigned to disciplinary programs because of behavior or discipline issues (ESC Region 9, 2004).

For any student, success is derived from elements such as caring and experienced staff members, adequate resources, and a suitable environment. Equally important is an understanding of the educational process and the rights of the student by parents and guardians. In 2003, in an effort to determine parental understanding of important elements special education laws, Education Service Center (ESC) Region 9 conducted a state-wide survey of parents of students receiving special education services to determine the extent to which Texas schools and other entities responsible for providing information to help guide parents through the process have been successful in providing the information (ESC Region 9, 2004).

The survey provided insight into many areas of parental understanding; however, one area that was deemed low by the survey was the area of discipline. The survey had the following four questions related to discipline:

1. Do you understand the school's discipline policy?
2. Are you aware that there may be alternative discipline procedures for students receiving special education services?
3. Are you aware that if your child is removed from his or her regular education classroom for disciplinary reasons, special education services must continue to be provided?

4. Do you know what a “BIP” (behavior intervention plan) is?

Over 90% of the responding parents felt that they had a good understanding of the school’s discipline policy and almost 75% of the parents knew that special education services must continue to be provided if the student was removed from the regular education classroom for disciplinary reasons. A smaller number of parents (61.6%) were aware that alternative discipline procedures were available for students receiving special education services and a minority of 40.4% of parents responded that they had a good understanding of what a BIP was.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research was to examine the four survey questions related to discipline from the state-wide survey conducted by Education Service Center (ESC) Region 9 through a comparison of selected disability categories as they compare to the responses received from parents of students with the disability category of emotional/behavioral disorders. In addition, the research examined the open-ended questions on the surveys to determine the types of concerns related to discipline and behavioral issues reported by parents. Also, a focus group of parents receiving special education services was conducted and data related to discipline and behavioral issues was accrued.

Research Question #1

How do parents of students identified as having an emotional/behavioral disorder rate their understanding of the school's discipline policy as compared to parents of students in the disability groups of (a) autism (AU), (b) auditorily impaired (AI), (c) learning disability (LD),
(d) mental retardation (MR), (e) other health impaired (OHI), (f) orthopedically impaired (OI),
(g) speech (SP), and (h) visually impaired (VI)?

Research Question #2

How do parents of students identified as having an emotional/behavioral disorder who are in the
ethnicity group of Caucasian rate their understanding of the school's discipline policy as
compared to parents of students identified as having an emotional/behavioral disorder who are in
the ethnicity groups of (a) African American and (b) Hispanic?

Research Question #3

How do parents of students identified as having an emotional/behavioral disorder who are
receiving educational services in large districts rate their understanding of the school's discipline
policy as compared to parents of students identified as having an emotional/behavioral disorder
who are receiving educational services in small districts?

Research Question #4

How do parents of students identified as having an emotional/behavioral disorder rate their
awareness of alternative discipline procedures for students receiving special education services
as compared to parents of students in the disability groups of (a) autism (AU), (b) auditorally
impaired (AI), (c) learning disability (LD), (d) mental retardation (MR), (e) other health impaired
(OHI), (f) orthopedically impaired (OI), (g) speech (SP), and (h) visually impaired (VI)?

Research Question #5

How do parents of students identified as having an emotional/behavioral disorder who are in the
ethnicity group of Caucasian rate their awareness of alternative discipline procedures for students
receiving special education services as compared to parents of students identified as having an
emotional/behavioral disorder who are in the ethnicity groups of (a) African American and (b) Hispanic?

Research Question #6

How do parents of students identified as having an emotional/behavioral disorder who are receiving educational services in large districts rate their awareness of alternative discipline procedures for students receiving special education services as compared to parents of students identified as having an emotional/behavioral disorder who are receiving educational services in small districts?

Research Question #7

How do parents of students identified as having an emotional/behavioral disorder rate their awareness concerning the provision of special education services if their child is removed from his or her regular education classroom for disciplinary reasons as compared to parents of students in the disability groups of (a) autism (AU), (b) auditorally impaired (AI), (c) learning disability (LD), (d) mental retardation (MR), (e) other health impaired (OHI), (f) orthopedically impaired (OI), (g) speech (SP), and (h) visually impaired (VI)?

Research Question #8

How do parents of students identified as having an emotional/behavioral disorder who are in the ethnicity group of Caucasian rate their awareness concerning the provision of special education services if their child is removed from his or her regular education classroom for disciplinary reasons as compared to parents of students identified as having an emotional/behavioral disorder who are in the ethnicity groups of (a) African American and (b) Hispanic?
Research Question #9

How do parents of students identified as having an emotional/behavioral disorder who are receiving educational services in large districts rate their awareness concerning the provision of special education services if their child is removed from his or her regular education classroom for disciplinary reasons as compared to parents of students identified as having an emotional/behavioral disorder who are receiving educational services in small districts?

Research Question #10

How do parents of students identified as having an emotional/behavioral disorder rate their understanding of a behavior intervention plan as compared to parents of students in the disability groups of (a) autism (AU), (b) auditorily impaired (AI), (c) learning disability (LD), (d) mental retardation (MR), (e) other health impaired (OHI), (f) orthopedically impaired (OI), (g) speech (SP), and (h) visually impaired (VI)?

Research Question #11

How do parents of students identified as having an emotional/behavioral disorder who are in the ethnicity group of Caucasian rate their understanding of a behavior intervention plan as compared to parents of students identified as having an emotional/behavioral disorder who are in the ethnicity group of (a) African American and (b) Hispanic?

Research Question #12

How do parents of students identified as having an emotional/behavioral disorder who are receiving educational services in large districts rate their understanding of a behavior intervention plan as compared to parents of students identified as having an emotional/behavioral disorder who are receiving educational services in small districts?
Research Question #13

What are the common topics of concern related to discipline when parents of students receiving special education are given an opportunity to respond to an open-ended questionnaire?

Research Question #14

What are the common topics of concern related to discipline, behavior intervention plans, and functional behavioral assessment when parents of students identified as being eligible for special education services are given an opportunity to express their views during a focus group?

Significance of Study

While there is a substantial amount of literature concerning the FBA, there is a dearth of literature concerning the attitudes and perceptions of the teachers, administrators, and other related service providers who are responsible for conducting and implementing the BIP. There is also a dearth of literature regarding parental understanding and expectations. Previous reviews of the literature have focused on the effectiveness and external validity of FBA/BIP; however, these reviews of literature were heavily weighted toward individuals with severe developmental disorders (Reid & Nelson, 2002), and not towards the understanding of the individuals expected to participate in the development and implementation of a BIP.

Assumptions and Limitations

One of the assumptions of any type of research that uses a survey or questionnaire is that the respondents will answer factually and honestly; however, subjects of this survey might be more willing to express their true feelings or lack of knowledge since the questionnaire was administered anonymously. Also, the perception or opinions of what is reported may be different from actual fact.
A number of limitations in this study warrant discussion. This study is using data that were previously collected as part of a larger state-wide survey dealing with many different aspects of parental understanding of special education issues. Although the study had four specific questions that related to discipline, the study did not specifically focus on this topic. If one were designing a survey specifically related to the topic of discipline, one would probably incorporate more in-depth questions. However, this survey is quite extensive in the number of parents that were reached for providing information, and produced a wealth of information that may be examined and disseminated.

A further limitation of this research was that due to confidentiality and proprietary issues, the researcher did not have access to the actual surveys or database, so there was no opportunity to manipulate the data to compare between groups. Chi Square was utilized in an attempt to determine whether or not the responses for each item were distributed normally.

Another limitation of this study is that the open-ended questions were not part of the original survey, but were incorporated into a letter that was sent to the parents with the survey. When the information was returned, the open-ended questionnaires were separated from the survey that had been pre-coded with important information such as eligibility category, district, and ethnicity. Unfortunately, it is no longer possible to differentiate the open-ended questionnaires by eligibility category or any other variable. It will be impossible to determine whether the student in question is E/BD or another eligibility category unless the parent specifically denotes the information.

An additional limitation is that none of the open-ended questions were specifically related to discipline, thereby creating a condition whereby parents are more likely to comment about discipline if they have had a negative experience. Due to the number of questionnaires that
were returned and the amount of information that parents gave, there is still valuable information that can be garnished despite the limitations of this survey format.

Definition of Terms

*Auditorially impaired:* Refers to a hearing impairment, permanent or fluctuating, that is so severe that the child is impaired in processing linguistic information through hearing with or without amplification, which adversely affects a child’s educational performance (Turnbull, Turnbull, Shank, & Leal, 1999).

*Autism:* Refers to a developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction, usually evident before age 3, which adversely affects a child’s educational performance. Other characteristics often associated with autism are engagement in repetitive activities and stereotyped movements, resistance to environmental change or change in daily routines, and unusual responses to sensory experiences (34 C.F.R., Part 300, Sec. 300.7[b][1])

*Deaf-blind:* A combination of hearing and visual impairments causing such severe communication, developmental, and educational problems that the child cannot be accommodated in either a program specifically for the deaf or a program specifically for the blind (Knoblauch & Sorenson, 1998).

*Developmental delay:* The most recent legislation, the IDEA Amendments of 1997 (P.L. 105-17), allows states and local education agencies to apply the term "developmental delay" for children ages 3-9. At the discretion of the state and the local education agency, children who are experiencing developmental delays in one or more of the following areas of physical development, cognitive development, communication development, social or emotional development, or adaptive development may receive services (Knoblauch & Sorenson, 1998).
Educational Service Center (ESC): Refers to a regional public multiservice agency authorized by State law to develop, manage, and provide services or programs to local educational agencies; and recognized as an administrative agency for purposes of the provision of special education and related services provided within public elementary and secondary schools of the State; and includes any other public institution or agency having administrative control and direction over a public elementary or secondary school (Chapter 8. Regional Service Centers, 1997).

Emotional/behavioral disorder (E/BD): Refers to individuals who are identified under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (1997) and under the law, exhibit one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time, and to a marked degree, which adversely affects educational performance: (a) an inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors; (b) an inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers; (c) inappropriate types of behaviors or feelings under normal conditions; (d) a general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression; or (e) a tendency to develop physical symptoms, pains, or fears associated with personal or school problems. The term does not include children who are socially maladjusted, unless it is determined that they are emotionally disturbed. (45 C.F.R. 121a.5[b][8][1978])

Functional behavioral assessment (FBA): Generally considered to be a problem-solving process for addressing student problem behavior. It relies on a variety of techniques and strategies to identify the purposes of specific behavior and to help the individualized educational plan (IEP) teams select interventions to directly address the problem behavior (Miller et al., 1998).
**Individualized education program (IEP):** The term means a written statement for each child with a disability. The IEP includes a statement of (a) the child's present levels of educational performance, including how the child's disability affects the child's involvement and progress in the general curriculum; (b) measurable annual goals, including benchmarks or short-term objectives, related to meeting the child's needs that result from the child's disability to enable the child to be involved in and progress in the general curriculum; (c) a statement of the special education and related services and supplementary aids and services to be provided to the child, or on behalf of the child, and (d) a statement of the program modifications or supports for school personnel that will be provided for the child to advance appropriately toward attaining the annual goals. Beginning at age 14, and updated annually, a statement of the transition service needs of the child under the applicable components of the child's IEP must be included (Turnbull, Turnbull, Shank, et al., 1999).

**Large district:** According to the parameters of the state-wide survey, a large district is any district with over 10,000 students.

**Mental retardation:** According to IDEA, the term refers to significantly subaverage general intellectual functioning existing concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior and manifested during the developmental period that adversely affects a child’s educational performance (34 C.F.R., Sec. 300.7[b][51]).

**Orthopedically impaired:** Refers to a severe orthopedic impairment that adversely affects a child’s educational performance. The term includes impairments caused by a congenital anomaly, such as clubfoot or absence of a member, impairment caused by disease, such as bone tuberculosis, and impairment from other sources such as cerebral palsy, amputations, and fractures (C.F.R. Section. 3000.7 (b)(7)).
**Other health impairment (OHI):** Refers to a wide range of conditions affecting student’s health and causing them to need special education or related services (Turnbull, Turnbull, Shank, et al., 1999). IDEA defines OHI as having limited strength, vitality, or alertness due to chronic or acute health problems such as a heart condition, tuberculosis, rheumatic fever, nephritis, asthma, sickle cell anemia, hemophilia, epilepsy, lead poising, leukemia, or diabetes that adversely affect a child’s educational performance (20 U.S. C. Section 1400).

**Positive behavioral supports (PBS):** Defined as a broad range of systemic and individualized strategies for achieving important social and learning outcomes while preventing problem behaviors in all students (Sugai et al., 2000).

**Small district:** According to the parameters of the state-wide survey, a small district is any district with less than 10,000 students.

**Specific learning disability:** Refers to a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, may manifest itself in imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations. The term includes such conditions as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. The term does not include a learning problem that is primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, of mental retardation, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage (Turnbull, Turnbull, Shank, et al., 1999).

**Speech:** A communication disorder such as stuttering, impaired articulation, language impairment, or a voice impairment that adversely affects a child's educational performance (Knoblauch & Sorenson, 1998).
**Traumatic brain injury (TBI):** Defined as an acquired injury to the brain caused by an external physical force that results in total or partial functional disability or psychosocial impairment that adversely affects a child’s educational performance. The term applies to open or closed head injuries resulting in one or more areas such as cognition, language, memory, attention, reasoning, abstract thinking, judgment and motor abilities. The term does not apply to brain injuries that are congenital or degenerative, or brain injuries induced by trauma (34 C.F.R., Sec. 300.7 [6][12])

**Visually impaired:** Refers to impairment in vision that, even with correction, adversely affects a child’s educational performance. Students with visual impairments represent a wide range of visual abilities such as low vision, functionally blind, and totally blind (Turnbull, Turnbull, Shank, et al., 1999).
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In order to provide a thorough knowledge base and clear understanding of the issues related to the discipline and behavioral issues of students receiving special education services, an extensive review of educational literature was performed. This was deemed necessary in order to define the basic terminology and conceptual framework necessary for conducting a functional behavioral assessment (FBA) for students who do not respond to the systems-wide strategies and interventions and for understanding the general procedures concerning implementing effective behavior intervention plans (BIPs) in schools. To gain a better understanding of the educational climate that caused FBA to be initially mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1997 (IDEA 1997) and reauthorized by the Individual with Disabilities Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA 2004), the legal factors surrounding the inception and implementation of FBAs will be examined along with the requirements for the resulting individualized education plan (IEP) and BIP.

The literature base constructed for this review was located following an exhaustive search of available print and electronic resources. Computerized searches were conducted through the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)® database of journals, books, and documents. Searches were also conducted through EBSCOhost® electronic journals service, Highbeam Research™ electronic library, PsycINFO™ abstract database, and UMI® Dissertations Abstracts International× database. Key search terms, included, but were not

ª EBSCOhost, [http://www.ebsco.com](http://www.ebsco.com)
° Highbeam Research, [http://www.highbeam.com](http://www.highbeam.com)
limited to: discipline, parental concerns, functional assessment, behavior intervention plan (BIP), positive behavioral supports (PBS), and functional behavioral assessment (FBA). The terms were used in an array of combinations, to identify literature which examined discipline issues in public schools. Literature from refereed journals, educational websites and textbooks published between the years of 1992 to 2004 was examined.

This review of relevant literature is organized into seven areas: (a) discipline and legislation, (b) PBS, (c) FBA, (d) BIPs, (e) issues regarding FBA/BIPs, (f) parental understanding of discipline issues, and (g) benefits of qualitative research for special education.

Discipline and Legislation

Safe and effective schools are of great concern to all educators, but they are of particular interest to those who work with students manifesting behaviors that impede their learning or the learning of others. Federal legislation and several national initiatives have served to bring the issue of safe schools to the forefront of public awareness. There is mounting recognition of the need to abandon traditional disciplinary practices and embrace a proactive approach for building safe and effective schools (Tonelson & Butler, 2000). In order to address these issues in education, Congress passed the reauthorization of IDEA which directly referenced the need for and use of positive behavioral interventions and supports (Bradley, Henderson, & Monfore, 2004; Sugai & Horner, 2002), and mandated that schools must conduct a FBA when the student's behavior disrupts the educational environment (Center for Effective Collaboration and Practice [CECP], 2000; Drasgow & Yell, 2001; Miller, Tansy, & Hughes, 1998).

The changes were comprehensive and complex which posed potential problems for school district personnel. The amendments to the law signaled a change in the balance between the rights of students with disabilities and the need for administrators to provide a safe learning
environment. Zurowski, Kelly, and Griswold (1998) reported that there were two forces driving the changes in procedures. The first was the stance that exclusionary discipline is ineffective as a means for encouraging positive behavior changes. Second, the degree of violence was, and continues to be, becoming more severe, and the age of the perpetrators is decreasing, requiring school administrators to intensify their attempts to maintain a safe and secure school. The purpose of IDEA was to achieve equilibrium between the right of the student to a free appropriate public education (FAPE) and the disciplinary procedures used to maintain a safe learning environment (Butera, Klein, McMullen, & Wilson, 1998; Leone, Mayer, Malmgren, & Meisel, 2000; Smith, 2000).

**Discipline Procedures**

Under IDEA, an individualized education program (IEP) team is expected to design, implement, and document FBAs, and to collect information to determine unsafe behavioral situations (Smith, 2000). The changes in the discipline procedures outlined in IDEA change the process from punitive to positive by focusing on affirmative behavioral outcomes, and the term expulsion is not part of the language of the new amendment (Zurowski et al., 1998). As a result, teachers and other school professionals are being asked to identify and use PBS to address problem behaviors. A FBA must be utilized to provide a comprehensive examination of the problem behavior to determine the purpose and functions of the behavior (Zurowski et al., 1998) and the IEP must be implemented in order establish a relationship between the disability and the misconduct, and to protect the right of the student to FAPE (Butera et al., 1998). Also, another important difference is that the IDEA amendments make it the schools’ responsibility to address behavior in a proactive manner, and develop goals and measurable objectives to evaluate the students’ progress or lack of progress (Smith, 2000).
IDEA does make allowances for students to be removed from school, even ones with disabilities, for certain offenses such as bringing a weapon to school, or possessing drugs on school grounds or at school sponsored events for short periods of time (Leone et al., 2000; Zurowski et al., 1998). In order to assess more punitive or long-term expulsion for other types of infractions, a meeting must be held to determine if the behavior is related to the disability. This meeting is called a manifest determination review. According to Zurowski et al., if the behavior is determined not to be related to the disability, then the student may receive the same disciplinary consequences as a student without a disability.

Although the intent of IDEA is to provide a balance between the legal rights of a student with disabilities and the need for schools to be free from violence and drugs, the primary reason to discipline should be to help the student, and discipline should be applied in such a way that it aids the student’s ability to function and learn (Bock, Tapscot, & Savner, 1998). If students are expelled or excluded, then the opportunity to learn is denied; however, if they are to be successful then they must learn the rules and the consequences for breaking the rules. Bock et al. concluded that sheltering a student with disabilities from the consequences of discipline would be harmful, because it does not teach them the realities of life.

Daniels (1998) attributes much of student misbehavior to inappropriate curriculum and ineffective teaching strategies. By identifying the instructional needs of the student and making adaptations in both content and delivery, many problems may be greatly reduced. Misbehavior could also be caused by a variety of other factors such as the physical arrangement of the classroom, frustration, or lack of clear expectations and procedures. By setting classroom rules, defining expectations, and developing a functional curriculum, teachers can build a classroom climate that will help all students to have more appropriate behavior. Rather than resorting to
reactive discipline strategies, teachers must be more proactive and build positive reinforcement for appropriate behaviors into the intervention plan (CEC Today Online, 1999; Leone et al., 2000; Zurowski et al., 1998).

Since the term FBA was included in the reauthorization of IDEA (Dunlap & Hieneman, 1999; Gresham, Watson & Skinner, 2001; Gunther, 2001), national discussions regarding appropriate procedures for incorporating FBA into the assessment and intervention practices have been intense (Shriver, Anderson, & Procter, 2001). Policymakers, educators, and other service-related professionals have been given guidelines (Gable, Hendrickson, & Van Acker, 2001) and a large number of literature reviews have addressed the use of FBA with students described as having emotional/behavioral disorders (E/BD)(e.g., Anderson, Freeman, Mullen, & Scotti, 1999; Dunlap & Heinemann, 1999; Horner & Sugai, 1999). There also continues to be an ever-increasing demand for practical information that contributes to the use of FBA practices in on-going school contexts (Dunlap & Heinemann, 1999; Peck, 2002), and teachers continue to need information on how to embed elements of FBA within the educational processes. This can be done by modifying existing procedures, ensuring the availability of relevant tools and materials, and providing on-going staff development opportunities (Peck, 2002).

