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A SURVEY OF ATTITUDES TOWARD THE PROPOSED NEW JERSEY SPECIAL
EDUCATION ADMINISTRATIVE CODE REVISIONS

by

Michael W. Gasky

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Master of Arts Degree in the Graduate Division
of Rowan University
May 1, 1997

Approved by _____
Professor

Date Approved 4/24/97

ABSTRACT

Michael W. Gasky
The Special Education New Jersey Administrative Code Policy Proposal Survey
1997
Dr. S. Jay Kuder
Master of Arts in Special Education

This study examined the reaction of teachers to five proposals for reforming special education. These proposals include the achievement of the Core Curriculum Content Standards, inclusion of exceptional students in state and districtwide assessments, child study team revisions, classification changes, notice reduction, and the redefining of consent. A fifteen closed-ended question survey with five Likert-type rating scale optional answers was developed. Seventy three graduate students in education participated in this study. The categorical data was illustrated through charts, graphs, and crossbreak tables. Survey analysis revealed that 52% supported the policy proposals, 35.9% were in opposition, 11.2% indicated no opinion, and 0.9% did not respond. The study further revealed that concern for the exceptional child was a priority, and that whether in support or opposition to the policy proposals, educational personnel are to continue to render quality service to the exceptional child in a professional and dignified manner.

MINI-ABSTRACT

Michael W. Gasky
The Special Education New Jersey Administrative Code Policy Proposal Survey
1997

Dr. S. Jay Kuder
Master of Arts in Special Education

Seventy three graduate students attending Rowan University were surveyed to determine their reactions and concerns to proposals for reforming special education. The analysis of the surveys indicated support for the policy proposals, although a number of concerns were expressed by the respondents.

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Chapter One Hypothesis and Research Question

Introduction

Recently Dr. Leo Klagholz, the New Jersey Commissioner of Education, presented a series of policy proposals to the Special Education New Jersey Administrative Code 6:28. Taken together, these proposals represent a revolutionary approach to the way special education is currently directed in New Jersey. The policy proposals are designed to provide school districts with increased flexibility in the provision of special education services. Currently, special education services are focused on regulations and procedural issues which have proven to be burdensome to the educational community. Dr. Klagholz proposes an approach that is student centered, will result in high academic achievement, and will enable, to the fullest extent possible, students with disabilities to fulfill the Core Curriculum Content Standards.

These policy proposals are currently being considered by the New Jersey Department of Education. The major elements of the policy proposals provide options in regard to the use of child study teams, the revision of the current medical model disability labeling system, the redistribution of class size and type, the mandating of the Core Curriculum Content Standards, and the inclusion of students with disabilities in state and districtwide assessments.

These policy proposals, if initiated by the New Jersey Department of Education, will impact special education services on three levels. The first is the school district. The policy proposals will allow districts to solve problems based on their own specific circumstances rather than requiring them to implement a single prescribed solution. The second is economically. Since districts will be provided with a greater level of flexibility of prescribing special education services to its' pupils, opportunities to implement quality programs at a reduced cost will benefit the local communities. Districts will have the

opportunity to redirect resources to effective instruction. Finally, the student with disabilities will be impacted. Student achievement and programs will become the focus rather than procedural issues. Local, individualized planning, based on the unique needs of each individual student, will be provided through these policy proposals.

Although there are many positive aspects to these policy proposals, problems may exist that will need to be addressed. What are some of these potential problems that parents, child study team (CST) members, and teachers, both regular and special education, may face should these policy proposals be approved? Parents may disagree with the policy proposal of allowing one CST member to be present at meetings for the purpose of identification, evaluation, and classification. They may insist that the present mandate requiring the entire CST (a school psychologist, a learning disabilities teacher-consultant, and a school social worker) to participate in the referral process continue to ensure a variety of professional disciplines and viewpoints. Due process hearings may result to settle disagreements between parents and school districts.

Child study team members may disagree with these policy proposals also. Although the option of allowing one CST member be present at meetings throughout the referral process and reducing the number of required evaluations to two may be expedient and cost effective, a "divided" team approach may prove to be ineffective and a disservice to the pupil with disabilities.

Regular and special education teachers may view the policy proposal of including students with disabilities in statewide and district assessments as unrealistic. Pressure to meet the Core Curriculum Content Standards and to succeed in assessments such as the High School Proficiency Test may prove to be burdensome to both students with disabilities and the regular and special education teacher. Teachers may be held to a greater degree of accountability for student performance on such assessments if these policy proposals are mandated.