Principles of Special Education Law

With the amendments in place, IDEA provided the six principles of special education law which are (a) free appropriate public education, (b) appropriate, nondiscriminatory, and multidisciplinary evaluation, (c) individualized education program, (d) least restrictive environment, (e) parent and student participation in decision-making, and (f) procedural safeguards (Guetzloe, 1998; Turnbull, Turnbull, & Wilcox, 1999). Two of these principles directly relate to FBA and PBS. First, IDEA requires a nondiscriminatory evaluation of the
students, which when done correctly, the FBA serves to function in this capacity. Second, IDEA requires an appropriate education for the student, which is what implementing the strategies and philosophies of PBS provides. The FBA is a form of evaluation and PBS is a form of intervention (Turnbull et al., 1999).

Three major points underlie the disciplinary changes of IDEA. First, the law emphasizes the use of positive behavioral interventions, supports, and services for students with disabilities who exhibit problem behaviors. Second, school officials may discipline a student with disabilities using the same consequences as a student without disabilities except for a few important exceptions (Yell & Katsiyannis, 2000). Third, school administrators may change the placement of a student for disciplinary purposes to an appropriate interim alternative setting or suspend the student to the same extent that disciplinary methods are used for students without disabilities (Guetzloe, 1998; Yell, Rogers, & Rogers, 1998). The main difference is that for students with disabilities, the suspension or change of placement may not exceed 10 school days (Johns, 1998; Yell et al., 1998). One exception to the 10-day ruling is that school officials may place a student in an appropriate alternative setting for up to 45 days if the student brings a weapon to school or knowingly possesses, uses, or sells illegal drugs at school or a school function (Guetzloe, 1998; Kea & Edmonson, 1998; Yell et al., 1998; Ysseldyke, Algozzine, & Thurlow, 2000).

Conditions Requiring an FBA

According to the stipulations of IDEA, FBA is only necessary under certain conditions, such as when students with a disability encounter disciplinary sanctions leading to an extended removal from educational settings. However, analysts of the law have identified much broader expectations and many professionals argue that a FBA should serve as the foundation for any
individualized BIP (Dunlap & Heinemann, 1999, Nelson, Roberts, & Smith, 1998). There are actually three perspectives for conducting a FBA that are being practiced in education today. The strict interpretation of IDEA is that FBA only needs to be conducted when students with a disability are the subject of school disciplinary proceedings. The broad interpretation is that a FBA should be conducted for any student with a disability who exhibits problem behaviors. The best practice interpretation is that FBA should be conducted for any general or special education student who is exhibiting behavior problems (Nelson et al., 1998).

Many leaders in the field (e.g., Drasgow & Yell, 2001; Scott, Meers, & Nelson, 2000) suggest that FBA should be conducted whenever the student has problem behavior that (a) demonstrates persistence even though classroom management systems have been carefully implemented, (b) is so severe that it places the student or others at-risk for injury or social isolation, and (c) is so disruptive that school personnel are considering a student's change in educational placement. When FBA and a BIP are developed, written, and implemented, both become part of the student's IEP records (Jolivette, Scott, & Nelson, 2000). However, the regulations do not specify techniques and strategies to use when assessing problematic behaviors (Drasgow & Yell, 2001) and as a result, assessment formats vary considerably from state to state and school district to school district (Asmus, Vollmer, & Borrero, 2002; Dieterich & Villani, 2000).

The favored interventions under IDEA are PBS and FBA given that the law creates a presumption in their favor. In the past, some educators may have used, and still want to use, interventions that would be considered aversive by many professionals in the field (e.g., Bock et al., 1998; Drasgow & Yell, 2001). Also, physical restraints have been misused by some educators who resorted to unnecessary physical intervention to control impeding or challenging
behaviors when, in actuality, physical restraints should be limited to a small range of behaviors that are capable of causing injury. At times, emergency interventions that deviate from PBS practices may be necessary since educators are not always able to predict a student's behavior, and some behaviors may put a student or other students and staff in jeopardy (Turnbull et al., 1999).

Positive Behavior Supports

Problem behaviors present schools with serious challenges because they disrupt the learning process for all children. Problem behaviors are often annoying, confrontational, defiant, or disruptive, and not only interfere with academic, social, and vocational success, but are also one of the most common reasons students are excluded from school. PBS represents an important effort to improve the quality of behavioral interventions; subsequently, providing an enhanced academic environment for all students (Turnbull et al., 2000).

Definition of PBS

PBS is defined as a general term that refers to the application of behavior analysis in the form of positive behavior interventions and systems to produce socially important outcomes with procedures that are socially and culturally appropriate (Sugai et al., 2000; Sugai & Lewis, 1999). It is not only viewed as a process for reducing problem behavior but as a process for assisting the student in being successful within the school, work, and community environments (Horner & Sugai, 1999). Systems of PBS offer a structure within which student failure is predicted and prevented as part of a coordinated process that is utilized by all school personnel (Scott, Nelson, & Zabala, 2003). The goal of PBS is to apply a behaviorally based systems approach to enhance the capacity of schools, families, and communities to design an effective environment that
improves the fit between research-validated practices and the environments in which teaching and learning occurs (Scott, Nelson et al., 2003; Sugai & Lewis, 1999).

Features of PBS

Research suggests that PBS programs have great potential for improving the competence of all students. The key concept in PBS is the idea that problem behaviors exist due to factors in the environment that directly relate to the behavioral deficiencies of the individuals and the environmental factors that surround them. Deficiencies in behavioral repertoires may be due to poorly developed vocational, academic, and social interaction skills, whereas, deficiencies in the environmental factors may be due to the lack of consistent behavioral guidelines, inadequate curriculum, poor supervision, and other organizational practices (Nelson & Sugai 1999). An important factor in implementing effective PBS techniques and strategies is the clear understanding of the consequences that maintain the problem behavior and the antecedents that reliably predict the problem behavior (March & Horner, 2002).

PBS represents the integration of four key elements: (a) science of behavior, (b) research validated and practical interventions, (c) attention to social values, and (d) a systems approach (Sugai et al., 2000; Turnbull et al., 2000). The PBS approach is founded on the science of human behavior, which emphasizes that that much of human behavior is learned, comes under control of environmental factors, and can be changed (Sugai & Horner, 2002). Second, PBS also emphasizes the adoption and sustained use of effective and practical interventions. The procedures to prevent and reduce the likelihood of occurrences of problem behavior often are associated with behavioral interventions, and the approach emphasizes strategies that use assessment information to arrange learning environments. Since the factors that trigger or
maintain problem behaviors are less likely to be present, adaptive or replacement behavior is much more likely to be taught and supported (Sugai & Horner, 2002; Sugai et al., 2000).

Third, in order to gain control of problem behavior, the PBS approach emphasizes the improvement of the living and learning options available to the student. A central tenet of PBS is that behavior change and the means by which behavior is changed needs to be socially significant by being comprehensive, durable, and relevant (Sugai & Lewis, 1999). It offers a number of proactive strategies, such as a prevention-focused continuum of support, proactive instructional approaches to teaching and improving social behaviors, and conceptually sound and empirically validated practices (Sugai & Horner, 2002). Fourth, a systems approach is emphasized which considers the many contexts in which adaptive behavior is required. In a school environment, PBS must consider the four main contexts of school-wide, classroom, non-classroom, and individual student, in which practices and processes are applied. A systems approach focuses on prevention-based practices, team-based problem-solving, active administrative support and participation, data-based decision-making, and a full continuum of problem behaviors that occur in school (Sugai & Horner, 2002; Sugai & Lewis, 1999).

Functional Behavioral Analysis

Most behavioral concerns can be remedied effectively through school-wide and class-wide PBS systems. A FBA only becomes necessary when the student's behavior problems are not successfully addressed with routine procedures. PBS systems must be well-designed and implemented with integrity since it is very time-consuming to conduct large numbers of FBAs with the comprehensiveness and precision needed to be effective in developing successful individualized interventions (Gable et al., 2001). Preventative measures such as defining expectations, arranging the physical environment, utilizing effective instructional methods, and
employing group reward systems will minimize most problematic behaviors (Dunlap & Heinemann, 1999).

**Definition and Purpose of FBA**

FBA has been defined as a process that is employed to acquire an understanding of an individual student's problem behavior and the manner in which the problem is influenced by the environment (Dunlap & Heinemann, 1999; Gresham et al., 2001; Horner & Sugai, 1999; March & Horner, 2002; Symonds & MacLean, 2000). FBA is not defined by a discrete set of procedures, but rather as a problem-solving process driven by a particular set of objectives for addressing student problem behavior (Shriver et al., 2001). The methods must be tailored to fit the characteristics and needs of the student, the nature of the environment, and the available personnel and resources (Drasgow & Yell, 2001). The assessment is conducted to determine as clearly as possible the purpose or function of a behavior and the particular circumstances in which the behavior is most and least likely to occur. The underlying assumption is that all behaviors occur for a reason (Nelson et al., 1998).

FBA relies on a variety of techniques and strategies to identify the purposes of specific behavior and to contribute valuable information to help IEP teams select interventions to directly address the problem behavior and develop an effective plan of positive behavioral interventions. FBA should be integrated, as appropriate, throughout the process of developing, reviewing, and, if necessary, revising a student's IEP (Dunlap & Heinemann, 1999; Gresham et al., 2001; Horner & Sugai, 1999; March & Horner, 2002; Symonds & MacLean, 2000).

No single instrument or procedure is recommended for conducting FBAs. The process involves gathering information through a combination of direct observations and interviews (Kirk, 1999). Many different observations tools and interview instruments (e.g., standardized
questionnaires, structured interviews, descriptive observations, experimental manipulations) have been developed to expedite the process (Anderson et al., 1999; Asmus et al., 2002; Symonds & MacLean, 2000; Vittimberga, Scotti, & Weigle, 1999). By using several indirect and direct methods of observation, the task becomes one of looking for predictable behavior patterns from the learning environment with respect to the student's behavior (Gresham et al., 2001; Lewis, 2000).

Objectives of FBA

The fundamental objectives of FBA can be stated as three questions that require answers:

1. What is a complete and specific description of the problem behavior, and with what other behaviors does it occur?

2. What is the probable function or purpose of the behavior, and what are the social and ecological circumstances that are present when the student is most likely to engage in problem behavior?

3. What are the social and ecological circumstances that are present when the student is least likely to engage in the problem behavior? (Dunlap & Heinemann, 1999; Horner & Sugai, 1999).

FBA has been largely administered by experts and has been an effective, though not necessarily efficient, method of creating the foundation for effective interventions (Scott, Nelson et al., 2003). It is regarded as a lengthy and elaborate process that involves a series of steps that lead to the development of a BIP (Asmus et al., 2002; Tonelson & Butler, 2000). The amount of time, effort, and expertise required to complete a FBA varies with the severity and intensity of the problem behavior (Vittimberga et al., 1999). In situations where the behavior has only recently emerged and is limited to only one or two isolated environments, the FBA can be
expedited with brief interviews and limited observations to confirm interview data. When the problem behavior is more destructive and durable, the FBA typically needs to be conducted in a more methodical and precise manner (Dunlap & Heinemann, 1999). To be efficient, FBA should be facilitated by individuals with expertise and the entire process owned and understood by the school staff (Scott, Nelson et al., 2003). Failure to begin with the first step and work through the entire process greatly reduces the likelihood of producing an effective and efficient intervention (Tonelson & Butler, 2000).

Training Requirements for FBA

Training teachers to conduct assessments that lead to quality educational programming, and that are useful for developing goals that result in meaningful educational benefit and address problem behavior in positive and proactive ways is imperative (Drasgow & Yell, 2001). Conducting a FBA effectively requires an array of skills and knowledge. The availability of competent facilitators is a factor that is likely to affect the outcomes and process. Without having the correct knowledge and skills, the individual conducting the FBA may employ inappropriate methods or have difficulty analyzing or utilizing the obtained data (Conroy, Clark, Fox, & Gable, 2000; Dunlap & Heinemann, 1999; Gable et al., 1998).

Critical skills for individuals who are required to conduct FBAs include the ability to collect, synthesize, and analyze relevant data, design interventions based on FBA information, and mobilize collaborative activities and resources for implementation (Drasgow & Yell, 2001). Conducting FBA efficiently and effectively requires individuals, who perform the assessments to be familiar with the range of tools and methods available, as well as the benefits and limitations of these tools. Individuals involved in the process are expected to work diligently and rapidly towards the final goal of designing an effective BIP (Dunlap & Heinemann, 1999).
Training school personnel to implement proactive support systems involving FBA is a complex, dynamic, and formative process (Scott, Nelson et al., 2003). FBA is enhanced through the active participation of teachers, families, and other direct support providers. In contrast to traditional expert driven models of consultation, a collaborative approach includes the individuals who know the student best, have the greatest familiarity with the environment, and have programming responsibility and control (Conroy et al., 2000; Dunlap & Heinemann, 1999). Benefits of involving the correct team members include improving the quality of the information gathered, promoting buy-in, and encouraging shared responsibility. With appropriate training, the input of the general education teacher is especially crucial if the student is or may be participating in the regular education environment. This teacher will be able to relay behavioral expectations to the team, and will also be able to provide valuable information about how the existing classroom environment and general education curriculum can be modified to support the student (Horner & Sugai, 1999).

Scott, Nelson et al. (2003) suggest that it is necessary to train a team of school personnel to be responsible for carrying out and planning the necessary assessment procedures. To be palatable to school personnel, FBA must be taught as a dynamic and formative process that fits the needs of the persons conducting it and the students being assessed. School personnel must be provided with a sufficient range of FBA strategy and tool examples that fit the array of potential conditions they are likely to encounter. The authors conclude that since different school personnel will have strengths and abilities with regard to assessment, the only effective technique for teaching the FBA process is to incorporate it as part of a school-wide process involving all personnel who have contact with the student targeted for assessment.
Functions of Behavior

FBA looks beyond the behavior itself. Identifying the function of behavior has primarily involved the examination of two types of relationships. First, that of a behavior and the environmental consequences with which it associated, and second, the stimulus conditions associated with the occurrence and nonoccurrence of behavior (Anderson et al., 1999). This broader perspective offers a better understanding of the function or purpose behind student behavior. Intervention plans based on an understanding of "why" a student misbehaves are extremely useful in addressing a wide range of problem behaviors (CECP, 2000).

Researchers have identified four categories of possible functions for problem behaviors: (a) access, (b) escape/avoidance, (c) autonomic reinforcement, and (d) multiple functions (Gable et al., 1998; Nelson et al., 1998). Excess behaviors may be maintained through either positive or negative reinforcement (Anderson et al., 1999). Behaviors may be maintained through positive reinforcement through attention from others or through access to preferred activities or items (Anderson et al., 1999; Gable et al., 1998). Negative reinforcement involves the removal of an unpleasant stimulus contingent on the exhibition of a particular behavior, such as a child banging his head on a desk when he has been given an unwanted assignment in order to get the teacher to remove the task (Gable et al., 1998; Gresham et al., 2001). Internal factors may also maintain undesirable behaviors such as a child rocking in order to gain sensory reinforcement (Anderson et al., 1999; Gresham et al., 2001).

Organization of FBA

The general steps in FBA are organized into the following areas:

1. Developing an operational definition of the problem behavior;
2. Identifying antecedent events and providing descriptions of the immediate activities, materials, and social stimulus that predict the occurrence of problem behaviors;

3. Determining consequences such as access to rewarding stimuli or escape from aversive stimuli that maintain the problem behavior;

4. Creating a clear hypothesis that integrates all information and is used in the development of behavior support; and

5. Intervening with alternative antecedents and consequences for the targeted behavior (Kirk, 1999; March & Horner, 2002).

Once completed, the FBA results in an operational definition of the problem behaviors and identifies the events that reliably predict when, where, and with whom problem behaviors are most and least likely to occur, and identifies the consequences that maintains the problem behaviors (Horner & Sugai, 1999; Yell & Katsiyannis, 2000). Following a FBA, practitioners and educators can rule out ineffective interventions and begin to select proactive and reinforcement-based interventions that match the purpose or the function of the problem behavior (Peck, 2002). The results of the FBA will not identify a specific intervention that should be used, but provide the foundation for selecting from interventions options that are logically consistent with information provided by the FBA (Anderson et al., 1999). The FBA should also identify intervention options that are contraindicated such as time-out or being sent to the office for escape related behaviors (Horner & Sugai, 1999).

*Functional Analysis*

Behavior analysts often make a distinction between functional assessment and functional analysis. FBA can be thought of as an umbrella-term that encompasses the initial problem identification and hypothesis development phase, followed by hypothesis testing. The hypothesis
testing phase is usually referred to as functional analysis and involves direct observation and experimental manipulations of environmental events. Functional assessment describes the full range of procedures that can be used to identify the antecedents and consequences associated with the behavior. Functional analysis refers to the experimental manipulation of environmental events in a highly controlled setting to assess the controlling functions the events have on behavior (Gresham et al., 2001).

Behavior Intervention Plans

The data collected during the FBA is used to develop the BIP and to determine the discrepancy between the student's actual and expected behavior (Salend & Taylor, 2002). It may be more appropriate to view legislative mandates on FBAs and BIPs as a single, continuous process rather than as a separate process and a subsequent product. This view helps to make certain that the FBA (a) is not considered to be an intervention in itself, (b) does not occur without the goal of developing a BIP, (c) incorporates data into an actual BIP, and (d) integrates both components of FBA and BIP into the student's IEP (Nelson & Sugai, 1999). BIPs, which are tied to the function sustaining the student's behavior as identified through the FBA, and which are consistently implemented and continuously monitored, increase the student's repertoire of appropriate behaviors, and are more likely to have positive effects on the student's educational outcomes (Jolivette et al., 2000).

Definition and Purpose of a BIP

A BIP refers to the scheme or blueprint for the systematic implementation of PBS that is based on the FBA and is designed to:

1. Prevent and reduce the students impeding behavior and teach and strengthen socially desirable and appropriate replacement behaviors.
2. Result in lasting positive changes in the student's behavior.

3. Ensure the student's physical freedom and opportunities for social interactions and individual choice.

4. Preserve and enhance the student's civil rights, human dignity, and personal privacy.

5. Ensure the student's rights to a free, appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment and with the use of the least restrictive and most realistic behavior interventions.

6. Provide the student with greater access to a variety of community settings and activities identified as transition goals by IDEA, the Rehabilitation Act, and the Americans with Disabilities Act.

7. The plan specifically excludes aversive interventions and limits the use of restraints (Turnbull et al., 1999 p. 27).

Components of a BIP

Four major components of BIPs are necessary to collectively address the intervention goals of (a) manipulating the antecedents to prevent problem behavior, (b) teaching more acceptable replacement behaviors that serve the same function as the inappropriate behavior, (c) implementing planned and immediate consequences, when necessary, and (c) planning for long-term prevention through life-style enhancement (Sugai & Lewis, 1999).

Manipulating antecedents. Behavioral support plans often include procedures for preventing behavior problems by avoiding those conditions that predict or occasion the problem behaviors. BIPs often include procedures that focus on altering the environment so that problem behaviors are irrelevant, teaching new skills that make problem behaviors inefficient, and providing consequences that make the problem behavior less effective (Gable et al., 2001;
Horner & Sugai, 1999). Making changes in the schedule, altering proximity to peers and adapting instructional materials can result in positive behavioral changes. Prevention has been an underutilized component of behavioral support, and including prevention strategies in BIPs is an important advance (Horner & Sugai, 1999; Sugai & Lewis, 1999).

**Teaching replacement behaviors.** BIPs also include explicit instructional objectives, which emphasize the teaching of acceptable functionally equivalent alternative skills. Teaching social skills has long been viewed as an important element for behavioral programming. More research also emphasizes that instruction on specific academic and communication skills are effective and efficient for reducing problem behavior (Gable et al., 2001). When the results of the FBA indicate that problem behaviors are related to skill deficits, a logical expectation is that the BIP will include instruction on those skills (Anderson et al., 1999; Horner & Sugai, 1999).

**Providing immediate consequences.** Comprehensive BIPs will continue to include strong emphasis on the fact that problem behaviors and desired behaviors are contingent on reinforcement (Gresham et al., 2001). Problem behaviors occur because they have a history of being associated with desired results (Gable et al., 2001). Simply delivering aversive events when problem behaviors occur will unlikely produce generalizable reductions in problem behaviors. Behavior support plans blend procedures for reducing rewards for problem behaviors, exaggerating rewards for appropriate behaviors, and punishing problem behaviors. The use of consequences is designed to both reduce the rewards for problem behaviors and increase the rewards for the alternate or replacement behaviors (Anderson et al., 1999; Horner & Sugai, 1999).

**Planning long-term prevention.** The selection of interventions that give careful scrutiny to the range of possible standard of living outcomes and plans for long-term prevention through
life-style enhancement is an often overlooked but necessary component. Planning for community integration and the development of skills that either remediate or obviate the need for the problem behavior is integral to long-term success (Anderson et al., 1999).

Intervention plans and strategies emphasizing skills students need in order to behave in a more appropriate manner, or plans providing motivation to conform to required standards, will be more effective than plans that simply serve to control behavior. Interventions based upon control often fail to generalize and many times they serve only to suppress behavior, which results in a child manifesting unaddressed needs in alternative inappropriate ways. Positive plans for behavioral intervention, on the other hand, will address both the source of the problem and the problem itself (CECP, 2000).

BIPs should be comprehensive in the sense that they guide adults in how to address problem behaviors across all times of the day, all places, and all activities where the problem behaviors are likely to occur. Effective behavioral support plans should focus on socially important behavior change that remains over time and results in generalized effects (Turnbull et al., 2000). In order to produce comprehensive effects, the implementation of multiple intervention procedures is often necessary (Gable & Hendrickson 2000). In the past, behavioral interventions were focused on the emphasis of consequences. Desired behaviors were rewarded while undesirable behaviors were ignored or punished. The information from the FBA and the resulting BIP should result in more generalized and long-lasting effects by focusing on the procedures for prevention and instruction, as well as attention to consequences (Horner & Sugai, 1999).
Contextual Fit of a BIP

Contextual fit refers to the extent to which the procedures of a behavioral support plan match the values, skills, resources, and administrative support of those who implement the plan. BIPs are designed to guide the behavior of adults, so the plan must be designed with features that will result in the behavior plan being implemented. It is not acceptable to build a behavior plan that is never implemented or is not implemented with fidelity (Gable et al., 2001; Nelson & Sugai, 1999). For plans to succeed, they must match the needs of all people in the situation. Two important concepts for assessing the contextual fit of behavior plans is recognizing that all behavior problems have multiple solutions (Gable & Hendrickson, 2000), and that the compelling focus of behavior specialists in defining the best behavioral plan may miss the need to provide equal attention to the practical considerations in the school (Dieterich & Villani, 2000; Gable et al., 1998). The plans must be designed so that they match both the technical requirements defined by the FBA and the contextual requirements defined by the skills and resources available to people who implement the plans (Horner & Sugai, 1999).

The IEP team must consider special factors, including the behavior on the part of the student that impedes his or her learning and the learning of others. If the student displays such problematic behaviors, the IEP team must consider positive behavioral interventions. Although the teams must consider whether or not to provide PBS, it is not bound by law to do so. If the student already has had the benefit of a FBA and behavior plan, the IEP team must review them to determine whether they address the behavior for which the student was disciplined (Turnbull, Turnbull, & Wilcox, 1999).
Issues and Research

The capacity of school personnel to develop and implement behavioral support plans will determine the extent to which many students will be allowed to remain in the educational system. The current policy commitment in IDEA 2004 to educate all students is a commitment to improving the capacity of schools to identify students, who are at risk for problem behaviors, conduct FBAs, build behavioral support plans, and implement the plans (Drasgow & Yell, 2001; Ysseldyke et al., 2000). More is known today about how to change problem behavior than ever before due to research and documentation of behavior analysis. The real question is not whether dangerous and disruptive behaviors can be changed, but whether the political climate needed to implement this more effective technology exists in schools today (Horner & Sugai, 1999).

Issues Regarding Research

Significant skepticism remains whether FBA is an appropriate process for public schools. Concerns include the feasibility of conducting FBA in schools, the validity of using a FBA for the full range of children in schools, and the high level of skill needed to conduct and use this type of assessment. By tradition, school principals and administrators have had a variety of methods to use in dealing with behavior problems, which could range from writing about the broken rule to suspension or expulsion (Bock et al., 1998). Bock and colleagues also reported that although federal legislation states proactive measures are advantageous, most administrators use reactive measures, which appear to be more beneficial for the school personnel than for the welfare of the disciplined student. Students who behave inappropriately at school may consciously or subconsciously want to be removed from school (Zurowski et al., 1998); however, excluding them allows them greater access to delinquent peers, drugs, and weapons, and allows them to have less supervision from responsible caring adults (Keele, 2000). Nelson
(1997) reports that long-term removal of students from school is not a therapeutic intervention and while it may keep schools relatively safe for short periods of time, it has a side effect of making the community less safe and has detrimental effects in the mental and academic well-being of the student.

A 1998 study conducted by Butera and colleagues documented that many school administrators felt that the IEP documents and the discipline process was too cumbersome and time-consuming to be effectively used in determining the discipline consequences of a student with disabilities. Sixty percent of the special education teachers interviewed felt that students with disabilities should be subject to the same consequences as nondisabled students. A large number of educators reportedly felt that IEPs were used to circumvent discipline and admitted to reluctance to identify students with emotional or behavioral problems for special education services because they felt that it “really tied their hands” (Butera et al., p. 112). Mitchell Yell, an expert in special education law, asserts in an interview (Walther-Thomas & Brownell, 1998) that the amendments will affect the manner that students with disabilities will be served and disciplined, but that the final form of the changes will take some time to be determined because states will have to make laws to bring themselves into compliance with IDEA.

The perception of the average citizen is that there has been a drastic increase in juvenile crime (Bender & McLaughlin, 1997). A columnist for The Washington Post, George F. Will (2000), refers to the passage of IDEA as a “therapeutic impulse” that has allowed an explosive number of students to be classified under what he refers to as ambiguous disability categories, such as learning disabled and emotional disturbance. The New York Times has reported a variety of stories about the problems of disciplining children with disabilities, such as, the disruptive kindergarten child who keeps the class in an uproar, but cannot be legally removed from class, or
a gang of kids who were caught selling drugs, and are expelled, except for the one labeled with a disability (Thernstrom, 1999). With the current controversy and the intensive media coverage of school violence (Leone et al., 2000), educators’ remarks and attitudes mirror many views expressed during national debates about school discipline and FAPE. Butera et al. (1998) found that in a recent poll of elementary school principals, 78% of the respondents interviewed felt that federal laws limit their ability to discipline effectively.

The majority of research in which FBAs were conducted has involved individuals with severe disabilities and problem behaviors, such as self-injury and aggression (Gresham et al., 2001; Yell & Katsiyannis, 2000). Questions have been raised regarding whether this type of procedure would be workable in typical schools and if it would be less effective with higher functioning students (March & Horner, 2002). Scott, Nelson et al., (2003) question whether educators in public school settings can become sufficiently fluent in using FBA so that it becomes standard practice in addressing challenging behaviors.

Much of the research of functional analysis has been conducted in either outpatient or inpatient clinical settings or other highly controlled settings, such as state residential facilities, clinics, or special schools for students with disabilities. Peck (2002) examined 46 experimental studies that were published in the Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis that employed functional analysis and found that 720 of the experiments had been conducted in a highly controlled setting. While these studies help to improve the understanding of how behavioral principles relate to severe behavior problems, it is often difficult for educators to relate these studies to the everyday application of procedures to improve behavior in the school setting.

Scott, Liaupsin, Nelson, and Jolivette (2003) documented an example of how the faculty and staff use a team-based functional assessment successfully in reducing problem behaviors at a
middle school of over 600 students in a middle-class neighborhood. Working together the group shares their collective observations to develop a collaborative behavioral assessment and corresponding intervention plan. The school’s process involves the same set of principles and procedures as the more formalized FBA procedures, but is simplified and streamlined in form so that the process is realistic for typical public school personnel.

A recent national survey by Scott et al. (2000) found that there was little consensus regarding procedures necessary to conduct a FBA for students with mild disabilities. The researchers found that when asked whether hypothesis statements should include observable actions or events, 25% of those surveyed responded sometimes or never. The authors concluded there is good reason to question the validity of school-based FBAs that do not adhere to one of the basic tenets on which the FBA is constructed, that is, stimuli are observable and measurable.

Issues Regarding Training

There is a growing body of FBA research in school settings, but questions persist regarding the effectiveness of FBA as a proactive assessment tool of problem behaviors in public schools. Several issues or concerns emerge in regard to training pre-service teachers in how to conduct FBAs. First, there is much variability in the information being taught due to the lack of consensus regarding FBAs and competencies necessary for pre-service practitioners. The level of consistency in FBA training across undergraduate programs and within schools of professional development is unclear, and many times the FBA training is embedded as a component of a classroom management course (Conroy et al., 2000; Stichter, Shellady, Sealander, & Eigenberger, 2000). Conroy and her colleagues suggest that the various aspects of the training in FBA should be introduced in several courses, along with a specific course that provides direct instruction in FBA skills in applied settings in order to build competence.
A second area of concern is the lack of emphasis on developing the pre-service teacher's ability to think critically and consequently make clinical judgments. The teachers need to be taught the skills of recognizing behavior patterns, understanding that behavior is purposeful and serves a function, recognizing multiple functions of behavior, and developing interventions linked to this information. It is important that pre-service trainers understand that critical thinking is both an attitude and a skill (Stichter et al., 2000).

Parental Concerns

Parents are their children’s first teachers and are often the only lifelong advocate for their child. Parents should be considered as experts on their child’s behaviors. They are often the only ones who can observe the child in all of the various environments in which he or she functions in over the span of his or her childhood. Parents and educators should work as partners to determine the most appropriate education for each child when a child is eligible for special education services; however, for parents to be effective partners on this team, they must know the special education process (Missouri State Department of Education, 2000). When the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (Public Law 94-142) established that individualized education programs guide the educational experience of public school students with disabilities, the legislation mandated that parents, special education teachers, and administrators attend IEP meetings to develop IEPs for students with disabilities (Martin, Marshall, & Sale, 2004). This was the first time in the history of public school education that parents of students with disabilities attained formal educational planning status equal to that of teachers and administrators (Lytle & Bordin, 2001; Martin et al., 2004).

IDEA made significant changes in the way parents, teachers, and administrators go about the important work of ensuring quality education and early intervention for almost 6 million
children with disabilities in the United States (IDEA 1997, 2004). In defining the parameters of an appropriate educational program for children with disabilities, the regulations of IDEA (1997) legitimized and enhanced the role of parents by granting parents the opportunity for shared decision-making with schools (Turnbull, Turnbull, Shank, et al., 1999). Extended parental involvement is evident throughout IDEA in the specific areas of evaluation, eligibility, IEP development, discipline, procedural safeguards, and mediation (IDEA 1997, 2004). Parents and family members are critical partners, along with school district personnel, in the education of their children. Parents provide essential information to teachers and administrators, play an important role in decisions made about their children and can be a key to supporting high expectations for their children during their school years (Lytle & Bordin, 2001).

IDEA also provides mechanisms to resolve conflicts between parents and school officials. Parents have legal due process rights under Federal and State laws to be involved and make sure that their child receives an appropriate education. Some of the procedural safeguards are that (a) parents must receive written notice several times during the process of identifying, evaluating, placement, and provision of special education services and programs for their child, (b) certain actions may not be carried out without written parental consent, and (c) parents may request meetings, mediation, and impartial hearings to resolve disagreements concerning their child’s evaluations, identification, placement or educational programming. Little is known about the experiences and perspectives of those who are involved in special education conflicts, particularly the parents' perspective, since there has been so little research performed in this area. The confrontation process itself should give parents and schools an opportunity to determine what each wants for the student and how it might be possible to achieve desired outcomes (Lake
Members of IEP teams must be aware of the relevant provisions of IDEA to ensure that students receive a FAPE (Drasgow & Yell, 2001).

Very little research has been done to determine the satisfaction and understanding of parents of children receiving special education services. In 2001, the New Hampshire Department of Education sponsored a series of 4 focus groups over a period of 8 months in an attempt to provide multiple opportunities for parents and citizens to express their thoughts, concerns, and ideas about various aspects of special education in New Hampshire. Over 100 individuals attended these sessions. Three of the focus groups had a specific topic area, such as transition, discipline, and IEPs, while the final session had the general topic of Special Education as its focus. At every forum, participants recommended that schools focus on improving communication. Participants felt that schools and parents must learn to share information and work through difficult decisions in order to positively impact the education of students with disabilities and expressed belief that this is a core issue that must be resolved in order to achieve successful outcomes for all students. Participants were universally in favor of continuing dialogue in the form of focus groups, and felt that participating in the groups provided them with an opportunity to share ideas and make recommendations (Auerbach, 2002).

Importance of Qualitative Methods in Special Education Research

In recent years qualitative research has earned an increasingly legitimate place as a form of systematic inquiry in educational scholarship (Pugach, 2001). Many of the criteria that establish the appropriateness of choosing qualitative methods parallel the conditions in special education. In special education, low incidence conditions (e.g. deaf-blindness, multiple-handicaps) cause sample sizes to be either restricted or small. In special education, the subjects are unique, with diversity across categories of disabilities as well as within them (Mertens &
McLaughlin, 1995). Special education researchers who draw on qualitative methods have responded by using this research paradigm chiefly to document stories of individuals with disabilities (Pugach, 2001). Qualitative studies tend to provide more detail about the uniqueness of the students' disabling conditions than do quantitative studies (Mertens & McLaughlin, 1995).

Peck and Furman (1992) explored the importance of qualitative research in special education in terms of recent developments in the analysis of issues in special education in (a) the philosophy of science, (b) the need for more holistic analysis of problems in policy and practice, and (c) the increased attention to descriptions of the world as experienced by individuals. The authors identified the following substantive contributions that qualitative research has made to special education:

1. Qualitative researchers have identified the fundamental roles of ideology, organizational dynamics, and the social/political process in shaping policy and practice in special education. Peck and Furman's analysis suggests that the most fundamental problems constraining the inclusion of children with disabilities in regular classes are less technical than political in nature. Focusing on the instructional process affecting children's behavior is less appropriate than addressing political issues. They contend that adherence to the positivist tradition of research is likely to lead researchers away from asking some critical questions about why children with disabilities are not succeeding in school.

2. Qualitative researchers have noted the value of constructing some sense of the insider's view. They noted that qualitative research has enabled development of professional interventions in special education that are responsive to the cognitive and motivational interpretations of the world held by children, parents, and professionals.
For example, definitions of inappropriate behaviors can be refrained in terms of their functional meaning for a child.

3. Qualitative methods have led to insights into the cultural values, institutional practices, and interpersonal interactions that influence special education practice. For example, placement and categorizing children in special education are subject to these influences, and can be understood only through a research process that can look at different levels of social ecology.

As interventions have changed, and as expectations regarding meaningful outcomes have broadened, quantitative data has often not matched the goals that need to be documented. The nature of quantitative data automatically yields information about important, but limited, behavioral change. The current nature of interventions requires that information be gathered to examine (a) how children relate with others, (b) how they communicate, (c) how cultural differences shape performance, (d) how the natural environment supports adjustment, and (e) early intervention affects the need for future special services. Advocates of treatment evaluation from a more systemic perspective have encouraged researchers and educators to begin considering the ways in which qualitative data can contribute to their inquiries (Schwartz & Olswang, 1996).

Qualitative research can provide a holistic analysis of policy and practice in early intervention and increase our understanding of the diverse issues facing families and the agencies serving them. Research that is intended to inform or assess early intervention programs must document these multiple realities to examine program implementation and efficacy (Brotherson, 1994). By understanding the cultural processes and the possible forms of domination and resistance that occur at the level of everyday life in schools and classrooms, a more complex
picture inevitably emerges (Carspecken & Apple, 1992). Qualitative data provide a description of the child in context. Implicit in qualitative methodology is the acknowledgment that the variables surrounding communication and social behaviors, as well as other behaviors of interest, are complex, interwoven, and difficult to measure. The complexity and the transactional interaction between the setting and the behaviors such as communication and social interaction are not merely acknowledged, they are appreciated. The data are descriptive and interpretive in nature, and are typically analyzed inductively with meaning as an essential concern.

The major assumption of the use of qualitative research is that behaviors are best understood in the natural context or setting in which they habitually occur. Accordingly, a broad spectrum of the child's behaviors and the context in which the behaviors are embedded are described in great detail (Schwartz & Olswang, 1996). Qualitative studies can, thus, be suggestive of more equitable forms of educational practice that practitioners can adopt in order to modify interaction patterns that result in, for example, inappropriate special education labeling (Carspecken & Apple, 1992). The application to special education of critical ethnographic methodologies, with their different assumptions and perspectives, opens access to knowledge and responses that can help in this search. Using qualitative research methods offers an extended means of investigating issues that have troubled the field in recent years, as did those earlier issues in the past years and may even offer a means of generating responses to these issues that are not conceivable without its particular lens (Anderson & Barrera, 1995).

*Focus Groups*

At times, it is preferable to collect information from groups of people rather than from a series of individuals. Focus groups are a research methodology which uses group interviews that explicitly include and use the group interaction to generate data (Greenhalgh & Taylor, 1997).
Focus groups can be useful to obtain certain types of information or when circumstances would make it difficult to collect information using other methods to data collection. They have been widely used in the private sector over the past few decades, particularly market research (Hancock, 1998; Rapple & Sarkodie-Mensah, 2002). They are being increasingly used in the public sector (Hancock, 1998) and in a variety of other research areas (Rapple & Sarkodie-Mensah, 2002). This method offers rich contextual data for understanding the depth and dynamics of interventions with children and families in a multitude of contexts (Brotherson, 1994). The intensive group interviewing process is used to solicit ideas, feedback, and constructive evaluation of products, issues, and future ideas (Rapple & Sarkodie-Mensah, 2002).

Focus groups provide a unique way to examine interventions. Focus group interviewing assists in understanding both the anticipated and unanticipated consequences of intervention and in interpreting the complexities of multiple families, systems, disciplines, and agencies (Brotherson, 1994). Group interviews can be used when (a) limited resources prevent more than a small number of interviews being undertaken, (b) it is possible to identify a number of individuals who share a common factor, (c) it is desirable to collect the views of several people within that population sub group, and (d) group interaction among participants has the potential for greater insights to be developed (Hancock, 1998).

Focus groups are groups that are special in terms of purpose, size, composition, and procedures. Their purpose is to thoughtfully explore through discussion a topic or phenomena of interest to researchers, marketers, or consultants (Krueger & Casey, 2000). Focus group interviews are designed to elicit multiple perspectives and are best suited to address questions that inform or assess policy and practice (Brotherson, 1994). The size of an individual group generally varies from 4 to 12 people. Multiple groups may be used in a focus group study. The
composition of the group is fairly homogeneous along some predetermined and significant characteristic. The procedures involve the use of a moderator using a list of topics or specific questions to fully explore the topic under discussion. In addition, appropriate ground rules are used to establish a permissive environment where participants are feely allowed to discuss the topic, points of view are not judged, and consensus is not sought. The discussions are generally tape recorded and transcribed. The transcriptions are carefully analyzed the resulting patterns or themes are used to more thoroughly understand the topic of interest (Krueger & Casey, 2000).

Conclusion

The IEP team process has been in place for over 25 years; however, due to the number of revisions in IDEA concerning parent participation, it appears that the process has yet to be fully inclusive of parents as equally valued and respected members of the team (Lytle & Bordin, 2001). The fact that data collection and analysis in classrooms can have a positive effect on the academic achievement of students with disabilities is well-documented. The real challenge seems to be the development of systems that can result in the achievement of academic and behavioral goals as efficiently as possible (Gunther, 2001). As FBA becomes a more frequent tool in the classroom, researchers, practitioners, and parents must work together to develop intervention procedures that are responsive to the complex demands of behavioral interventions in a variety of settings (Gable et al., 2001).

Knowledge that student misbehavior can have many forms and functions that often change over time magnifies both the challenge and importance of finding ways to promote maintenance and generalization of behavior changes that stem from FBA. Parents and professionals can work together to provide a more positive team experience that enables the design of effective interventions that enhance the child’s well-being and academic instruction.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

This chapter delineates the research questions for this study and provides in-depth information on subject selection and research procedures. Information is also provided on the types of analysis used and how permission to use the study was granted. In 2003, in an effort to determine parental understanding of important elements of special education laws, Region 9 Education Service Center (ESC) conducted a state-wide survey of parents of students receiving special education services to determine the extent to which Texas schools and other entities responsible for providing information to help guide parents through the process have been successful in providing the information.

The purpose of this current research was to examine the four survey questions related to discipline through a comparison of each disability category as it compares to the answers received from parents of students with the disability category of emotional/behavioral disorders (E/BD). In addition, the research examines the open-ended questions on the surveys to determine the types of concerns related to discipline and behavioral issues reported by parents. Also, a focus group of parents receiving special education services was conducted and data related to discipline and behavioral issues was accrued.

Research Question #1

How do parents of students identified as having an emotional/behavioral disorder rate their understanding of the school's discipline policy as compared to parents of students in the disability groups of (a) autism (AU), (b) auditorally impaired (AI), (c) learning disability (LD), (d) mental retardation (MR), (e) other health impaired (OHI), (f) orthopedically impaired (OI), (g) speech (SP), and (h) visually impaired (VI)?
Research Question #2

How do parents of students identified as having an emotional/behavioral disorder who are in the ethnicity group of Caucasian rate their understanding of the school's discipline policy as compared to parents of students identified as having an emotional/behavioral disorder who are in the ethnicity groups of (a) African American and (b) Hispanic?