Problem Statement

Given the potential impact of the proposed changes in special education, I propose to examine the following question: What are the reactions and concerns of educational personnel in regard to the recent policy proposals to the Special Education New Jersey Administrative Code 6:28 by New Jersey Commissioner of Education Leo Klagholz? Specific policy proposals to be considered for this investigation include curriculum standards and assessment, child study team revisions, classification, notice and consent.

Hypothesis Statement

My hypothesis is that the reactions and concerns of educational personnel and parents in relation to the recent policy proposals to the Special Education New Jersey Administrative Code 6:28 by New Jersey Commissioner of Education Leo Klagholz will be a composite of skepticism and optimism. Educational personnel may respond with optimism due to pending flexibility in the educational process yet, they also may view the changes with skepticism due to inclusionary and funding issues that may lead to teacher cutbacks in many districts. Parents may fear a loss in quality education for students, both nondisabled and with disabilities, due to the policy proposal ramifications. However, optimism may prevail for parents who favor inclusion and hail the policy proposals as an improvement to New Jersey's educational system.

Definition of Terms

1. Educational Personnel

This term will be used to define child study team members, teachers, both regular and special education, and administrators.

2. Special Education New Jersey Administrative Code 6:28

This term defines a handbook of legal guidelines and procedures for directing special education programs in the state of New Jersey.

Purpose

These proposed policy changes if initiated, will redirect New Jersey special education programs and administration. This redirection may have ramifications on both state and local level. Many of these ramifications may be seen immediately. Others may develop as these policy proposals are implemented and as time progresses. Some immediate ramifications may be seen in the area of personnel reduction and the need for in-service training. If student's with disabilities are to be prepared for district and statewide assessments, it may be beneficial to include these pupils into a regular classroom where the Core Curriculum Content Standards has already been implemented. Also, if the classification policy proposal is approved, it may increase mainstreaming and inclusion efforts for such pupils. These two policy proposal aspects may lead to the necessity of team teaching composed of regular and special education teachers, or it may require that teachers be dual certified to educate both nondisabled students and students with disabilities. In either case, the number of required teachers may also be reduced and replaced by teacher assistants. Cuts in funding may result in numerous employment losses and the reduction of quality education for both student populations.

Educational personnel may have to attend several in service training seminars if such proposals are approved. These in services may be designed to assist educational personnel in understanding the policy proposals and what new responsibilities are required of them in the process.

Child study team members may find it difficult to communicate effectively if the option of allowing one member to be present at meetings throughout the referral process is approved. They may also decide that three evaluations is most beneficial to the pupil with disabilities instead of the proposed two. Certain members may view their discipline to be vital in the evaluation of a potential pupil with disabilities. Other members may disagree and decide that their discipline and professional judgement is sufficient for the proposed two evaluations.

Parents may view two evaluations as insufficient and detrimental to their child. They may think that three is necessary to ensure a proper diagnose. A third evaluation may be the parents financial responsibility if these policy proposals are approved. Parents of nondisabled students and students with disabilities may decide that it is not in their child's best academic interest to be in an inclusion classroom. They may determine that the quality of education is disrupted due to the diversity of needs represented in such a class.

As these variables are considered, educational personnel will need to be prepared. Therefore, this study will serve as an instrument of preparation. As educational personnel are surveyed and interviewed, they will have the opportunity to reflect on the impending policy proposals and begin preparing for these changes in special education should they be approved by the New Jersey Department of Education.

Overview

This thesis will consist of four remaining chapters. Chapter two will focus on literature review. What are the "experts" saying about changes in special education? What are the reactions and concerns of educational personnel and parents to such changes? What are or have been the ramifications of proposed special education changes in recent years? Chapter three will emphasize research design and the procedure used to collect data. The results and analysis of this study will be examined in chapter four. The fifth and final chapter will discuss the survey. The results of the survey will be examined. Survey implications and the limitations of this study will also be discussed. Finally, suggestions for a follow up study will be presented with options for future research.