Research Question #3

How do parents of students identified as having an emotional/behavioral disorder who are receiving educational services in large districts rate their understanding of the school's discipline policy as compared to parents of students identified as having an emotional/behavioral disorder who are receiving educational services in small districts?

Research Question #4

How do parents of students identified as having an emotional/behavioral disorder rate their awareness of alternative discipline procedures for students receiving special education services as compared to parents of students in the disability groups of (a) autism (AU), (b) auditorally impaired (AI), (c) learning disability (LD), (d) mental retardation (MR), (e) other health impaired (OHI), (f) orthopedically impaired (OI), (g) speech (SP), and (h) visually impaired (VI)?

Research Question #5

How do parents of students identified as having an emotional/behavioral disorder who are in the ethnicity group of Caucasian rate their awareness of alternative discipline procedures for students receiving special education services as compared to parents of students identified as having an emotional/behavioral disorder who are in the ethnicity groups of (a) African American and (b) Hispanic?
Research Question #6

How do parents of students identified as having an emotional/behavioral disorder who are receiving educational services in large districts rate their awareness of alternative discipline procedures for students receiving special education services as compared to parents of students identified as having an emotional/behavioral disorder who are receiving educational services in small districts?

Research Question #7

How do parents of students identified as having an emotional/behavioral disorder rate their awareness concerning the provision of special education services if their child is removed from his or her regular education classroom for disciplinary reasons as compared to parents of students in the disability groups of (a) autism (AU), (b) auditorily impaired (AI), (c) learning disability (LD), (d) mental retardation (MR), (e) other health impaired (OHI), (f) orthopedically impaired (OI), (g) speech (SP), and (h) visually impaired (VI)?

Research Question #8

How do parents of students identified as having an emotional/behavioral disorder who are in the ethnicity group of Caucasian rate their awareness concerning the provision of special education services if their child is removed from his or her regular education classroom for disciplinary reasons as compared to parents of students identified as having an emotional/behavioral disorder who are in the ethnicity groups of (a) African American and (b) Hispanic?

Research Question #9

How do parents of students identified as having an emotional/behavioral disorder who are receiving educational services in large districts rate their awareness concerning the provision of special education services if their child is removed from his or her regular education classroom
for disciplinary reasons as compared to parents of students identified as having an
emotional/behavioral disorder who are receiving educational services in small districts?

Research Question #10

How do parents of students identified as having an emotional/behavioral disorder rate their
understanding of a behavior intervention plan as compared to parents of students in the disability
groups of (a) autism (AU), (b) auditorally impaired (AI), (c) learning disability (LD), (d) mental
retardation (MR), (e) other health impaired (OHI), (f) orthopedically impaired (OI), (g) speech
(SP), and (h) visually impaired (VI)?

Research Question #11

How do parents of students identified as having an emotional/behavioral disorder who are in the
ethnicity group of Caucasian rate their understanding of a behavior intervention plan as
compared to parents of students identified as having an emotional/behavioral disorder who are in
the ethnicity group of (a) African American and (b) Hispanic?

Research Question #12

How do parents of students identified as having an emotional/behavioral disorder who are
receiving educational services in large districts rate their understanding of a behavior
intervention plan as compared to parents of students identified as having an emotional/behavioral
disorder who are receiving educational services in small districts?

Research Question #13

What are the common topics of concern related to discipline when parents of students receiving
special education are given an opportunity to respond to an open-ended questionnaire?
Research Question #14

What are the common topics of concern related to discipline, behavior intervention plans, and functional behavioral assessment when parents of students identified as being eligible for special education services are given an opportunity to express their views during a focus group?

Subject Selection

State-wide Survey

In 2003, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and the Education Service Center (ESC) Parent Coordination Network, led by Region 9 (www.esc9.net) in Wichita Falls, Texas, discussed the need to gather information from parents and spearheaded the development of a state-wide survey that would determine parental understanding of issues and regulations related to special education. When designing this study, given the extensive history of providing information to parents and the findings of the Office of Special Education Programs Monitoring Report, it was deemed appropriate to ask whether current efforts were indeed providing parents with the information and training that they wanted and needed. The survey was developed by a committee consisting of volunteers from the Parent Coordination Network, the State Parent Training Committee, the Parent Training and Information Center (PATH East www.partnerstx.org), and representatives from Education Service Centers. Academic Information Management, Inc. (www.aimdata.com) was selected to provide support for the survey process.

Survey questions were developed by a committee of educators, parents, and advocacy group members. Using the Texas Admission, Review, and Dismissal (ARD) Guide for parents as a reference, two versions of a one-page survey with overlapping questions were developed. A total of 54 unique items was included covering the major areas of (a) eligibility and referral, (b)
admission, review, and dismissal and individual education program (IEP), (c) educational services, (d) records, training, and help, (e) transition, (f) discipline, (g) information sources, and (h) general satisfaction.

The structured responses for the questions on the surveys were either “yes”, “no”, or “not sure” or “completely understand”, “somewhat understand”, or “do not understand”.

The structured response items were supplemented with six open-ended questions covering quality and source of information. The following six questions were on the open-ended questionnaire:

1. What could be done to improve your understanding and comfort level with the special education process?
2. What is/was your best source of information regarding special education?
3. What is/was your least helpful source of information regarding special education?
4. What would be the best (most helpful) way to get information to you regarding special education?
5. What is the most important type of information regarding special education that you need?
6. Any other comments or suggestions?

A sampling approach was developed that included distribution of approximately 32,000 surveys, English and Spanish versions, which included all disability, ethnic, and geographic categories of the state of Texas, and used TEA demographic data from the Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS). Data used to distribute surveys were based on the 2002-03 school year. This was the most current year available within the timeframe of the
survey. Initial surveys were piloted in a variety of settings with consideration of different groups of parents.

A letter was sent to all district superintendents and directors of special education notifying them about the survey and providing information about its purpose. Surveys were sent to districts bundled by campus with individual student packages to be distributed to parents. Students’ whose home language survey indicated Spanish had surveys in both English and Spanish included. Packets to parents included a self-addressed, postage paid return envelope. Parents were asked not to provide student identifiable information.

Although approximately 32,000 surveys were mailed, several factors affected whether parents received or returned surveys. These included the following:

1. Student mobility across districts which annually, according to TEA reports, is over 20%.
2. Leaving school through graduation, dropout, or moving out of state or country.
3. Intra-district movement by changing campuses.
4. Never distributed by school.
5. Not taken home by student.
6. Parent apathy or suspicion regarding survey use.
7. Doubt survey will impact their child.
8. Loss, mailing errors, and other factors.

Over 5,100 surveys were returned with almost 5,000 received in time to be included in the analyses. This represents a total return rate of about 16%. Given the factors noted above, the nominal return rate is almost twice as high. This compares to rates seen in parent surveys within large-urban districts. Return percentages within geographic region, ethnicity, and disability
categories were proportional to actual percentages. Some disability categories have very few students. Results from those particular categories were suppressed. Almost 2,000 surveys were returned with open-ended comments included. This represents about 37% of all returned surveys. Survey A and B in Spanish and English and the open-ended questionnaire can be found at the ESC Region 9 website (http://www.esc9.net/survey).

**Focus Groups**

The procedure for collecting data for this part of the study was focus groups. According to Krueger & Casey (2000) focus groups are moderator-led group discussions lasting between 60 to 120 minutes. A focus group should have from four to ten people who are recruited based on common characteristics such as demographics or attitudes. The focus group for this study adhered to the guidelines presented by Krueger and Casey (2000). The group lasted approximately an hour and a half and involved parents of students who are eligible for special education services. The focus group was held during the evening in the conference room of the Special Education building of a local district. Permission to contact parents was secured through the appropriate procedures (See Appendix A for permission letter). Once permission was received, the researcher attended a monthly presentation provided by the local district for parents of students receiving special education services. At the meeting parents were given a brief overview of the purpose of the study and were recruited to participate in the focus group. A flyer with relevant information such as date, location, times, and purpose was given to each of the attending parents. Registration forms were also given out to all parents who expressed an interest in participating in the focus group. These forms were collected at the end of the meeting. A reminder phone call or e-mail was given the day before the focus group. Each participant was
asked to sign a letter of consent to participate in the study. Each participant was given a $30 stipend in exchange for his or her time and input.

**Procedures for Data Collection**

*State-wide Survey*

In order to answer research questions one through twelve, which pertain to the questions related to discipline on the state-wide survey, the researcher asked Pam Humphries at ESC Region 9 to process each question through the computer program and database compiled for this study. Qualifiers and limiters had to be set differently for the individual questions. Due to the low incidence and response rate, three categories from the survey were eliminated: Deaf-Blind, Noncategorical Disabilities, and Traumatic Brain Injury. These were not included in the analysis. For questions one, four, seven, and ten, each question was examined by individual disability categories as they compared to the category of E/BD. For research questions two, five, eight, and eleven, the ratings of parents of students identified as having E/BD who are Caucasian was compared to parents of students identified as having E/BD with other ethnic groups. Research questions three, six, nine, and twelve compared the understanding of parents of students identified as having E/BD from large districts to the understanding of parents of students identified as having E/BD from small districts. The information for all twelve questions is reported in percentages and displayed through the use of tables.

In order to examine the information on the open-ended questionnaires, the researcher carefully read and examined each of the 1,700 questionnaires. As each survey was read, it was determined whether the parent who completed the survey addressed any area or topic related to discipline. Any survey determined to address discipline was sorted from the others to be examined in depth.
Further analysis was then conducted on the surveys related to discipline. Each of the surveys was examined by the researcher to determine the specific area of concern, such as BIPs, disciplinary tactics, or alternative placements. Research question thirteen was answered by analyzing and grouping the types of information and comments provided by the questionnaire. The information has been displayed through the use of a table with typical remarks and comments included in the findings to provide an anecdotal recording of the information that the survey provided.

Focus Groups

The researcher conducted the focus group. The researcher has had previous experience conducting focus groups and is aware of possible pitfalls of this type of research, such as having one participant dominate the group or the discussion swaying from the research topic. The group was led using a predetermined questioning route developed to fully answer the research question and to provide a flow to the discussion (See Appendix B for the questioning route). The session began with introductions and a reminder of the rules, such as confidentiality and respecting the comments of all participants. Participants were informed that their comments were going to be recorded. Participants were given a numbered card and were asked to identify themselves by number before beginning to speak. The researcher used a copy of the questions and a check sheet to record responses made by the group and to take notes of the discussion. The procedures for analysis of information gained through the focus group was to evaluate the contents of the group discussion as it is related to topics of concern, such as functional behavioral assessment, behavior intervention plans, and discipline. The recording was transcribed (See Appendix C for the transcription) and pertinent statements made by the participants and the overall response of the group has been documented for the discussion questions.
Types of Analysis

The format and design of the research study was both quantitative and qualitative in nature. Research questions one through twelve was examined quantitatively. A chi-square was used to analyze whether the frequency distribution for the categorical variables was consistent with expectations (Hinkle, Wiersma, & Jurs, 1998).

Research questions thirteen and fourteen was examined using qualitative methodology. Several qualitative analysis software programs (e.g., Nud*ist, Qualrus, Atlas/ti) that use an array of computational strategies to assist with coding qualitative data analysis were examined by the researcher to determine their usefulness in analyzing the data. There has been considerable debate about the efficiency and utility of many of these programs. Some researchers feel that methodological bias and distortions are often produced and the use of computer programs may even be detrimental to the analysis and interpretation process (Kelle, 1997; Morgan, 1995). Cutting and pasting of text segments and content analysis of qualitative data has been strongly advocated by Krueger and Casey (2000) and Morgan (1995), and was the method chosen by the researcher. Comments have been examined to discover if there is a pattern of concern or repeating issues. Typical remarks and comments have been included in the findings to provide an anecdotal recording of the information that the survey and the focus group provided.

Permission Granted

Permission was granted by Pam Humphrey, Director of Parent Involvement/Transition (pamhumphrey@esc9.net) of the Region 9 Education Service Center (www.esc9.net) to use the information provided by the State-wide Survey of Parents of Students Receiving Special Education Services that was completed in March of 2004.

1 Nud*ist, nudist@sagepub.com
2 Qualrus, www.idealworks.com
This chapter contains a presentation of the analysis of data. The findings of this study were organized and presented according to the type of instrument used to gather data and the research questions addressed. The research questions are listed with the findings presented in narrative and tabular form. A chi-square was used to analyze whether the frequency distribution for the categorical variables was consistent with expectations (Hinkle, Wiersma, & Jurs, 1998). Statistically significance results are indicated by $p < .01$. All results indicated that the obtained frequencies did significantly differ from those that would be expected if all cell frequencies were equal in the population. Due to confidentiality and proprietary issues, the researcher did not have access to the Education Service Center (ESC) Region 9 database, so there was no opportunity to manipulate the data to compare whether there were statistically significant differences between groups.

The purpose of this research was to examine the four survey questions related to discipline from a state-wide survey conducted by ESC Region 9 through a comparison of selected disability categories as they compare to the responses received from parents of students with the disability category of emotional/behavioral disorders (E/BD). In addition, the research examined the open-ended questions on the surveys to determine the types of concerns related to discipline and behavioral issues reported by parents. Also, a focus group of parents receiving special education services was conducted and data related to discipline and behavioral issues was accrued.
State-wide Survey

In 2003, in an effort to determine parental understanding of important elements of parental understanding of special education laws, ESC Region 9 conducted a state-wide survey of parents of students receiving special education services to determine the extent to which Texas schools and other entities responsible for providing information to help guide parents through the process have been successful in providing the information (ESC Region 9, 2004).

The survey provided insight into many areas of parental understanding; however, one area that was deemed low by the survey was the area of discipline. The survey had the following four questions related to discipline:

1. Do you understand the school's discipline policy?
2. Are you aware that there may be alternative discipline procedures for students receiving special education services?
3. Are you aware that if your child is removed from his or her regular education classroom for disciplinary reasons, special education services must continue to be provided?
4. Do you know what a “BIP” (behavior intervention plan) is?

Over 90% of the responding parents felt that they had a good understanding of the school’s discipline policy and almost 75% of the parents knew that special education services must continue to be provided if the student was removed from the regular education classroom for disciplinary reasons. A smaller number of parents (61.6%) were aware that alternative discipline procedures were available for students receiving special education services and a minority of 40.4% of parents responded that they had a good understanding of what a behavior
intervention plan (BIP) was. The current study was designed to reanalyze the data by examining each question by disability category, ethnicity, and size of district.

**Research Question #1**

How do parents of students identified as having an emotional/behavioral disorder rate their understanding of the school's discipline policy as compared to parents of students in the disability groups of (a) autism (AU), (b) auditorally impaired (AI), (c) learning disability (LD), (d) mental retardation (MR), (e) other health impaired (OHI), (f) orthopedically impaired (OI), (g) speech (SP), and (h) visually impaired (VI)?

Table 1

*Perception of Parents of Students with Disabilities of Their Understanding of School’s Discipline Policy by Disability Category Based on ESC Survey A*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disability Category</th>
<th>Completely Understand</th>
<th>Somewhat Understand</th>
<th>Do Not Understand</th>
<th>Chi Square</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E/BD</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>86.1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AU</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>87.6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AI</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>93.8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LD</td>
<td>597</td>
<td>92.7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MR</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>90.8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OHI</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>90.0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(table continues)*
Table 1 (continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disability Category</th>
<th>Completely Understand</th>
<th>Somewhat Understand</th>
<th>Do Not Understand</th>
<th>Chi Square</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$n$</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>$n$</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OI</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>95.6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SP</td>
<td>279</td>
<td>90.9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>92.7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* $p < .01$.

As shown in Table 1, the range of responses from parents of students eligible for special education services that they completely understand their school’s discipline policy was from 86.1 to 95.6%. These percentages are very high considering the length of many school handbooks and the complexity of discipline policies within schools. It is also quite common that discipline policies are implemented inconsistently between schools even within a district. When comparing the parents of students identified as having E/BD to other groups, these parents rated their understanding of the school’s discipline policy lower at 86.1% than all other groups.

The parents of students identified as having autism rated their understanding a percentage point higher (87.6%) than parents of students identified as E/BD. It is interesting to note that students in the disability categories of E/BD and autism, who are most likely to have trouble with social interactions and behavior problems, are the two groups whose parents rated their understanding of school discipline policy the lowest.

Research Question #2

How do parents of students identified as having an emotional/behavioral disorder who are in the ethnicity group of Caucasian rate their understanding of the school's discipline policy as
compared to parents of students identified as having an emotional/behavioral disorder who are in
the ethnicity groups of (a) African American and (b) Hispanic?

Table 2

*Perception of Parents of Students with E/BD of Their Understanding of School’s Discipline*

*Policy by Ethnicity Based on ESC Survey A*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Completely Understand</th>
<th>Somewhat Understand</th>
<th>Do Not Understand</th>
<th>Chi Square</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>87.6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>91.3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>79.3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .01.

As shown in Table 2, parents of students in the disability category of E/BD who are also
Hispanic in ethnicity reported a much lower understanding (79.3%) of the school’s discipline
policies than the ethnicity groups of Caucasian (87.6%) and African American (91.3%). This is
probably due to a lack of understanding of the English language and the discipline codes not
being sent home in the native language.

*Research Question #3*

How do parents of students identified as having an emotional/behavioral disorder who are
receiving educational services in large districts rate their understanding of the school's discipline
policy as compared to parents of students identified as having an emotional/behavioral disorder
who are receiving educational services in small districts?
Table 3

Perception of Parents of Students with EBD of Their Understanding of School’s Discipline

Policy by District Based on ESC Survey A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District Size</th>
<th>Completely Understand</th>
<th>Somewhat Understand</th>
<th>Do Not Understand</th>
<th>Chi Square</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>91.8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>80.3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .01.

The understanding of the school’s discipline policies for parents in large districts with more than 10,000 students (91.8%) is considerably higher than the understanding of parents in small districts with less than 10,000 students (80.3%) as shown by Table 3. This may be due to large districts having a consistent system of distributing information to parents or having a standardized code of conduct for the district.

Research Question #4

How do parents of students identified as having an emotional/behavioral disorder rate their awareness of alternative discipline procedures for students receiving special education services as compared to parents of students in the disability groups of (a) autism (AU), (b) auditorally impaired (AI), (c) learning disability (LD), (d) mental retardation (MR), (e) other health impaired (OHI), (f) orthopedically impaired (OI), (g) speech (SP), and (h) visually impaired (VI)?
Table 4

Perception of Parents of Students with Disabilities of Their Awareness of Alternative Discipline Procedures by Disability Category Based on Survey A and B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disability Category</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Uncertain</th>
<th>Chi Square</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E/BD</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>66.5</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>27.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AU</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>78.3</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>14.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AI</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>52.6</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>37.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LD</td>
<td>751</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>410</td>
<td>32.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MR</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>65.1</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>28.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OHI</td>
<td>286</td>
<td>57.5</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>34.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OI</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>65.9</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>25.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SP</td>
<td>354</td>
<td>54.8</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>36.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>69.2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>23.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*$p < .01.$

The rate of parents responding affirmatively for this question dropped considerably as shown by Table 4. The range of responses from parents stating that they understood that alternative discipline procedures may exist for students receiving special education services was from 52.6 to 78.3%. Almost 67% of parents of students identified as having E/BD stated that they knew that their child might be eligible for alternative discipline procedures; whereas, 27.5% of parents responded that they did not understand and 6% were uncertain about their understanding (Chi square = 289.84, $p < .01$). Parents of students in the eligibility category of
autism rated their awareness the highest at 78.3%, while 14.5% responded that they did not know and 7.2% were uncertain of their knowledge that alternative discipline procedures could be provided (Chi Square = 203.76, \( p < .01 \)). It is interesting that the parents of students from all eligibility categories rated their awareness of alternative discipline procedures for special education students considerably lower than they rated their understanding of the school-wide discipline system.

**Research Question #5**

How do parents of students identified as having an emotional/behavioral disorder who are in the ethnicity group of Caucasian rate their awareness of alternative discipline procedures for students receiving special education services as compared to parents of students identified as having an emotional/behavioral disorder who are in the ethnicity groups of (a) African American and (b) Hispanic?

**Table 5**

*Perception of Parents of Students with E/BD of Their Awareness of Alternative Discipline Procedures by Ethnicity Based on Survey A and B*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Uncertain</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Chi Square</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( n )</td>
<td>( n% )</td>
<td>( n )</td>
<td>( n% )</td>
<td>( n% )</td>
<td>( p )</td>
<td>( \chi^2 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>67.4</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>26.3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>.000**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>69.6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>26.1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>.000**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>63.4</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>29.6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>.000**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*\( p < .01 \).*
As shown in Table 5, the group of parents who rated their awareness of alternative discipline procedures the lowest were parents of students identified as Hispanic in ethnicity. Parents of students who are Hispanic with the eligibility of E/BD reported that 63.4% were aware; whereas, 29.6% reported they were not aware and 7% reported they were uncertain of their awareness (Chi square = 65.26, \( p < .01 \)). This is consistent with previous findings and suggests that lack of understanding of the language may be the reason for lack of awareness concerning alternative discipline procedures. This was also corroborated through the open-ended questionnaires in which many Spanish-speaking parents requested information printed in Spanish.

**Research Question #6**

How do parents of students identified as having an emotional/behavioral disorder who are receiving educational services in large districts rate their awareness of alternative discipline procedures for students receiving special education services as compared to parents of students identified as having an emotional/behavioral disorder who are receiving educational services in small districts?

Table 6

*Perception of Parents of Students with E/BD of Their Awareness of Alternative Discipline Procedures by District Size on ESC Survey A and B*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District Size</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Uncertain</th>
<th>Chi Square</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( n )</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>( n )</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>72.2</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>22.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>61.6</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>32.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* \( p < .01 \).
Data from Table 6 shows that the parents of students identified as having an E/BD in large districts of 10,000 students or more stated that they were aware of alternative discipline procedures at a much higher percentage (72.2%) than parents from small districts (61.6%). This may be due to having more consistent polices in place for providing information to parents regarding discipline procedures.

Research Question #7

How do parents of students identified as having an emotional/behavioral disorder rate their awareness concerning the provision of special education services if their child is removed from his or her regular education classroom for disciplinary reasons as compared to parents of students in the disability groups of (a) autism (AU), (b) auditorally impaired (AI), (c) learning disability (LD), (d) mental retardation (MR), (e) other health impaired (OHI), (f) orthopedically impaired (OI), (g) speech (SP), and (h) visually impaired (VI)?

Table 7

Perception of Parents of Students with Disabilities of Their Awareness of Provision of Special Education Services by Disability Category Based on ESC Surveys A and B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disability Category</th>
<th>Completely Understand</th>
<th>Somewhat Understand</th>
<th>Do Not Understand</th>
<th>Chi Square</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E/BD</td>
<td>246</td>
<td>78.1</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>16.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AU</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>76.9</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AI</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>77.3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LD</td>
<td>973</td>
<td>77.3</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>17.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(table continues)
Table 7 (continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disability Category</th>
<th>Completely Understand</th>
<th>Somewhat Understand</th>
<th>Do Not Understand</th>
<th>Chi Square</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>χ²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MR</td>
<td>308</td>
<td>76.8</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>.000*</td>
<td>209.61</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OHI</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>72.4</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>.000*</td>
<td>181.33</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OI</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>69.4</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>.000*</td>
<td>44.49</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SP</td>
<td>454</td>
<td>70.0</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>23.6</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>.000*</td>
<td>209.17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>77.3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>.000*</td>
<td>40.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .01.

As shown in Table 7, parents of students with E/BD reported at the highest percentage that they were aware that services must be continued if their child was removed from the instructional setting for discipline problems. Over 78% of parents of students in this disability category responded that they completely understand that services must be continued; whereas, 16.5% responded that they somewhat understand and 5.4% responded that they did not understand (Chi square = 177.95, p < .01). This supports the conclusion that parents of students with E/BD are provided the necessary information to make decisions related to their child’s disability and academic success.

Research Question # 8

How do parents of students identified as having an emotional/behavioral disorder who are in the ethnicity group of Caucasian rate their awareness concerning the provision of special education services if their child is removed from his or her regular education classroom for disciplinary reasons as compared to parents of students identified as having an emotional/behavioral disorder who are in the ethnicity groups of (a) African American and (b) Hispanic?
Table 8

*Perception of Parents of Students with E/BD of Their Awareness of Provision of Special Education Services by Ethnicity Based on ESC Surveys A and B*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Completely Understand</th>
<th>Somewhat Understand</th>
<th>Do Not Understand</th>
<th>Chi Square</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>80.4</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>73.9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>77.5</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p* < .01.

As shown in Table 8, 13% of parents of students identified as having E/BD in the ethnicity group of African American reported that they did not understand that services must be continued to be provided if a student is removed from the instructional setting for behaviors related to their disability; whereas, 13% reported that they only somewhat understand and 73.4% completely understand that services must continue to be provided for their students if removed for discipline reasons (Chi square = 30.43, *p* < .01). It is relevant that parents of African American students with E/BD rate their understanding somewhat lower (73.9%) than the two ethnicity groups of Caucasian (80.4%) and Hispanic (77.5%) since there has been some concern about the overrepresentation of African American students in disciplinary alternative education programs (DAEP) and correctional settings.

Research Question #9

How do parents of students identified as having an emotional/behavioral disorder who are receiving educational services in large districts rate their awareness concerning the provision of
special education services if their child is removed from his or her regular education classroom for disciplinary reasons as compared to parents of students identified as having an emotional/behavioral disorder who are receiving educational services in small districts?

Table 9

*Perception of Parents of Students with E/BD of Their Awareness of Provision of Special Education Services by District Size Based on Surveys A and B*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District Size</th>
<th>Completely Understand</th>
<th>Somewhat Understand</th>
<th>Do Not Understand</th>
<th>Chi Square</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>82.5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>74.4</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>21.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Findings, as shown in Table 9, for this question are consistent with the responses to previous questions in that parents of students with E/BD from large districts (82.5%) are more likely to report a higher awareness that special education services must be continued to be provided than parents from small districts of less than 10,000 students (74.4%). This may be due to large districts having better routes for distributing information to parents or more consistent discipline policies.

*Research Question # 10*

How do parents of students identified as having an emotional/behavioral disorder rate their understanding of a behavior intervention plan as compared to parents of students in the disability groups of (a) autism (AU), (b) auditorily impaired (AI), (c) learning disability (LD), (d) mental
retardation (MR), (e) other health impaired (OHI), (f) orthopedically impaired (OI), (g) speech 
(SP), and (h) visually impaired (VI)?

Table 10

*Perception of Parents of Students with Disabilities of Their Understanding of Behavior*

*Intervention Plan by Disability Category Based on ESC Survey A*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disability Category</th>
<th>Completely Understand</th>
<th>Somewhat Understand</th>
<th>Do Not Understand</th>
<th>Chi Square</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E/BD</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>60.3</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>32.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AU</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>59.4</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>29.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AI</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>34.0</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>51.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LD</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>35.6</td>
<td>331</td>
<td>51.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MR</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>44.0</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>44.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OHI</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>41.3</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>46.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OI</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>51.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SP</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>34.0</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>51.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>45.0</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>42.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .01.

As shown in Table 10, 60.3% of parents of students identified as having E/BD reported 
that they understand the purpose of a BIP, while 32.2% responded that they somewhat 
understand and 7.5% responded that they did not understand the purpose of a BIP (Chi square = 
61.00, p < .01). Other than parents of students with the eligibility of autism (59.4%), the range of
percents for parents who responded that they completely understand the purpose of a behavior intervention plan was considerably lower (33.3 to 45.0%).

The overall understanding rate for this question dropped considerably; however, a BIP is only necessary when the student’s behavior is interrupting the student’s learning or the learning of others. Although it is not mandatory, it is likely that most students who qualify for special education as a student with E/BD will have behaviors that interfere with learning. It is important to note that students in the disability categories of E/BD and autism will often have problems with social interactions that may result in situations that disrupt the learning environment.

Given the large percentage of students receiving special education services in DAEPs, the importance of a BIP cannot be overstated. Additionally, there are federal requirements that removal to a DAEP not be directly related to the child’s disability (Boehner & Castle, 2005). The fact that over 60% of the parents of students with E/BD stated that they understood the BIP demonstrates that the parents who need the information about BIPs are getting the information at a higher rate than parents of students in other disability categories that do not have behavioral problems and therefore do not need the information.

*Research Question #11*

How do parents of students identified as having an emotional/behavioral disorder who are in the ethnicity group of Caucasian rate their understanding of a behavior intervention plan as compared to parents of students identified as having an emotional/behavioral disorder who are in the ethnicity groups of (a) African American and (b) Hispanic?
Table 11

*Perception of Parents of Students with EBD of Their Understanding of Behavior Intervention Plan by Ethnicity Based on ESC Survey A*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Completely Understand</th>
<th>Somewhat Understand</th>
<th>Do Not Understand</th>
<th>Chi Square</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>66.3</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>24.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>65.2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>30.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>41.9</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>51.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .01.

It is interesting to note that parents of students identified as having E/BD in the ethnicity groups of Caucasian (66.3%) and African American (65.2%) are consistent in reporting that they understand the purpose of a BIP. This somewhat contradicts the findings on the previous question where a lower percentage of parents of students in the African American ethnicity group reported that they understand that special education services must continue to be provided if their child is removed from the educational setting than parents of other ethnicity groups. The parents of students identified as having E/BD in the ethnicity group of Hispanic report that they understand the BIP at a much lower rate of 41.9%. This may be due to language barriers or not receiving information in their native language.

Research Question #12

How do parents of students identified as having an emotional/behavioral disorder who are receiving educational services in large districts rate their understanding of a behavior
intervention plan as compared to parents of students identified as having an emotional/behavioral disorder who are receiving educational services in small districts?

Table 12

Perception of Parents of Students with EBD of Their Understanding of Behavior Intervention Plan by District Size Based on ESC Survey A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District Size</th>
<th>Completely Understand</th>
<th>Somewhat Understand</th>
<th>Do Not Understand</th>
<th>Chi Square</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$n$</td>
<td>$%$</td>
<td>$n$</td>
<td>$%$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>58.9</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>31.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>61.6</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>32.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* $p < .01$.

Table 12 shows that almost 62% of parents of students identified as E/BD from small districts report that they understand the BIP as compared to 59% of parents from large districts of more than 10,000 students. It is interesting to note that this is the first question related to district size that parents from a small district rate their understanding higher than parents from a large district.

Open-ended Responses

In addition to the structured format questionnaire, parents were given an opportunity to respond to six open-ended, free-response questions. Five of the questions were directive in nature while the sixth question was completely open to comments, ideas, and suggestions. Approximately 40% of all parents responding to the structured format questionnaire answered at least one question from the opened ended questionnaire. This resulted in responses from 1,823
parents from the English survey and another 197 from the Spanish survey. The responses from the Spanish surveys were translated into English and were included in the analysis.

The fact that a large percentage of the parents chose to write down additional comments is significant in that parents feel they have a great deal to say to educational professionals. By including the free-response questions in the survey, parents were permitted to tell researchers what they believed without being restricted to a set of responses. An open-ended format is very informative in that it does not limit the respondents to one of only three or four answer choices. At the same time, particularly with the large number of responses, the open-ended format makes it difficult to classify the subject and topic of each of the responses.

The first step in the analysis process was to develop an initial set of categories for the parent’s responses to each of the six questions. This approach allowed for tabulating the typical responses made by the parents. In order to ensure the confidential nature of the responses, parents were instructed not to include identifying information. As each of the questionnaires was received, they were assigned a number that corresponded to when the survey was received.

All of the open-ended surveys were carefully read and separated into seven categories: (a) home/school communications, (b) teacher education and preparation, (c) transition planning, (d) available services, (e) student rights, (f) individualized education plan (IEPs) and modifications, and (g) discipline. For the purpose of this study, only the questionnaires pertaining to discipline or behavior were used. In order to determine if a questionnaire related to discipline, the researcher identified key words such as behavior, behavior intervention plans, behavior problems, and discipline.

Eighty of the open-ended responses dealt with some aspect of discipline. Each of the open-ended questionnaires were further analyzed and divided into subcategories. This was a two-
fold process. First, the researcher read, analyzed, and summarized each of the surveys. The summary was entered into a word processing program along with the identifying number of the questionnaire. Then each summary was re-read and categorized into subgroups. Within the discipline category, four identifiable subcategories emerged related to issues of (a) information seeking, (b) problems with school discipline, (c) teacher training, and (d) programming.

*Research Question #13*
What are the common topics of concern related to discipline when parents of students receiving special education are given an opportunity to respond to an open-ended questionnaire?

Table 13
*Common Topics of Concern Related to Discipline Based on ESC Questionnaire*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Topics</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information Seeking</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems with School Discipline</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Training</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programming</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Information-seeking.* Most of these responses were given in reply to the question on the survey which asked, “What is the most important type of information regarding special education that you need?” Responses typically varied in the wording, but conveyed the message that parents need information on how to manage their child’s behavior at home. Four of the responses specifically mentioned needing more information on BIPs. Several mentioned needing information that related specifically to their child’s disability such as autism, bipolar, or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).
These responses were typically brief and to the point, such as, “I need information about behavior management” or “How to control my son’s behavior”. Longer responses tended to express concern on whether school personnel also knew behavior management techniques. A variety of terms were used to imply the same concept, such as behavior control, discipline training, and behavior modification. Several parents requested information on the types of procedures and techniques used in the classroom so they could implement consistent techniques at home.

The following are examples of typical responses from parents in reply to the question, “What is the most important type of information regarding special education that you need?”

- Classes student is being placed in, time in resource classes vs. regular education and behavior intervention plan.
- Consistent information from all teachers and counselors. So we can compare school behavior with home behavior and make the needed adjustments for our child’s success.
- How to deal with his behavior.
- Anything on behavior problems.
- Any new techniques used at school or home to encourage better academic and/or behavior skills.
- How to help my son be attentive at school and information on discipline in the school since he is special education.
- More information on disciplinary issues and BIPS.
- Information related to behavior management.
- Need more papers and studies of child behavior and management.
Problems with school discipline. Typical responses in this category tended to be lengthy and go into some depth to explain the problem situation. In several cases, the parent attached additional sheets of paper to the open-ended questionnaire and some turned the paper side-ways to have more room to write. A variety of problems were addressed, such as children being continually suspended for behaviors related to their disability or the BIP not being implemented. Parent responses in this subcategory tended to be negative with the parents blaming the school for not following proper procedures for dealing with students who receive special education. Three of the parent responses reported that their child was in a placement or situation where other children were allowed to be aggressive or bully without receiving consequences. Several parents mentioned specifically that the BIP had not been followed and they felt that their child’s rights had been violated. The following are a sample of the parent responses.

- There are times the teacher and I do not agree on methods used for [my child’s] behavior problems. Also when I do have questions or concerns with the school, I’m always redirected to someone else who is never available to speak with me.

- The school didn’t know what a BIP is, alternative discipline, pre-ARD meeting—it took years to get one and still had all the IEP written up.

- My child has a BIP in place. 11 weeks later it still has not been put into action.

- The school needs to provide alternative placements for children who have serious behavioral issues that they cannot handle. The solution is to send the child home through the district’s eyes. This only teaches the child he is in control of when and what he’ll learn. The burden of his education lays in an unqualified person’s lap—his mother.
• I need help from TEA to straighten out problems at school, behavior, the IEP, and receiving the right services.

• My rights as a parent when a BIP plan is not implemented in the classroom. Also why my child’s services stop when he is in ISS.

• I’m still upset that my son was antagonized and upset to the point of a fit and the teacher had him handcuffed by the SRO officer.

Teacher training. This subcategory was closely related to the previous category except that the parent responses tended to be brief and just request that teachers receive more training on how to deal with problem behaviors. A total of 10 responses were in the category.

• More/All teachers need to be trained in the symptoms and classroom behaviors of ADD/ADHD students and how to better cope/manage them!

• Have experts come in to the classroom to watch the child’s behavior—don’t just leave it up to one teacher.

• How my child is being disciplined or how he’s being corrected and if he has a problem is he being listened to and if he is being helped.

Programming. A total of 8 responses were in this subcategory. These responses were often expressed in the form of a questions such as, “Why are students with behavior problems and learning problems put in the same classroom?” Although these responses may not directly deal with discipline, there is an underlying question of how academics and classroom management procedures are being implemented in such a classroom.

• Not mixing children with behavioral problems with children with learning problems.
• I’ve never met a parent of a special needs child who was satisfied with the way their child was being educated. So perhaps you should start doing some focus groups and listen to what parents have to say.

• There should be two different special education classes. One for behavior problems…The second class should be for learning problems. Right now all the kids bounce off each other.

Focus Group

Research Design

This research was designed to provide more in-depth information about questions being asked by the state-wide survey. This is a qualitative study utilizing focus group discussions; therefore, a questioning format was used to gather information. The focus group was held in February of 2005. All of the participants were parents of special education students, so the topics that they were asked to discuss were current and relevant to them.

Procedure for Reporting the Data

The procedure for analysis of the data of the focus group was handled by analyzing the contents of the group discussion as it related to the research question. Pertinent statements made by the participants and overall response of the group were documented. Check sheets were used to record the responses of the group. The check sheet provided the researcher with a way of determining who participated in each question and the amount of input. Subjective analysis was then applied to the focus group data based on the researcher’s personal observations and review of the transcripts and recording.

The researcher began the session by introducing herself. Due to confidentiality, the participants were not asked to introduce themselves. Prior to actually beginning the focus group
discussion, the researcher explained the purpose of the study and informed the participants that they were being recorded. The researcher used a copy of the discussion questions and a check sheet to record responses made by the group and to take notes during the discussion.

Participants

Nine parents attended the focus group. All were women, although it was made clear that either parent could attend. The participants provided background demographic information. Five of the participants were married, while four were divorced. Ages of the participants ranged from their late twenties to late forties. All participants were Caucasian. The age ranges of the children in special education were from 4 to 14, although three of the parents had older children who did not qualify for special education services. The number of years that the children had been receiving special education services ranged from one to ten years. Seven of the nine parents had more than one child, and four of the parents had more than one child who qualified for special education services. Disability categories that were represented were autism, speech impairment, other health impairment, learning disability, mental retardation, and E/BD. Some students had more than one eligibility condition, such as autism and mental retardation.

There was, of course, a strong relationship between age and years in special education with older children having been in special education for a longer period of time. However, it was interesting to note that all of the students identified as having autism had been qualified as eligible by the age of three. For students in other disability categories, such as Learning Disabled or E/BD, the student typically began receiving services at the age of five. The latest that any student had been identified was by the age of eight. While all parents took part in the discussion, parents whose children were qualified as Autistic or E/BD were more vocal in their responses and tended to report a better understanding of issues related to discipline, functional behavioral
assessments (FBA) and BIPS. Three of the nine parents either were currently teaching or had been teachers. Additionally, two of the parents were attending graduate school in order to further their knowledge about issues related to special education.

The researcher transcribed the audiotapes. These transcripts were compared with written notes to prevent misinterpretation of the data and to supplement the data collected on the audiotapes. Once the final transcript was completed, the researcher analyzed and compared the results of the focus group to discover commonalties and differences in the responses. This process resulted in several themes that were then coded in specific categories. In addition, the researcher selected specific quotes from the data to show common themes throughout the focus groups. Quotations considered meaningful and important were grouped with other quotations that were relevant to the research question. These direct quotes serve to provide internal validity of the findings (Baumgartner & Strong, 1998). The various pieces of transcribed materials were used as supportive materials and are incorporated within an interpretive analysis. The transcript appears in Appendix C.

Research Question #14

What are the common topics of concern related to discipline, behavior intervention plans, and functional behavioral assessment when parents of students identified as being eligible for special education services are given an opportunity to express their views during a focus group?

Understanding of discipline procedures. A majority of the parents (67%) responded that they felt that they understood the school’s discipline policies, especially those concerning regular education rules, regulations, and policies. Two of the parents (22%) reported that they only sometimes understood the discipline policies, while one parent firmly reported that she did not understand them. Several of the parents put caveats in place, such as they understood regular
education discipline, but not the differences for special education or they understood the policies, but did not agree with them.

- I feel that I understand the regular education discipline policies, but I don’t know what the differences are for special education.
- I understand them, but I think I came to understand them through trial and error by being called numerous times by the school before I ever understood how they operated.
- I’ve got a son who missed his tutorials which are mandatory, both morning and afternoon, so they gave him two days of PAS. I think some of the school’s discipline rules go a little bit overboard for the crimes committed.

The parents typically agreed that they felt that the school’s discipline procedures or policies were too harsh for their children, even for their children who did not qualify for special education services. Several related incidents where their children received consequences that were not appropriate for the seriousness of the behavior. One parent related how her daughter in middle school was assigned an after school detention for being in the hallway during lunch time. The parent felt that the consequence was a little harsh for what was an innocent mistake.

Several parents agreed that they felt that the school actually implemented polices designed to over-punish students with disabilities. Although they felt that their children needed consequences for their problem behavior, they felt that administrators did not consider the children’s needs. As one parent explained, “They are taking a child who is autistic and making him sit in a chair all day. Sometimes I think they set up the punishment in order to make them fail. I feel like they’re setting him up for failure by making him sit at a table all day. So he had to sit there and obtain a certain level for ten times in order to get out of trouble.” Another parent
expressed the same concern, but felt that is was due to a lack of communication between the school and the parent so that it “becomes a communication breakdown, personal interest conflict, or an educational interest conflict. If they don’t understand the situation to begin with, it’s very difficult to get through the barriers in the first place.”