Chapter Two Literature Review

Introduction

In the mid-1980s, various states began to experiment with the concept of deregulation in education. Influenced by national reports which cited deregulation as an opportunity to improve teacher performance and increase professional innovation at the local level, states permitted schools to solicit waivers from regulation (Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, 1986; Holmes Group, 1986). Purkey & Smith (1983) maintained that this move toward flexibility developed from the evolving philosophy that autonomy from overburdening state regulations was a catalyst toward school improvement. Schools that are freed from impositions that stem from state regulations which mandated the specifications, organization and delivery of education, could devise services that best meet specific needs of their students. Teachers, administrators and other professionals who frequent contact with students would make expert decisions at the local level. To encourage efforts in deregulation, educators agreed to be held accountable for their performance (National Governors Association [NGA], 1986).

Fuhrman & Elmore (1995) examined the development of deregulation from limited waiver programs to charter programs and new performance-based accountability systems that included broad-scale deregulation. They indicated that early deregulation efforts were so limited in scope that expected results were few. Broader deregulation efforts also proved difficult in producing desired results. Habits of practice and political forces were barriers to both the early deregulation efforts and the latter, broader deregulation endeavors. A continuing state role uncertainty regarding waiver implementation, deregulation and how states should delegate to school districts of varying types compounded the difficulty of implementing deregulation.

Waivers

Waivers are exemptions from state codes and regulations. They have been used to provide districts facing unusual emergency situations additional time to comply with state regulations. Waivers typically dealt with the length of the school year, removing minimum requirements in crises, bad weather or other unavoidable circumstances, teaching out of field, and permitting districts to staff classes when properly certified teachers were unavailable (Furhman & Elmor, 1995). Due to the move towards autonomy, states began to offer waivers specifically to encourage school innovation in the late 1980s.

Furhman & Elmore (1995) surveyed principals in 125 schools eligible for deregulation, 4 elementary schools, an intermediate school and a high school (all deregulated), in two South Carolina districts between 1990 and 1992. Interviews were conducted with central office and building administrators and three to seven teachers in each school. Interviews with teachers and administrators from three school districts in Washington State were also conducted over the same period of time. A telephone survey of project coordinators in all eligible sites was completed in 1993. In Texas, teachers and administrators in 7 schools eligible for waivers were also interviewed between 1992 and 1993. Finally, state policymakers, association leaders, analysts, and agency personnel were interviewed in each state concerning deregulation and its implementation.

South Carolina, Washington, and Texas were states that promoted innovation and therefore received waivers. Furhman & Elmor (1995) discovered that programs developed from waivers in these states were limited in design and had little effect on school practice after a few years of operation.

In 1992, Furhman & Elmore (1992) reported that South Carolina and Washington efforts began to reflect broader thinking about school practice and operation. This broader thinking approach was encouraged by local politics and associated monetary awards. Even with this variable stimulating broader efforts at deregulation and school reform, Furhman & Elmore (1995) concluded that deregulation produced modest effects

and that there is little indication that deregulation is more of a stimulus for change in individual schools over a period of time than traditional methods.

Criteria and Eligibility

In the programs studied by Fuhman & Elmore (1995), only certain schools were eligible for exemptions from state regulations. Three criteria were used to measure eligibility: (1) high achieving schools were accepted and were rewarded through deregulation, (2) schools were selected to participate through a competitive process, and/or (3) were part of a detailed change plan/application process. To qualify, each school had to meet at least one or more of the three criteria. In South Carolina, all three criteria were used to deregulate schools. South Carolina's Flexibility Through Deregulation (FTD) Program allowed automatic exemption from rules instituted in the state's Defined Minimum Program (DMP) to schools that achieved School Incentive Grant rewards twice over a four year period. These recipient schools performed high on standardized tests comparable to schools with similar socioeconomic status. 245 schools received deregulated status between 1989 and 1994. The FTD Program also provided school innovation and dropout grants. Individual waivers and rule by rule waivers could also be requested by these schools which were selected under these programs. Few schools did request these specific waivers (Fuhman, Fry, & Elmore, 1992). The South Carolina state board eventually developed a restructuring program after schools who wished to receive waivers but were not qualified to do so complained that the programs were not designed to serve their particular needs. After reviewing specific waiver requests, 106 other schools received restructuring waivers through 1993.

In Washington State, Fuhman & Elmore (1995) studied the Schools for the Twenty-First Century Program, which provided grants to competitive schools and encouraged school restructuring. This program offered funding for additional contracts to school employees for a ten extra day maximum beyond the school year for the purpose

of planning and preparing for the following school year. It also provided waivers for impeding rules that restricted the implementation of proposed programs. Districts were required to cooperate with the program which was six years in duration. By 1994, 7 districts and 26 schools had participated in the program.