- My son actually got in trouble before Christmas, and has just today gotten out of that discipline. I mean he already has problems sitting. He also got sent to AEP. They thought that was a solution for him. It just created more headaches for me.
- My daughter in regular education called me very upset because she had gotten her first detention. Evidently, you are not supposed to be in the hall during lunch time, and she and a friend had run down to put a note in a boy’s locker and they were nabbed by the principal. So she gets to visit Thursday school this week for something that was very innocent. She is taking it very hard.
- I had to miss work for 15 days in the fall because my son was suspended. Until finally, after he was assaulted by his principal, he was put in the right placement.
- I’m just praying that [my son] won’t get anymore referrals, because if he does, they’re going to send him to AEP. He can not afford any more office referrals.
- I agree with some of the rules regarding drugs, weapons, and all those things. But some of these things are ridiculous. If they talk in class, you go to PAS for a day. Come on that’s ridiculous.

Awareness of alternative discipline procedures. Fewer than half of the parents responded that they knew that alternative disciplinary procedures could be used for their student receiving special education services for problems related to the student’s disability; however, even though these parents knew that there were alternatives, they felt that whether
the procedures were consistently used or implemented depended more on the classroom teacher or administrators than any other factor. Several parents related incidents of how one teacher would work with their child while another teacher would send the child to the office for the same offense.

One parent asked what was meant by “alternative discipline procedures,” and once it was explained she felt like it had actually caused problems for her child saying, “At the school that he’s currently at, a couple of the Special Education teachers felt so sorry for him that they don’t punish him or they don’t give him consequences, since they don’t have to follow the regular guidelines for behavior for all the other students.” She felt that her son had been allowed to get away with behaviors that he should not have and was being moved to another school because his behavior problems had escalated to the point he could no longer stay in the regular education classroom.

- I’m aware of [alternative discipline procedures], but from my experience it really depends on the teacher and what the teacher is willing to do. I’ve had teachers who would not budge one way or another. I don’t want to say that they couldn’t be bothered, but basically that was the way that it came down to. Everybody had to act in a certain way and anybody who acted outside of that was just a problem and they weren’t going to deal with it.

- I think it just depends on who is in the mood to do it or it’s just like, “OK, she’s not going to get to go out to the playground today, or whatever.” It just depends on that person’s mood that day.

- I think it depends on administration’s support. Is the principal in the building going to put up with somebody going to the office if they are aware of their
disability? I’ve had many different principals in the past and in one building they would go to the extremes where the principal would not make any allowances for the disability, but the assistant principal was more special education savvy, and he would make allowances for the disability.

- What do you mean by alternative disciplinary procedures?

Awareness of continuation of special education services. Only four of the nine parents responded that they knew that a special education student must continue to receive services if he or she is removed from the instructional setting for disciplinary reasons. A very interesting point was brought up by one parent on how much special education time and services a student would need if the child was in an inclusion or mainstream setting. Although students may be in a regular education setting for all of their instructional classes, they are still receiving modifications and accommodations for their disability, which may or may not be provided in an alternative setting. Implementing a BIP may be especially difficult, since a student is often expected to sit at a study carrel for the entire day without interacting with other students. Many BIPs allow for movement or for shortened assignments which is often not feasible in a disciplinary setting. Two of the parents had very young children which might help to account for the reason they were not aware that services must be continued. It is unlikely that a 4 or 5 year-old child is going to be suspended from school or placed in a disciplinary alternative education placement.

- Considering the number of kids that I’ve had going through the special education system, I should have know that.

- I didn’t know that either and it’s kind of funny because they would set my son who is in elementary school like they do in middle school--like he is in PAS. He would sit
there all day long in the office. And he didn’t attend any of his special education classes during those times.

- I am aware that [special education services must be continued], but…when you’re dealing with inclusion kids. Just because they are not in special education classes does not mean that they aren’t getting special education services. If they were in special education classes like a resource class or a TU class and they were pulled, they would have to have special education services. But in an inclusion or mainstream class, how much of that is actually considered special education academic services.

- I made sure at AEP that they were very aware of that!

Understanding behavior intervention plans. Several of the focus group questions related to the BIP and how the information for the BIP is gathered and how the BIP was implemented. One of the questions from the state-wide survey was asked, “Do you understand the purpose of the BIP?” Four of the parents responded that they did understand, but offered no elaboration. When the moderator tried to bring out more in-depth responses, one parent defined the BIP as something “to ensure that you have objectives that are positive and negative reinforcers. You should have short-term objectives and it should look just like your academic IEP because it should have observable and measurable goals that are working against each other so that you can extinguish the behavior.”

At this point the tone of the discussion changed; whereas, before the parents freely shared information in a narrative form, they began asking questions of the moderator and making statements in the form of questions. While the parents knew the BIP was to address problem behaviors, they were not sure how the interventions were to be done. Many felt that is was just a form that outlined discipline procedures that could take place, where others wondered if it should
be proactively addressing problem behaviors. Several parents mentioned the overwhelming amount of paperwork that they received at Admission, Review, and Dismissal (ARD) meetings and wondered how they were to keep up with all the different terms.

- My daughter has a BIP in place, but I’m not sure how much they use it!
- If it’s on the BIP, should it be discipline or should it be teaching interventions?
- Should they include new ways to teach the behavior, instead of just discipline? Should they include things like replacement behaviors?
- For my son, they seem to do the same thing all the time. He is constantly in trouble for the same things. I think the BIP focuses on what’s going on. I just don’t think they’ve come up with a reliable way of dealing with it, because I don’t feel like I’m any farther now than I was a year ago.

_Understanding of Functional Behavioral Assessment._ A FBA is the instrument used to gather information for the BIP. Many of the parents were not familiar with the term and could not recall seeing one in their child’s paperwork. A parent interview is one of the recommended strategies for gathering information for the FBA, and most parents could not remember being asked questions that related to the function of their child’s behavior. Parents have a long behavioral history with their children and can offer insight to problems that other can not see. One parent relayed how her child in elementary school can not handle competitive sports, and yet, she was told that he had to be in physical education as part of his instructional day. The mother did not want her child to be kept from going to the gym, but she asked that her child be allowed to help the coach set up goals or be a timekeeper, rather than having him participate in the games. She says that this works for a time, but after a while, they put him back in the game situation, where he inevitably hits someone and the vicious cycle begins again.
As a group, the parents had a wealth of information that could be used to change the environment so that negative behaviors did not continue to occur. Some of the ideas suggested by the parents were to giving their child something to hold to provide for sensory issues like a squeeze ball or theraputty, allowing them to get up for brief periods of time, and teaching them replacement behaviors, such as anger management. It was clear that the parents did not want their children to escape consequences for their behaviors; however, they wanted the school to look for antecedents or triggers that are causing the behaviors to occur. Parents also realized that their children chose to misbehave because they often preferred the place that was used as punishment. Many times children who misbehave are sent to an alternative placement, where there is a very small ratio of students to teachers—sometimes a one-on-one. Many children who are having trouble in school have a difficult time interacting with their peers and completing assignments. These parents reported that they felt that their children chose to misbehave because they preferred the place that the principal was using for punishment, especially in the case of suspension. Parents want their children to behave appropriately in the classroom; however, they feel that behaviors must be allowed in some cases to help their child be successful. One parent related how her son’s teacher allowed him to get up and circumnavigate his chair briefly. According to the mother, the teacher said, “I’d much rather have him to that because he does it quietly and he doesn’t bother anybody else. If I make him sit in his chair, he’s banging on his desk or he’s kicking and pushing. It drives me crazy if I make him sit.” This teacher has instituted changes in the environment that allow him to move and he does so quietly without bothering anyone else. He is also able to complete his work more effectively. While other teachers might insist that he stay in his chair, this teacher has allowed accommodations that allow for this student’s disability.
• One of his problems is that he would get out of his chair and tie his shoes over and over. A compulsive behavior. And his teacher set limits for him, and said “OK, you can get out of your chair and touch your shoes ten times today.” Then after two weeks, she would say “OK, only 9 times today.” By the end of the year, he wasn’t getting out of his chair touching his shoes anymore. But the other teacher would just send him to the principal’s office every time that he got out of his chair to touch his shoes. So you know that it really depends on how much the teacher is willing to work with those plans.

• The more support you have, the easier it is for the teacher to follow the BIPS and to remain focused on the individual rather than the whole class.

• When a behavior happens over, and over, and over again, you have to find the trigger. Finally, we did work on that a little bit and it is better, but they still…When he behaves for a certain period of time, they throw him right back into the mess, and it happens every single time. It got to the point where I said “Don’t call me if he hits somebody. Don’t call me!”

• If they would make more accommodations for their behaviors, then we would see more academically. The schools these days, put more emphasis on how they behave and what they do wrong, than making them learn academics. My fourth grader is reading at a first grade level, and until this year they hadn’t done crap about it.

Another common thread was the way that ARD meetings and paperwork were handled. Parents remarked that they were not familiar with the different forms and were not given a chance to see it until after the ARD. One parent remarked that in her district, all of the forms are computerized, and they do not actually get to see anything until after the ARD when the
information is printed off. Several parents commented that they felt the school tried to withhold information to keep them from asking for more services or accommodations.

- If you don’t know the talk and the language that they are using. And you go into your first ARD meeting and they’re talking about BIPS and IEPS, and ARDS, and FBAS and AUs and ED, and all the other acronyms then you’re so confused. It is so hard to keep up. There are no parent support groups….and the districts won’t provide the information.

- But there was so much paperwork. How could you possibly remember all of the terms? It was probably there, but I honestly cannot remember.

Summary of Results

The purpose of this research was to examine the four survey questions related to discipline from a state-wide survey conducted by Education Service Center Region 9 through a comparison of selected disability categories as they compare to the responses received from parents of students with the disability category of emotional/behavioral disorders. In addition, the research examined the open-ended questions on the surveys to determine the types of concerns related to discipline and behavioral issues reported by parents. Also, a focus group of parents receiving special education services was conducted and data related to discipline and behavioral issues was accrued. Chapter Four presented the data analysis for 14 research questions.

Findings related to the state-wide survey indicated that parents of students identified as having E/BD rated their understanding of the school’s discipline policy lower than most groups. Almost 67% of parents of students identified as having an E/BD stated that they knew that their child might be eligible for alternative discipline procedures while approximately 33% of the parents in the same category stated that they did not realize or were not sure that their students
could receive alternative consequences if the behavior problem was related to their disability. The highest percentage of parents reporting that they were aware that services must be continued if the child was removed from the instructional setting for discipline problems were parents of students with E/BD. This supports the conclusion that parents of students with E/BD are provided the necessary information related to their child’s disability. Over 60% of parents of students identified as having E/BD reported that they understood the purpose of a BIP. Although it is not mandatory, it is likely that most students who qualify for special education as a student with an E/BD will have behaviors that interfere with learning. Almost 60% of the parents of students with autism also reported that they understood the purpose of BIPs. This is important to note since students in these two disability categories often have behaviors that result in situations that disrupt the learning environment. Parents of students of other disability categories stated that they understood the purpose of a BIP at a much lower rate.

Parents of students with the eligibility of E/BD in the ethnicity group of Hispanic reported a much lower understanding of the school’s discipline policy than the ethnicity groups of Caucasian and African American. Thirteen percent of parents of students identified as having E/BD in the ethnicity group of African American reported that they did not understand that services must be continued to be provided if a student is removed from the instructional setting for behaviors related to their disability. It is relevant that parents of African American students with E/BD rate their awareness that services must be continued to be provided somewhat lower at 73.9% than the two ethnicity groups of Caucasian (80.4%) and Hispanic (77.5%) since there has been some concern about the overrepresentation of African American students in DAEP and correctional settings. It is interesting to note that parents of students identified as having E/BD in the ethnicity groups of Caucasian (66.3%) and African American (65.2%) are consistent in
reporting that they understand the purpose of a BIP. This somewhat contradicts the findings on the previous question where a much lower percentage of parents of students in the African American ethnicity group reported that they understood that special education services must continue to be provided if their child is removed from the educational setting.

The understanding of school discipline policies for parents of students with the eligibility of E/BD in large districts is much higher than the understanding of parents in small districts. Parents of students identified as having E/BD in large districts also stated that they were aware of alternative discipline procedures at a much higher percentage (72.2%) than parents from small districts (61.6%). Almost 62% of parents of students identified as E/BD from small districts report that they understand the BIP as compared to 59% of parents from large districts. It is interesting to note that this is the only question related to district size that parents from a small district rate their understanding higher than parents from a large district.

In addition to the structured format questionnaire, parents were given an opportunity to respond to six open-ended, free-response questions. Approximately 40% of all parents responding to the structured format questionnaire answered at least one question from the open-ended questionnaire. The two largest subcategories of information-seeking and problems with school discipline procedures each had 31 responses. Teacher training had 10 responses and programming had 8 responses. Most of these responses were given in response to the question on the survey which asked, “What is the most important type of information regarding special education that you need?” Responses typically varied in the wording, but conveyed the message that parents need information on how to manage their child’s behavior at home. Parents also tended to express concern on whether school personnel also knew behavior management techniques.
A variety of problems regarding school discipline were addressed, such as children being continually suspended for behaviors related to their disability or the BIP not being implemented. Parent responses in this subcategory tended to be negative with the parents blaming the school for not following proper procedures for dealing with students who receive special education. Parent responses also requested that teachers receive more training on how to deal with problem behaviors.

The focus group was designed to provide more in-depth information about questions being asked by the state-wide survey. The procedure for analysis of the data of the focus group was handled by analyzing the contents of the group discussion as it related to the research questions. A majority of the parents (67%) responded that they felt like they understood the school’s discipline policies, especially when it was concerning regular education rules, regulations and policies. Two of the parents (22%) reported that they only sometimes understood the discipline policies, while one parent firmly reported that she did not understand them. Several of the parents put caveats in place, such as they understood regular education discipline but not the differences for special education or they understood the policies but did not agree with them.

The parents typically agreed that they felt that the school’s discipline procedures or policies were too harsh for their children, even for their children who did not qualify for special education services. Less than half of the parents responded that they knew that alternative disciplinary procedures could be used for their student receiving special education services for problems related to the student’s disability; however, even though these parents knew that there were alternatives, they felt that whether the procedures were consistently used or implemented depended more on the classroom teacher or administrators than any other factor.
Several of the focus group questions related to the BIP and how the information for the BIP is gathered and how the BIP was implemented. While the parents knew the BIP was to address problem behaviors, they were not sure how the interventions were to be done. Many of the parents felt that the BIP was just a form that outlined discipline procedures that could take place, where others wondered if the BIP should be proactively addressing problem behaviors. Several parents mentioned the overwhelming amount of paperwork that they received at ARD meetings and wondered how they were to remain familiar and updated on all the different terms and regulations that are being used. A FBA is the instrument used to gather information for the BIP. Many of the parents were not familiar with the term and could not recall seeing one in their child’s paperwork.
CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND
IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

For all students, especially those receiving special education services, academic success is derived from many different considerations, including understanding by parents and guardians of the educational process and the rights of the students. Complex special education laws and regulations concerning the provision of academic services and appropriate procedures for discipline may be both confusing and time-consuming to try to understand. While these procedures and regulations were developed to protect the rights of students receiving special educational services, many of these safeguards may actually confound parents who are not familiar with the acronyms and terminology often used. The academic and behavioral outcomes for students receiving special education services continue to be poor since statistics show that almost 33% of all students with disabilities and nearly three-fourths of students with an emotional/behavioral disorder (E/BD) have been suspended or expelled from school. This is extremely high when compared to a 22% rate of suspension or expulsion for same-age students in the general population (Bradley, Henderson, & Monfore, 2004) Another disturbing statistic is that students receiving special education services comprise approximately 12% of the total school population, yet they represent more than 25% of the students who are removed from regular classrooms and assigned to disciplinary programs (ESC Region 9, 2004).

The purpose of this research was to examine the four survey questions related to discipline from a state-wide survey conducted by Education Service Center (ESC) Region 9 through a comparison of selected disability categories as they compare to the responses received
from parents of students with the disability category of emotional/behavioral disorders. In addition, the research examined the open-ended questions on the surveys to determine the types of concerns related to discipline and behavioral issues reported by parents. Also, a focus group of parents receiving special education services was conducted and data related to discipline and behavioral issues was accrued.

Conclusions and Implications

Based on the findings of this research, the following conclusions can be drawn. Interpreting the results of this study should be done with caution. Subjects in this study may differ from populations in other areas and the conclusions are limited to subjects who are similar to those who participated in the various components of this study. Furthermore, due to confidentiality and proprietary issues, the researcher did not have access to the ESC Region 9 database and was unable to manipulate the data to compare whether there were statistically significant differences between groups.

1. Parents of students identified as having an E/BD rated their understanding of the school’s discipline policy lower than parents of students from other eligibility categories.

2. The Hispanic ethnicity group (79.3%) reported a much lower understanding than the ethnicity groups of Caucasian (87.6%) and African American (91.3%). This may be due to a lack of understanding of the English language and the discipline codes not being sent home in the native language of the student.

3. Parents of students with E/BD in large districts (91.8%) rate their understanding of the school’s discipline policy much higher than parents in small districts (80.3%) rate their understanding. This may be due to large districts having a consistent system of
distributing information to parents or having a standardized code of conduct for the district.

4. When asked to rate their awareness of alternative discipline procedures, the rate of understanding dropped considerably. Almost 67% of parents of students identified as having E/BD stated that they knew that their child might be eligible for alternative discipline procedures. Approximately 33% of the parents of students with E/BD stated that they did not realize or were not sure that their students could receive alternative consequences if the behavior problem was related to their disability. The group of parents who rated their awareness the highest was the parents of students in the eligibility category of autism at 78.3%. This information is very relevant because federal legislation prevents students being sent to disciplinary alternative educational placements (DAEP) for behaviors directly related to their disability.

5. The group of parents of students with E/BD who rated their awareness that students in special education are eligible for alternative disciplinary procedures the lowest was parents of students identified as Hispanic (63.4%). This is consistent with previous findings that suggest lack of understanding of the language may be the reason for lack of understanding concerning alternative discipline procedures.

6. Parents of students identified as having E/BD in large districts stated that they were aware of alternative discipline procedures at a considerably higher percentage (72.2%) than parents from small districts (61.6%).

7. Parents of students identified as E/BD reported at a much higher percentage that they were aware that services must be continued if the child was removed from the instructional setting for discipline problems. This supports the conclusion that parents
of students with E/BD are provided the necessary information regarding discipline, functional behavior assessment (FBA) and behavior intervention plans (BIP) that will help in planning for problem behaviors related to their child’s disability.

8. Thirteen percent of parents of students identified as having an E/BD in the ethnicity group of African American reported that they did not understand that services must be continued to be provided if a student is removed from the instructional setting for behaviors related to their disability. It is relevant that parents of African American students with E/BD rate their understanding somewhat lower at 73.9% than the two ethnicity groups of Caucasian (80.4%) and Hispanic (77.5%) since there has been some concern about the overrepresentation of African American students in disciplinary alternative education program (DAEP) and correctional settings.

9. Over 60% of parents of students identified as having E/BD reported that they understood the purpose of a BIP. Although it is not mandatory, it is likely that most students who qualify for special education as a student with E/BD will have behaviors that interfere with learning. Almost 60% of the parents of students with autism also reported that they understood the purpose of BIPs. This is important to note since students in these two disability categories often have behaviors that result in situations that disrupt the learning environment. Parents of students of other disability categories stated that they understood the purpose of a BIP at a much lower rate. Since a large percentage of students in DAEP are eligible to receive special education services, the importance of a BIP cannot be overstated. Additionally, there are federal requirements that removal to a DAEP not be related to the child’s disability. The fact that 60% of the parents of students with E/BD stated that they understood the BIP
demonstrates that the parents who need the information about behavior intervention plans are getting the information at a higher rate than parents who do not need the information.

10. Almost 62% of parents of students identified as E/BD from small districts report that they understand the BIP as compared to 59% of parents from large districts. It is interesting to note that this is the only question related to district size that parents from a small district rate their understanding higher than parents from a large district.

11. When given a chance to respond through an open-ended questionnaire, parents addressed a variety of problems, such as children being continually suspended for behaviors related to their disability or the behavior intervention plan not being implemented. Parent responses in this subcategory tended to be negative with the parents blaming the school for not following proper procedures for dealing with students who receive special education.

12. In a focus group discussion, a majority of the parent’s (67%) responded that they felt like they understood the school’s discipline policies, especially when it was concerning regular education rules, regulations and policies; however, while parents said that they understood them, they reported that they did not necessarily agree with them. Several parents reported that they understood regular education discipline but not the differences for special education or they understood the policies but did not agree with them.