Texas had various approaches to waivers as well. Furlman & Elmore (1995) discovered that in 1992, the Partnership School Initiative (PSI) provided waivers for 83 schools which were chosen through a proposal process. Half of the schools were elementary, one quarter were middle schools and the final quarter was composed of high schools. 2,500 schools responded to the PSI. The selections were based on the desire to innovate and were made by twenty regional service centers. Other criteria included: instructional leaders, a committed faculty and staff, a visionary principal, a central administration and board that favored deregulation, and a supportive community. These Partnership Schools who were selected for the waivers received the assistance of a regional center coordinator and top state officials who visited and offered services to the PSI sites.

Waivers in Texas were also applied to the Innovative Grant Program which was delegated through legislation to the Educational Economic Policy Center at the University of Texas at Austin. Low performing schools with at-risk populations applied to the center for participation. Twenty seven grants were delegated for innovation and thirty-one sites were provided with waivers in 1993-1994. To broaden eligibility for waivers, schools could send an application to the Texas Education Agency, which included documented information on board, superintendent-principal support, and faculty involvement (Furlman & Elmore, 1995).

Waiver Effects

The broadest approach to deregulation was South Carolina's Flexibility Through Deregulation (FTD) Program. Automatic exemption from many regulations in the state's

Defined Minimum Program (DMP) was given to eligible schools. Regulations that were removed were codes that were primarily concerned class scheduling, class structure and staffing. Mandated was the minimum six hour elementary day, however, maximum lunch time requirements and the variables under which activity periods reflect instructional time were eliminated. Mandated subject time allocations were removed, although each subject was still required to be taught. Certified teachers were still required, but not necessarily certified in the subjects to which they were assigned. High School graduation and standardized testing requirements were still mandated as well as some special needs programs. A class size cap was instituted for the gifted and talented class while general class size limits were unrestricted (Furhman & Elmore, 1995).

Waivers in Washington's Schools for the Twenty-First Century Program, affected the school year length, teacher contract requirements, teacher/student ratios, compliance requirements for salary caps and program offerings. Funds appropriated by the state legislature for programs such as bilingual instruction and learning assistance could be combined for provisional assistance (Washington State Senate, 1987). Waivers did not apply to graduation or testing requirements. Several sites applied for waivers and were denied approval by the state. Some denials were implemented out of concern by the state over potential ramifications that may affect special needs students also served by federal programs. Several sites desiring waivers perceived the application process as a headache, fearing bureaucratic red tape, specific codes and regulations that may tangle efforts for school reform and deregulation (Furhman & Elmore, 1995).

Restrictions in Texas affected the waiver program as well. The waiver authority for Partnership Schools and for general applications was not extended to curriculum-essential elements, elementary class size, minimum graduation requirements, restrictions on extracurricular activities, at risk programs, special education or bilingual programs. Schools supported by the Innovative Grant Program were waived to some extent from these specific regulations (Furhman & Elmore, 1995).

By creating rules of eligibility for waivers, states have taken a cautious approach toward deregulation. In their concern for health, safety, and civil rights, states have maintained fundamental regulations such as mandated curriculum essentials. While allowing for class size flexibility, some type of restraint remains in place for class size population. Establishing limits, rules, and requirements revealed states caution in regard to deregulating special education programs. This hesitant approach may be attributed to federal laws, regulations and mandates or constituencies and pressure from special interest groups (General Accounting Office [GAO], 1993; Hetrick, 1994; Fuhrman & Elmore, 1995).

Waiver Innovations

Schools operating with waivers initiated several interesting approaches to academic achievement and motivation. In South Carolina, subjects were integrated. Math and Science were combined to create an innovative and time effective approach to learning. Programs such as art, music and foreign language were also added to the elementary grades (Fuhrman & Elmore, 1992). In Washington, outcome-based approaches, off campus learning, and interdisciplinary approaches for course enhancement were experimented with. A restructuring and site-based management program was designed by a network of schools for the benefit of developing innovative classroom techniques and teaching approaches. The Texas Partnership Schools investigated several reform options which included: Accelerated Schools, Glasser's Quality Schools, community instruction, critical thinking, authentic assessment, and portfolio assessment (Fuhrman & Elmore, 1995).