13. The parents typically agreed that they felt that the school’s discipline procedures or policies were too harsh for their children, even for their children who did not qualify for special education services. Although they felt that their children needed
consequences for their problem behavior, they felt that administrators did not consider the children’s needs.

14. Less than half of the parents responded that they knew that alternative disciplinary procedures could be used for their student receiving special education services for problems related to the student’s disability; however, even though these parents knew that there were alternatives, they felt that whether the procedures were consistently used or implemented depended more on the classroom teacher or administrators than any other factor.

15. While the parents knew the BIP was to address problem behaviors, they were not sure how the interventions were to be done. Many felt that it was just a form that outlined discipline procedures that could take place, where others felt it should be proactively addressing problem behaviors.

16. As a group, the parents had a wealth of information that could be used as positive behavior supports to create an environment that would allow their child to be successful; however, most parents reported that they did not feel like the district listened to their suggestions.

Recommendations for Further Research

Findings from this research support the need to further investigate the parental understanding of parents’ understanding of discipline issues, FBAs and BIPs. Although parents relate that they understand the regular education discipline policies, parents of students receiving special education services do not always understand the differences between the two or what types of alternative services might be warranted. There continues to be a dearth of literature concerning the attitudes and perceptions of the teachers, administrators, and other related service
providers who are responsible for conducting and implementing the BIP. There is also a dearth of literature regarding parental understanding and expectations. More research is needed to determine parental understanding of important elements of parental understanding of special education laws, especially as it relates to discipline and FBA/BIPs.

Further research is also necessary to determine the extent to which Texas schools and other entities responsible for providing information to help guide parents through the process have been successful in providing the information (ESC Region 9, 2004). Additional areas of research might include conducting focus groups across different geographical regions to determine parental understanding and perceptions. Developing an equivalent survey in a quiz format would be helpful in determining true understanding of procedures and policies related to special education rather than reported understanding. Longitudinal studies that follow parents of students in special education would also be helpful in determining if the knowledge base of parents deepens as the child progresses through the special education system.
APPENDIX A

PERMISSION LETTER
January 6, 2005

Dr. Paula Walker  
Director of Special Education, Lewisville ISD  
701 S. Charles Street  
Lewisville, TX 75057

To Whom It May Concern:

Lisa Davison has been given permission to recruit participants for a focus group from parents that attend a Focus Night presentation sponsored by the Special Education Department of Lewisville ISD. The information gained from the focus group will be used to complete research requirements for her doctoral dissertation, "Parental Understanding of Discipline Issues, Functional Behavioral Assessment, and Behavior Intervention Plans: Using a Statewide Survey to Examine Parents' Reports Related to Discipline."

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Dr. Paula Walker  
Director of Special Education
APPENDIX B

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONING ROUTE
Focus Group Questioning Route

1. Do you feel that you understand the school's discipline policy?

2. Can you give the group some examples of discipline problems that have occurred recently at your child’s school?

3. What barriers have you encountered in trying to get help or information that you need to solve discipline issues?

4. Are you aware that alternative discipline procedures can be used for students receiving special education services?

5. Are you aware that special education services must continue to be provided if your child is removed from his or her regular education classroom for disciplinary reasons?

6. Are you familiar with the term “Functional Behavioral Assessment” and was one conducted for your child at his or her last ARD meeting?

7. Do you understand what the purpose of a behavior intervention plan?

8. Does the behavior intervention plan address the problems that your child is having at school?

9. What changes would you like to see made in your school with regard to how discipline is handled?

10. Is there anything else you would like to share with us?
APPENDIX C

FOCUS GROUP TRANSCRIPT
Focus Group Transcript

Moderator: The first question that we are going to be discussing tonight is “Do you feel that you understand the school’s discipline policy?”

Participant #8: No, I’ve spoke with three principals today.

Participant #4: Yes I do, but I don’t agree with them.

Participant #3: Yes, I think I do.

Moderator: We’re discussing the regular education discipline policies at this point. Do you understand the regular education policies for the school?

Participant #1: I understand them, but I think I came to understand them through trial and error. By being called numerous times by the school before I ever understood how they operated.

Participant #6: I feel that I understand the regular education discipline policies, but I don’t know what the differences are for special education.

Participant #5: I agree with number 6. That I know what the policies are for regular education, but I don’t know what the differences are. But I basically understand.

(Participant #9 enters late and she is caught up with the group.)

Moderator: The first question was, “Do you understand the school’s discipline policy?”

Participant #9: Sometimes.

Moderator: There’s nothing like putting you on the spot.

Participant #7: Um….I’ll just say that I never thought about it. Seriously……I don’t know……I guess when it comes up.

Participant #2: Yes.
Moderator: (Pause) Can you give the group an example of discipline problems that have occurred recently at your child’s school? Not necessarily about your child, but something you would feel comfortable sharing.

Participant #6: My daughter in regular education called me very upset because she had gotten her first detention. Evidently, you are not supposed to be in the hall during lunch time, and she and a friend had run down to put a note in a boy’s locker and they were nabbed by the principal. So she gets to visit Thursday school this week for something that was very innocent. She is taking it very hard.

Participant #8: I’ve got a son who missed his tutorials which are mandatory, both morning and afternoon, so they gave him two days of PAS. I think some of the school’s discipline rules go a little bit overboard for the crimes committed. I don’t think the punishment fits the crimes committed.

Participant #1: Just a recent incident. My son is in his specials class, and he was having a bad day. He called his teacher an evil heartless witch. And I got a phone call on that one. He went to the behavior specialist and had to sit out.

Participant #9: My son actually got in trouble before Christmas, and has just today gotten out of that discipline. And I sometimes think they take it a step too far. They are taking a child who is SI and making him sit in a chair all day. He’s going to have a hard time making it through the day. Sometimes I think they set up the punishment in order to make them fail. I don’t mean to but…I feel like they’re setting him up for failure by making him sit at a table. All day. I mean he already has problems sitting. So he had to sit there and obtain a certain level for ten times in order to get out of trouble. He also got sent to AEP. They thought that was a solution for him. It just created more headaches for me.
Participant #2: What is AEP?

Participant #9: Alternative Education Placement is like if you do something major—it’s where everyone gets sent. But they think it helps with behavior management. He went there for 3 weeks. All it did was make my life miserable. I had to get him to daycare by 7 a.m. so that they could pick him up to take him. It didn’t help whatsoever, but they thought that was a solution.

Participant #8: Have you ever heard of transition or heard of…

Participant #9: Carrollton doesn’t do transition, they only do PAS classes.

Participant #8: They don’t?

Participant #9: And they seem to have too high a ratio for kids to teachers in the classes—especially for kids who are SI. They need to have a 2 to 1 ratio instead of a 3 to 1.

Participant #8: That’s what transition is. It’s for behavioral issues. And they’re in a very small classroom. There are 8 kids in the class with three teachers. They deal with behavior first and then with education. One of my sons is going to be lucky enough to go there instead of AEP.

Participant #9: I wish they offered that but they don’t. I feel that our district is missing out when it comes to Special Education. That’s why I’m trying to get a job in the Lewisville School District. So I can transfer my son to this district.

Participant #4: I do think that often times, there is a misunderstanding in the district. There are disadvantages to having transition units. Where I am at—they are called SAC units. But often times, they do not put interventions in place first. So when that happens a child is moved rather than them putting an intervention in place that could have kept that child in their regular placement. But it’s not done. But the other thing that they needed to keep
them out of trouble is not done. Instead of putting an intervention in place, they’re shipped off to another school. There’s not always a class available at every school, so it happens. That’s my only comment. I think it’ll become clearer as we talk why a FBA and BIP are so important….as a support and safety net for those kinds of things.

Moderator: What barriers have you encountered in trying to get help or in trying to get the information that you needed in order to solve discipline issues?

Participant #8: It has taken me two years to get the school to respond to my son to get anything done. Which is way too long. They could have nipped this in the bud two years ago instead of waiting until it got so out of control that he has to be changed to another school. And it was strictly the school system and the teachers because at the school that he’s currently at, a couple of the Special Education teachers felt so sorry for him that they don’t punish him or they don’t give him consequences…Or they give him consequences, but since they don’t have to follow the regular guidelines for behavior for all the other students, so they can get away with more and they know it.

Participant #9: It actually took me 2 six-weeks to even get my school district to even test him. They actually suspended him for 15 days even though I went in the spring and asked for him to be tested, they told me, “No, we don’t test over the summer break.” I had to miss work for 15 days in the fall because he was suspended. Until finally, after he was assaulted by his principal, he was finally put in the right placement.

Participant #1: At first when I was trying to get them to test my son, he was in Kindergarten, and he was totally shutting down. And there was no way, in any way shape or form that he was going to learn anything at that point. And I was told that he had to be three years behind in school before they would test him. And that was the state law, and so I couldn’t
see waiting three years for him to get behind. He couldn’t write…. he couldn’t…didn’t know his letters. There was no way that he was going to survive to the third grade to be tested. So I had him privately tested and took it into the school. It cost me a lot of money, but it was well worth it. It forced them to test him on their own and put him into the avenue that he needed. Since then, we have been able to communicate and work for what is in his best interest. But it was a very difficult 6 months of fighting back and forth of whether they were going to test him.

Participant #8: I ran into that too. You tell them to begin with in Kindergarten, that they are not ready for this and they don’t listen.

Participant #1: Believe me…even his kindergarten teacher recommended that he be tested and they still said that they wanted to wait and that they weren’t going to do it.

Participant #4: I know this is a parent thing, but I also was a kindergarten teacher and I had a student who needed to be tested—you could clearly see that he had many issues—and the district wanted to wait as well.

Participant #1: His teacher was very supportive…..very supportive. I couldn’t have asked for a better teacher under the circumstances. She was great, but the school was very resistant to do anything about it. Basically, you have to push, push, push, and push.

Participant #4: (Brief pause) Can you repeat the question?

Moderator: What barriers have you encountered in trying to get help or in trying to get the information that you needed in order to solve discipline issues?

Participant #4: I think there is a conflict of interest. There is a lack of communication on the school’s part, the parents’ part and the administrator’s part and whoever is involved in trying to get everybody on the same page and trying to get everybody to see the same
behaviors. Trying to get everybody to understand the situation. Very often, I think, it becomes a conflict of communication breakdown or personal interest conflict or an educational interest conflict, or a lack of education on everybody’s part. If they don’t understand the situation to begin with, it’s very difficult to get through the barriers in the first place.

Participant #6: I have a teacher friend, kindergarten teacher, and she says that she is restricted. She’s not allowed to say that the child may have ADHD or anything. She’s restricted in what she can say. The best that she can say....and I’m sure that it’s because of legal reasons....is to go see a doctor. And I think it’s a shame because a lot of parents aren’t going to get right in to see a doctor. There’s a valuable, valuable red flag that can’t be waved.

Moderator: Are you aware that alternative discipline procedures can be used for student’s receiving special education services? (Pause) Let me restate that. Did you know that a school can use alternative disciplinary procedures for students once they have been qualified for special education services?

Participant #8: What do you mean by alternative disciplinary procedures? Such as?

Moderator: If a behavior that a student is engaging in is determined to be related to his disability, then the student should not be punished for that behavior. And so, when something has been identified as being part of their disability, alternative disciplinary procedures can be used. For example, rather than sending a student to an alternative educational placement, the student could be placed in a more restrictive placement or other techniques and supports could be used.
Participant #8: So like what we’re doing. A program that is kind of between the two classes. A class where the teacher knows about the issues and teaches them new behaviors and how to deal with the issues they’ve got.....so they can learn to handle their behavior problems.

Participant #1: I’m aware of it, but from my experience it really depends on the teacher and what the teacher is willing to do. Because I’ve had both ends of the scale. I’ve had teachers who were willing to modify what they do based on the needs of my child and would change how they relate to my child, but I’ve had teachers who would not budge one way or another. I don’t want to say that they couldn’t be bothered, but basically that was the way that it came down to. Everybody had to act in a certain way and anybody who acted outside of that was just a problem and they weren’t going to deal with it. And, I had to have my child removed from a classroom because of that. And they did remove him because I did have sufficient evidence to so show that he would talk out to ask a question because he did not know what to do, and she would turn him to face the wall so that he could not interact with the rest of the classroom. He has ADHD, and he’s going to work? Things like that. And I was able to have him removed because of things like that. And I had other teachers who were …could relate to him as an individual. One of his problems is that he would get out of his chair and tie his shoes over and over. A compulsive behavior. And his teacher set limits for him, and said “OK, you can get out of your chair and touch your shoes ten times today.” Then after two weeks, she would say “OK, only 9 times today.” By the end of the year, he wasn’t getting out of his chair touching his shoes anymore. But the other teacher would just send him to the principal’s office every time that he got out of his chair to touch his shoes. So you know that it really depends on how much the teacher is willing to work with those plans.
Participant #5: I am aware that alternative procedures can be used.

Participant #3: Same thing. My daughter has a BIP in place, but I’m not sure how much they use it. Once again, I think it was more of a spatial thing. She was pushing people. On the playground, she would be up on top of the slide and kids would come up and she would say “Hello, you’re not welcome here.” And they would have to do certain things there. But I think it just depends on who is in the mood to do it or it’s just like “OK, she’s not going to get to go out to the playground today, or whatever.” It just depends on that person’s mood that day.

Participant #4: I think it also depends on administration’s support. Is the principal in the building going to put up with somebody going to the office if they are aware of their disability? I’ve had many different principals in the past and in one building they would go to the extremes where the principal would not make any allowances for the disability, but the assistant principal was more special education savvy, and he would make allowances for the disability. He would work with everybody and would work to make sure that the needs of the student were being met. It’s nice to have that support as teachers as well. Because sometimes when you’re in the classroom, you’re nearly pulling your hair out. When you’re to your last straw, it doesn’t matter who it is, and it’s nice to have somebody to bring you back to reality. Its ok—don’t loose your cool here. It happens, but it’s nice when you have that support. The more support you have, the easier it is for the teacher to follow the BIPS and to remain focused on the individual rather than the whole class.

Moderator: Are you aware that special education services must continue to be provided if your child is removed from his or her regular education classroom for disciplinary reasons?
Participant #7: I didn’t know.

Participant #8: I didn’t know that either and it’s kind of funny because they would set my son who is in elementary school like they do in middle school--like he is in PAS. Well, they do something similar to that in elementary school and he would sit there all day long in the office. And he didn’t attend any of his special education classes during those times.

Participant #4: I am aware of that, but she brings up a good point when you’re dealing with inclusion kids. Just because they are not in special education classes does not mean that they aren’t getting special education services. If they were in special education classes like a resource class or a TU class and they were pulled, they would have to have special education services. But in an inclusion or mainstream class, how much of that is actually considered special education academic services or not--when you’re pulled from a class.

Participant #2: I was aware of that.

Participant #3: The same. I was aware of that.

Participant #9: I made sure at AEP that they were very aware of that.

Participant #5: I don’t think I was aware.

Participant #6: I was not aware.

Participant #8: Considering the number of kids that I’ve had going through the special education system, I should have know that.

Moderator: We are going to be discussing some of the terms related to special education now.

Are you familiar with the term “Functional Behavioral Assessment” and was one conducted for your child at his or her last ARD meeting?

Participant #9: Not at his last, but it was done in PPCD last year. It was one of the first things that this school did for him was a functional behavioral analysis.
Participant #1: I’m not sure what that is.

Participant #4: Probably too well for the district own good. There was a situation where they wanted to put my son in a self-contained classroom, and I said well ok, but you have to do a functional behavioral assessment first. And they said, Oh we did and here’s a two page FBA that was a checklist. That isn’t what IDEA defines as FBA. So I said, I want a comprehensive FBA that triangulates data, and I want this and I want that. And they said Oh, but this school doesn’t provide that. And I said, "Exactly, but under IDEA... yada, yada, yada." So they actually had to outsource and bring somebody in to complete the FBA as defined by IDEA. And they don’t like me so much.

Participant #8: Is the FBA part of the psychological evaluation?

Moderator: Sometimes it is done as part of the psychological evaluation; the psychologist could be a team member in completing the FBA. But it is not a part of the psychological evaluation. Anytime a child is engaging in a behavior that is interfering with his learning or the classroom learning, a team of professionals should be gathered together to look at the behavior and determine the function of the behavior. To determine what is causing the behavior.

Participant #8: And would that be like bringing in a behavior specialist?

Moderator: That is one of the things that a behavior specialist would typically do.

Participant #8: OK, then my son must have had an FBA.

Participant #5: No, I wasn’t aware.

Participant #6: No I wasn’t aware either.

Participant #7: I’m always confused by the terms and what it is.
Moderator: It is a form and you should receive one in the ARD paperwork. And it should have on it “Functional Behavioral Assessment.”

Participant #7: But there was so much paperwork. How could you possibly remember all of the terms? It was probably there, but I honestly cannot remember.

Participant #4: And if it’s not pointed out specifically and exclusively as a parent when you are going through all that paperwork, it is very easy—especially if it’s a two-page FBA like most districts, but not all districts want to do—where one teacher fills out the form. This is not what she just defined as a comprehensive FBA. So when it’s only a two-page piece of paper which a teacher fills out, which is sometimes slipped by as a FBA. It is very difficult to see that that is actually what they are talking about.

Participant #3: Especially in this day and age because we don’t see any paperwork in front of us until the ARD paperwork is printed out and brought back to us. So as far as going through the paperwork, filling it out and showing us. That doesn’t happen.

Participant #8: On mine, I absolutely put my foot down this year and I said, “You’re going to do it or I’m going straight to the superintendent. And I wanted a full everything. He’s eligible for these tests and I wanted it done. And based on the results that I’m getting. We haven’t had his actual ARD yet, so I’m not sure of everything that they did, but their doing what they should be doing….Finally.

Participant #4: And you should know that. If you have had a FBA, because part of it is parent interviews, part of it is ……..Am I steeping over bounds? (Laughter)

Participant #8: Well, I just didn’t know what it was and it sounded like something that was done. Yes, I was involved in it, but I didn’t know what it was called.

Participant #7: So we’ve all had one of these done at some time?
Moderator: Not necessarily. Only if your child’s behavior has or is causing a problem with their own learning or is interfering with the learning of others. Like in the case of a classroom disruption. There are certain eligibilities which typically indicate that a FBA/BIP would be necessary. Like if your child has an ED label or if your child is AU. Sometimes with ADHD there is a lot of impulsivity. You would not want your child disciplined for impulsive behaviors because that type of behavior would be related to the handicapping condition. That would be a time that you would want an FBA/BIP. For that type of situation.

Participant #4: Isn’t it under the law that when they are withdrawn from an educational placement that it is mandated?

Moderator: Right. That’s a good point. If your child has been out of the educational setting for disciplinary reasons, for…actually it’s 10 days. That is a minimum. I have to say that in our district, that an FBA is done anytime there is a behavior that interferes with learning. However, different districts do different things.

Participant #1: Does the functional behavioral assessment have to be done before the BIP is established?

Moderator: Yes, that’s right.

Participant #1: So if you have a BIP, then chances are that you had the assessment.

Moderator: Right. You should have. (Laughter)

Participant #7: What language are we talking here? (Laughter)

Participant #9: Actually my son’s was done after. We had a BIP in place, and then we did that to find out what the key was to the tantrumming. Why was he tantrumming? Of course it’s changed totally this year. Ours was done by the top behavior specialist in the district. She
took a special interest in him. But now this year is completely different, because as they
change, as the brain chemistry changes, then you’re back to square one each year.

Participant #5: I think I have a BIP on one child, but I don’t remember seeing a FBA. Or talking
about a FBA.

Participant #3: I don’t remember a FBA, but it might be in there. I know that the BIPs there.

Moderator: How many of you were asked for your input? If your child has a BIP in place, an
FBA should have been conducted to determine the BIP, the behavior intervention plan.

How many of you were consulted or asked to give input to the FBA?

Participant #5: I wasn’t.

Participant #1: I was.

Participant #3: I was.

Participant #9: I was.

Participant #8: I was, and actually I was a big part of it. And his ARD is next week. And I don’t
have everything in writing yet. But since Christmas, I have been very much involved with
the process of testing. Every step of the way.

Participant #4: Yes.

Moderator: The next question is asking about the BIP. It’s just kind of a general question. Do
you understand the purpose of a behavior intervention plan?

Participant #4: Yes.

Participant #2: Yes.

Participant #8: Yes.

Participant #1: Yes. (Laughter)
Moderator: Would someone like to elaborate on what they think is the purpose of a behavior intervention plan. That actually wasn’t a very good question for a focus group. That question came from the state-wide survey. I’m using some of the questions directly off the state-wide survey and some of the questions I developed for this focus group. When I ask a question and everybody just goes “yes”, then I realize that it’s not a very good question for a focus group. Who would like to elaborate on what they think the purpose of a behavior intervention plan is?