Response to Deregulation

Pressure to develop new approaches to teaching, curriculum adaptations, academic challenges and opportunities were reported by several waiver recipient sites. Deregulatory

schools were viewed with optimism and expectation by state and local officials, other school districts, parents, and the general public. Schools in Texas, South Carolina, and Washington initiated programs for the purpose of innovation but also due to the pressure that stemmed from the optimism and expectation of change and success. A South Carolina administrator asserted that deregulatory status continued to create an atmosphere of expectation three years into the waiver program. A coordinator for a Texas Partnership School compared the Partnership Schools to a fish bowl that was on display for all to see. In Washington, educators felt that a meaningful change was not being accomplished in their schools due to high expectations to achieve (Furhman & Elmore, 1995).

Furhman & Elmore (1992) asserted that regulations were not necessarily responsible for many of the barriers to educational innovation as they appeared to be. In each state, schools initiated programs that could have received state approval before deregulation, but did not due to unfamiliarity with state codes and regulations. The Flexibility Through Deregulation (FTD) schools in South Carolina reported that several of the activities that they were implementing or had implemented could have been initiated before deregulation had they designed the programs in a way that would have been conducive to the DMP. A Washington State official stated that what the deregulatory schools thought were once barriers to change were actually not. After receiving waivers from regulations, they realized that what they wanted to do could have been achieved through the established state codes and regulations.

Other Factors

State regulations are affected by other factors and appear to be more restrictive than what they really are. Some of these factors include: local school board policies, union contracts and noneducational mandates such as environmental codes, city and county laws, and requirements. Educators and administrators may blame regulations when confronted with barriers to innovation and general attempts to experimenting with new

approaches to teaching and curriculum adaptations. Fuhman & Elmore (1995) argued that state regulations are usually viewed through a lens of tradition and therefore are interpreted as such, when actually, codes and regulations have always been open to interpretation by school districts and boards.

Removing the rules through waivers did not necessarily enable teachers and administrators to envision new and dynamic educational approaches, rather it was a starting point toward innovation and strategy. Usually, the effort in obtaining a waiver will motivate a district to begin experimenting with change, and once a waiver is obtained, the risk of stepping out of habitual approaches to teaching and administration will be encouraged and expected. Teachers and administrators perceived codes and regulations in Washington to be restrictive and limiting, however, Fuhman and Elmore (1992) maintained that the state regulations were rather weak. South Carolina traditionally developed regulations that were strong and defined. Texas historically has allowed local regulations to control schools and districts until the 1980s when mandates were reviewed, rewritten, and redirected through state intervention (Picus, Hertert, & Van Kirk, 1993).

In conclusion, despite state regulations and codes, the mandates are actually less restrictive than they are actually perceived or imagined to be.

New Jersey Deregulation Efforts

Public Law 94-142, the *Education for all Handicapped Children Act of 1975*, provided an educational "civil rights" charter for all children with disabilities. Prior to this enactment, millions of children with disabilities were denied equal access and opportunity to a free and an appropriate education. In 1990, the United States Federal Government reauthorized PL 94-142 into IDEA, the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (PL 101-476). This reauthorization emphasized the individual rather than the handicapping condition and enhanced service availability and related services to students with disabilities. IDEA stipulated that each child with a disability was to be guaranteed an

education that met individual need, a free and appropriate education was to be provided in the least restrictive environment, and the rights of each child and family were to be protected and ensured through procedural safeguards (U.S. Department of Education, 1995; IDEA Index, 1995).

While IDEA has assisted millions of students with disabilities complete high school, attend college, procure employment and function in society, academic achievement, employment and graduation rates of students with disabilities were still significantly lower when compared to nondisabled students. As a result of this discrepancy, the United States Federal Government proposed several amendments to IDEA in 1995 to ensure success and increase educational competencies among the special needs population. The New Jersey Department of Education also recognized that IDEA and the Special Education New Jersey Administrative Code 6:28 have not achieved the intended measure of success for students with disabilities. Therefore, New Jersey Commissioner of Education Leo Klagholz has proposed several special education policy proposals to amend the Special Education New Jersey Administrative Code 6:28. These policy proposals, if approved by the New Jersey Department of Education, are intended to increase creativity, flexibility and innovation in special education through local school districts in the State of New Jersey (U.S. Department of Education, 1995; New Jersey State Department of Education Public Information Office, 1996;).

New Jersey Task Force

In 1995, a New Jersey Task Force on Special Education was formed to examine issues regarding the funding and implementation of special education services. The Task Force efforts were focused on developing options for a cost effective provision of special education to children who needed such services. The Task Force also made numerous recommendations regarding curriculum standards and assessment, child study team adjustments, classification, notice and consent. Based on these recommendations, policy

proposals to the Special Education New Jersey Administrative Code 6:28 were developed by Commissioner of Education Leo Klagholz .