Participant #4: It’s to ensure that you have objectives that are positive and negative reinforcers—correct me if I’m wrong, because we’ve gotten out of my expertise—You have positive reinforcers and you have the objective of what you want the child to do. And sometimes, on the forms they will have a competing behavior of what you do not want the child to be doing. So those behaviors should not be compatible. And that’s what you’re trying to do. You’re trying to alter the behavior of the student. You should have short-term objectives and it should look just like your academic IEP because it should have observable and measurable goals that are working against each other so that you can extinguish the behavior.

Participant #8: They are mastered or not mastered. There’s no in-between.

Participant #4: Right.

Participant #1: But at the same time, if they have this established behavior that you say can’t be punished, but that they are trying to correct. But yet it’s not something that they can…..I can’t think of the right word to use…..

Participant #9: I disagree. I think they do overly punish. Because for my son, they seem to do the same thing all the time. He is constantly in trouble for the same things.
Participant #4: I want to ask if that is one of his objectives on his BIP.

Participant #9: Oh yes it is. But we’re not progressing.

Participant #8: I usually agree with most of this, but I this point I actually disagree because I was after them, and after them, and after them. Why can’t we make this routine? We had a teacher, two teachers actually, that felt so sorry for him, that they would not cooperate. And so he got away with murder. And now the teachers are being surprised because now we’re in fourth grade. And I want to sit back and say “I told you so!”

Participant #1: At the same time, my child is in fourth grade too. His teachers are very good, but at the same time, if they spent so much time disciplining him over the things that he really can’t help himself. Well he can, but he’s having trouble helping himself. And if they were to discipline him, he would be disciplined so much that they wouldn’t be able to get anything else out of him.

Participant #4: That’s my issue too. If it’s on the BIP, should it be discipline or should it be teaching interventions?

Participant #1: I think there has to be consequences when they exhibit the behavior, but….

Participant #4: But if there are not interventions to correct the behavior, then it’s going to become a vicious cycle.

Participant #2: Should they include new ways to teach the behavior, instead of just discipline? Should they include things like replacement behaviors?

Participant #8: That’s exactly what my son is going in to. He’s getting a whole new fresh start and they do not focus on the negatives. Now this is probably out of context, but they would teach him, “No, that’s not how we do it, we do it like this.” There is no
punishment for how you did it, but we’re going to learn how to do it this way. It’s not….There’s no….That’s just how we do it.

Participant #1: I don’t know in other districts, but don’t most kids who have a BIP in place—don’t they go to a behavioral specialist for a certain amount of time a week and learn alternate behavioral patterns……My child does.

Various voices: No…Different districts do it differently….It depends

Participant #4: It can be different school to school sometimes.

Participant #9: Sometimes it’s a class.

Participant #1: Well, he goes with one or two other kids, but it’s not a huge group. They work on relating, and whatever the problem is. And they work on expressing yourself versus lashing out.

Participant #8: My son in the middle school, he gets 80 minutes per cycle where he goes for 20 minutes at a time with other kids that are having the same kinds of social problems or whatever. But it’s not enough. I don’t care what they say. Now the program that my other son is going in to. He will be with behavior specialists every day, all day. It won’t be where he’s disrupting class any more, because the class that he’s going to be in is especially designed for children with behavior difficulties.

Participant #4: When my son was in fourth grade, they had a behavior unit at his school for first, second and third grade. The fourth and fifth grade SAC unit was in a different building. We were able to tap into what you were saying. I was able to suggest that we tap into the talents of the behavior specialist for behavior problems. Because those teachers are used to dealing with a variety of behavioral issues. So for his fourth grade year, he did have that support in his classroom. But in his fifth grade year, they did not want him as a fifth
grader to be interacting with the younger students so that support was completely and
totally eliminated. And that was the same year that they were talking about including him
in the SAC unit and moving him to another school. And so they removed the services,
and all of the sudden there was this tremendous amount of behavior and then it was “Oh
look, he’s a behavior problem and he’s got the AU label, so we want to move him to a
different school in fifth grade.” So really if just depends from school to school and
district to district, administrator to administrator what the resources of your school are.
Participant #8: Yeah, we are having to change schools because the program is not offered at his
school. And I’m just praying that he won’t get anymore referrals, because if he does,
they’re going to send him to AEP. He can not afford any more office referrals.
Participant #9: My child loves AEP. (Laughter)
Participant #5: It’s supposed to be a punishment….You’re supposed to hate it. (Laughter)
Participant #9: Yes, he loved it.
Moderator: Just as an aside…..I’m not really supposed to be adding a lot to the discussion, but
that is the purpose of the functional behavioral assessment. To determine whether that
might actually be a reinforcer for them rather than a negative consequence.
Participant #9: It is a reinforcer and an escape mechanism.
Participant #8: My oldest loved PAS. He would tell me that he could get all his work done right
then and there. No one would interrupt him.
Participant #9: Plus, it is one on one. They get a lot of attention. That’s what they are looking for.
My son knows that if he gets in trouble at school, he can get one-on-one and that’s what
he wants.
Participant #4: if you’re trying to escape the confines of the classroom and all the stressors that your peers are putting on you. All the pressures of work, all the pressures of get this work done now, and you’re trying to escape that. And that is why your behavior is erratic, then you put them in AEP placement where they can do it on their own, in the quiet, by themselves, they can have help or not have help, what is going to stop them from being bad, if the classroom is a more difficult place to be than an alternative placement.

Participant #8: That’s why we’re changing to an alternative placement. And when he goes to fifth grade, he’ll never have to leave this school. He’ll stay there until he goes to middle school and they’ll put him in the middle school that has the program for him. Even after he gets better and goes back into regular education classes, he’ll stay at the school where the program is so that he’ll have the support of the program to fall back on.

Moderator: The next question is, “Does the behavior intervention plan that you have in place address the problems that your child is having at school?”

Participant #8: Currently no.

Participant #3: Yes.

Participant #4: I was going to ask you if that will change.

Participant #8: Yes, I think there’s going to be a whole lot of change. Right now, my son is not even in a class. He goes to his favorite teacher from third grade and sits with her all day. She gives him work and when she’s doing her class, he’s just sitting on the side.

Participant #4: Not currently, but I have to say that the issue is with the timing of the ARD. We’re coming up close to an ARD date, I think. And as the year progresses, he’s done so well that I think he’s outgrown a good bit of the interventions that they’ve put into place. Also, he had a facilitator. So there have been a lot of changes. I wish there was an avenue
or a vehicle by which that if he does master all of those objectives, and they stay maintained for six weeks, eight weeks, twelve, weeks. That we’re not stuck with the same BIP all year long.

Participant #1: You can call a BIP. Can’t you?

Participant #4: Yeah, but when you cause as much trouble as I do, you try to stay under the radar as much as you can. I don’t think it’s the parent’s responsibility every single little minute time to call the school and say “Look”. I think the school should have the responsibility for that too.

Participant #8: That’s kind of what happened this is or what they call that transition class. They call it transition. They can graduate out on their own after so many weeks of the right kinds of behaviors. They can go back into the mainstream class. From the beginning, he’ll still have his homeroom class and be a part of that fourth grade class and his specials. As he graduates for so many weeks, then he’ll get to go back. Now if he slips, then they have consequences in place. But he knows that up front. He’s been a big part of the ARD himself. Because now he knows exactly what is expected of him and what he has to do. Which I think is something that districts might want to consider doing— involving the children in the ARD. Maybe they have a conflict with the teacher, which just hasn’t been brought out. Maybe there’s a certain way that teacher is acting or something. Not everybody gets along.

Participant #9: I think the BIP focuses on what’s going on, I just don’t think they’ve come up with a reliable way of dealing with it. Because I don’t feel like I’m any farther now than I was a year ago. Except for going to all this separate ARD meetings. I have pushed them too at school. Please help him with his anger management. That’s his biggest problem.
He doesn’t know how to express himself verbally when he gets frustrated. And getting them to actually put in situations where he’s getting upset, and then help him work through it. Because I look for playgroups and anything else that I can get him in to help him with that, but it’s not easy to find.

Participant #8: No, there’s not!

Participant #9: There’s just not a lot out there.

Participant #8: There are not a lot of resources for them. That’s why I pushed so hard. Because I went and got the—and it seems like it’s this thick (holding hands about 6 inches apart)—of what’s available and what’s the school’s responsibility. What they can do and what limit they can do it, and to what extremes I can ask. And I just started saying, “Hey, Do this and do this.” And I started writing it down in these little codes and so now they don’t…. Or if something comes up that I don’t know what’s going on. I go home and I research.

Moderator: What changes would you like to see made in your school with regard to how discipline is handled?

Participant #8: I think they need to take away a lot of there silly rules that are just……

Kids……Sixth graders. Their favorite thing to do is tap on the desk. All the teachers know it, all the principals know it, but if every time the kid taps on the desk, he gets sent down to the office. How much time is he wasting? Is it really that big of deal to tap on a desk? Especially if the kid has ADD or ADHD. You know, they’re not hurting anybody. They’re not stabbing people, they’re not…..I’m mean I agree with some of the rules regarding drugs, weapons, and all those things. But some of these things are ridiculous. If they talk in class, you go to PAS for a day. Come on that’s ridiculous.
Participant #4: I had a problem with a teacher last year. My son is dysgraphic and he finally decided to write. He’s all excited and so he’s starting to write with his favorite pen. He’s finally decided to take an interest in writing, and do you think I want to take away his favorite pen? Pens are different and it uses different fine motor skills. If you write with pen, if you write with pencil, there are two different types of sensory. Especially those types of pens that you barely have to touch. So everything is great until he goes to Math. So she makes this big issue over writing in pencil to the point where I actually brought his individual counselor in, because I asked for her to talk at his ARD. This whole big ordeal over pencil or pen. Even the diagnostician was asking, “Is it that big of deal?” And all she said was “YES!” Well, guess what she created? This aversive relationship between him and the teacher. So now, he knows he’s suppose to be aversive, but he doesn’t even remember why. The pencil and the pen thing—only the teacher remembers that. Because that was six weeks ago. But now we’ve created this pattern of behavior and I’m going to make you mad. Does that make sense? So now rather than looking at the issues or looking at inconsequential preventative interventions or preventative comments, or the student, now we’re going reactive because there’s this huge explosive between her and him. And nobody can remember why. And the deal is…so finally…we get him to use a pencil and what does he do? He chews the eraser off. Well then he gets in trouble for chewing the eraser off. Or for chewing the pencil. He’s AU and he has stereotypic behaviors. He’s obsessive-compulsive. He’s going to do that. It’s one of his tics. That pencil is shredded by the end of the day. Where if you had a pen, it wouldn’t be chewed in the first place. And guess what? We get to middle school and the teacher says, “Go buy erasable pens. I won’t tell.” So I go buy erasable pens and that’s what he’s using and
that’s the end of it. So sometimes, just because a teacher wants one thing one way and
doesn’t want to put modifications or accommodations into place to modify that for the
good of the individual or the good of the student instead of looking at the student’s
disability and trying to accommodate it. It’s the teacher’s way, or no way, or the
highway, and all of the sudden you have these compounding behaviors and the landslide
that happens on top of that. And you wonder why?

Participant #1: I had a similar problem and my question was…You know…..the behavior….and
I’m not condoning the behavior, but at the same time you’re ignoring the triggers of the
behavior. You know? My son had a problem in PE. He’s very competitive and they
would play a game, a ballgame, soccer, or whatever, and if somebody steals the ball from
him. He comes unglued, has a little fit or tantrum. He has hit other children and I’d be
like, “Why does he have to play the game. Can’t you give him something to do like
timing the game, setting up the goals? Make him involved in the process, but keep him
out of the game. They would call me up and say, “He hit another child.” And I would ask,
“What was he doing?” It took me forever to get that across to them. In competitive
things, in a situation, it is something he cannot handle. He cannot handle competitive
situations, but yet he has to go to gym. And I tell them, “I’m not saying he can’t go to
gym, but can’t he help the coach set goals?” It took me forever to get that through to
them. Instead of punishing him when he would do it, I’d tell them to give him alternative
things to do. Or even make it…..because the kids……once they knew that they could get
my son’s goat. They would do it because they thought it was funny to see him fall apart.
So then, “I’m like….What are the other kids doing?” “Well we can’t discuss that with
you.” “We’ll I understand that you can’t discuss the other students. I’m not asking for
names, addresses, and phone numbers.” I just saying that you have to take the whole behavior and the whole scope of the behavior. When a behavior happens over, and over, and over again, you have to find the trigger. Finally, we did work on that a little bit and it is better, but they still…When he behaves for a certain period of time, they throw him right back into the mess, and it happens every single time. It got to the point where I said “Don’t call me if he hits somebody. Don’t call me!”

Participant #5: That’s so funny!

Participant #4: I called the principal back one time because he called me. And while I was calling him, he was on the other line calling me back again because my son had been in trouble again. That’s exactly what I said, “Quit calling!”

Participant #8: I got so frustrated because I would get three to four phone calls on my one son every day. And I said, “You call me again, then you’re going to pay my salary.” I said, “What is it this time?” I said, “Haven’t you been trained to learn how to handle this? Because I’m not the one getting paid to do this. You are and it’s your responsibility, and the school district’s responsibility. And it’s your duty to figure out what to do.” And they went and told the principal on me. So then I get called to the principal’s office. (Laughing)

Participant #9: I sometimes think some of my son’s tantrumming could be prevented if we actually recognized OT services at school. My son’s been going to an OT for about two and a half years now and I’ve seen a huge change in him for two years. He’s now able to play soccer, and he’s the only one who can stand in line at soccer and not goof off. He stands there perfectly fine. Now two years ago, he couldn’t even stand in line—he would kill someone. He’d hit them or punch them or do something. Now he’s the one who can
stand there. And there are times I keep mentioning to them, “You know what? He needs the weighted blanket. He needs the weighted vest. He needs the ball to sit on.” “Nope! Can’t have them. Doesn’t qualify.” Because it’s only about the writing. And you know. That is something that really needs to be looked at in schools. Because there is much more need for these kids with sensory integration issues. And that is not recognized. I keep getting told, “That is not part of his ARD. That is not part of his BIP.” But those are contributing factors to his tantrumming. Because it’s amazing. If you brush him a couple of times a day. He can keep it together. He can keep his frustration under control. But I had to get a doctor’s note to get him brushed at AEP. Because they were like we can’t brush him. And I told them, “It’s very easy to brush him. He’s got the brush. It’s very easy. He even does it.” “Nope, we can’t brush him. He’ll have to do it on his own.” There’s so many things that we could do that would help him on his BIP, but no we can’t do them because they’re OT and he doesn’t qualify because he writes fine. That’s a frustration for me. And I don’t know how to change it. I’ve taken everything from his Occupational Therapist. She used to work with school districts and offered to help do anything that she could do. But they’re not going to do anything for him. It’s just frustrating because there are a lot of things that we could do to limit the behavior—especially for kids that are ADHD. What’s wrong with them having a little thing in their lap that they’re doing something with when they are writing or doing something?

Participant #8: Exactly!

Participant #9: Or once you’re done with that.

Participant #8: If you have an ADD child that is done with their work, what do you expect them to do with their hands? Give them something to do or quit complaining.
Participant #1: I think a lot of that is how much your teacher is willing to work with you. I have another child who is now in first grade, and he is ADHD, and his thing is he can’t sit in the chair. So he is doing this (Stands up and circles chair) all day long. It drives the teacher crazy, but she said, “I’d much rather have him to that because he does it quietly and he doesn’t bother anybody else. And if I make him sit in his chair, he’s banging on his desk or he’s kicking and he’s pushing. It drives me crazy if I make him sit. So now she’s learned to let him just circle his chair because he does it quietly and he doesn’t bother anybody else. He’ll stop and write down something. He’ll do his work and then he goes back to circling his chair. A lot of other teachers would not put up with that. But he’s much happier when he’s able to do it. And now she says that since she’s let him do it, he does it less.

Participant #9: He has a new focusing activity.

Participant #4: It comes down to tolerable behaviors. Socially acceptable behaviors. You guys are absolutely right. It is much easier to put a squeezy thing in your hand then it is to be pulling a kid off the wall because they have no sense of where they are in the world. No sense of.....what is that word I’m looking for? Grounded. If they’re not touching something then they’re not grounded. If they’re not, then they are everywhere. Another issue too. I found out, lo and behold, when my son was in the fifth grade, he is reading on a first grade level. But when he gets to middle school. We found out that he’s suddenly gifted. So all this time in elementary school was wasted time, because he could read on the fifth grade level in the first grade. And he could have taken a fifth grade test and passed it in the first grade. So most the schools around here are K-5 and 6, 7, 8. So he gets to middle school, and I can’t say enough great things about his teacher, but she says,
“He’s really bored.” So we tested him and put him in the gifted classes. We’re not even going to mess with the testing, we’re just going to put him in there and see how he does. And he took off. All the sudden he has this out and he’s just taken off with it. But if we had to test him for giftedness, then he wouldn’t have passed the test because the other issues would have gotten in the way. So one day, he’s reading history, he’s in history class. And he’s got his book right here and his other book right here. The teacher approaches him and tells him to put his other book away so that he doesn’t get in trouble. And he says I know right where we are. We’re right here.” And goes back to reading his other book. So these kids are way...way smarter than we even give them credit for. And we’re trying to put these round pegs in square holes. And if we do that, we’re going to shave the kid instead of making a few more accommodations.

Participant #8: Exactly! If they would make more accommodations for their behaviors, then we would see more academically. The schools these days, put more emphasis on how they behave and what they do wrong, than making them learn academics. My fourth grader is reading at a first grade level. And until this year, they hadn’t done crap about it. I was pretty involved, but I could go to all these special meeting during the day to find out what was going on and city council meetings, and all this other stuff. But when I quit work, I put my family first. I work harder now than I’ve done and I get paid less for it. But I could help any mother who had a child who had any kind of disability with the ropes of where to go.

Participant #4: I think that listening to you guys and those of you who disclosed the ages of your kids; we’ve been in this for nine years now. At the age of three, we were in a district in West Texas. There was no information. Any information I got, I got it because I went and
found it myself. And that is unfortunate. Terribly, terribly unfortunate. Because as all of you guys can attest, we don’t have the energy for that. We’re running circles with the kids.

Participant #8: She got so mad at me because it is public information and they didn’t have any books to hand out. And I waited there for four hours while she copied every page. She went and called someone and told me, “We don’t have time.” And I told her, “It’s my right!” And she got her supervisor, and her supervisor got her supervisor who called the superintendent who said, “We have to supply her with that information. You can ask her politely if we can have time to pull it together or you can sit there while you do it.”

Participant #4: And that is exactly right. And if you don’t know your right to the information or where to get the information, or how to talk about the information. Because when we’re talking about FBAS, and you were chuckling about all the acronyms and whatnot. That’s the thing. If you don’t know the talk and the language that they are using. And you go into your first ARD meeting and their talking about BIPS and IEPS, and ARDS, and FBAS and Aus and ED, and all the other acronyms then you’re so confused that you’re saying, “What was my name again?” It is so hard to keep up. There are no parent support groups. There are no…..and the districts won’t provide the information.

Participant #3: They don’t want you to get the data.

Participant #4: Exactly!

Participant #8: If they got parents like us with children like us all in the same school or right within the same school district. They would be hammered and they would hate us! And if we told any other parent, we’d be on their hit list.
Participant #3: Actually, I belonged to one in Michigan. There were a bunch of little districts that got together. And it was the schools that were actually recruiting people. That actually surprised me. I was new to the whole thing and I got on board. It was really interesting to even be in a fairly close radius to these other schools on different things that were going on. Things that I had no idea that even existed. It was like “Wait a minute! It was done over here at this school, so we can do it over here.”

Moderator: It is time. But I would like to ask if there is anything else that anyone wants to share before we close?

Participant #7: Where are the dad’s? (Laughter) What’s going on here?

Participant #9: I don’t get any support. My son’s father is bipolar, so it’s better like that. (Laughter) We just had a manic episode. God blesses us with what we need. My two best friends both had children that were autistic. Their children were much more sever, but my son is mild compared to what they went through. But they went through this; I saw her go through it. And thank God, because she is the one who walked me through this. She’s the one who went to my first ARD with me. I’m a teacher, but I’ve never been through that side of it. But you ask about the fathers. Sometimes it’s better if they are not involved. For me right now, we see him once in a while, but he’s not a help, he’s a hindrance.

Participant #8: They never agree with us either.

Participant #9: If you need consistency with your child, and they’re bouncing back and forth. It’s very difficult for them when they need consistency. And my ex is the first one to admit right now that he’s not good with my son. He’s not a help at all.

Participant #4: There was a statistic out there somewhere. You take all marriages and 50% of them end in divorce. And you take that number and 50% of that number is families of
Special Education. That would be a 75% divorce rate for families with children in Special Education.

Moderator: Thank you for coming tonight. You input was very helpful and greatly appreciated.
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