On August 7, 1996, the New Jersey State Department of Education issued a news release concerning Commissioner of Education Leo Klagholz's policy proposals. In the release, Dr. Klagholz asserted the necessity of adjusting the special education system for the purpose of deregulation, local flexibility in initiating codes and regulations, educational excellence and student centered results rather than focusing on regulations that limit initiative and innovation. The news release concluded with a statement regarding the State Board seeking public input to the proposed policies, speculation regarding the revision of the policies, and then a possible informing of the Commissioner to put into effect the regulations based on the proposed policies (New Jersey State Department of Education Public Information Office, 1996).

Hearings

Hearings were scheduled throughout 1996. These hearings were designed to elicit public concern and comments regarding the proposed changes to New Jersey special education. The New Jersey State Board of Education then issued a reflective summary of public concerns regarding child study team adjustments, classification, curriculum standards and statewide assessments, consent, notice and other special education issues. Comments were stated by concerned parents, teachers, child study team members, social workers, lawyers, doctors and members of special education special interest groups such as United Cerebral Palsy Association of New Jersey and The Arc of New Jersey (State Board of Education: Comment Response Form, 1996).

Child Study Teams

One comment was made in regard to the proposed child study team approach toward evaluations. The concern was if this aspect of the proposal is approved will

districts be required to staff complete child study teams when only one member is required for identification, evaluation and classification? The State Board asserted that each district will still be required to staff a complete child study team in sufficient numbers to secure the availability of necessary programs and services. However, the proposal will still allow child study team flexibility to ensure time opportunities for consultations and interventions.

Reactions to Child Study Team Proposal

Reactions to the child study team policy proposals included support for the proposals, the need for legislative intervention, the necessity for all members to be present at eligibility and IEP meetings, the perceptions that changes in the child study team regulation will result in poor communication between parents and members, and that the proposals are designed to eliminate the social worker from team membership (State Board of Education: Comment Response Form, 1996).

The New Jersey Education Association disagreed with the child study team policy proposals. According to the NJEA Review (1996), the association believed that each member needs to be present at meetings to determine a student's eligibility for special education services. The expertise of each member is needed to determine if a disability exists and in what area. The NJEA further believed that future amendments could be made to reduce the number of evaluations that child study team members are required to make should the proposals be approved. This belief is based on a report (MGT study) that was recently released by the state which suggested the subcontracting of child study team members in school districts. The NJEA stated that this implied that the child study team will provide restricted direct services to students except for evaluations. Finally, the NJEA viewed the proposals as an instrument to restrict funding rather than a tool that will serve the special needs population.

According to School Psychology Review (1991), Public Law 94-142 mandated that child study teams are responsible for decisions regarding eligibility and programming for special education students, not individual members. The law limits the influence of any single member from making such decisions by requiring consultation from parents and a multiplicity of professionals.

In conclusion, child study teams are viewed as providing numerous benefits to students, teachers, and schools in general. Some of these benefits included: accuracy in assessment, classification, and special education decisions, a panel for diverse professional input and judgement, provision of consultative services to schools, students, parents and agencies, and a team resource for producing innovating programs and methods for the educational community (Pfeffer, 1981).

Classification

Another comment was made regarding the proposed single classification system. How would this differ from current medical model disability labeling system and what are its future implementations? Under the current model, funding was distributed for students with disabilities based on the students placement. Schools who had students with disabilities placed in the regular classroom did not receive special education funding to cover services. As a result of this discrepancy, this current system created a perception that funding designated pupil placement. The proposed model will designate a single classification: "Eligible for Special Education." This label will be based on federal eligibility category definitions. Funding will be distributed on student eligibility rather than placement. Districts may apply to the state for the assumption or reimbursement of extraordinary costs. Some of these extraordinary costs include residential placements and intensive needs programs (Report of the New Jersey Legislative Task Force on Special Education, 1995).

Reactions to the Classification Proposal

Responses to this proposal varied. Four individuals voiced support for the classification policy proposal. Others stated that legislative change was necessary and that before the proposal was approved, specific criteria needed to be developed. Concern for current students already labeled and classified was asserted as well (State Board of Education Comment Response Form, 1996).

Carol Spencer, a mother of a student who has been diagnosed with ADD, was apprehensive toward the change from the medical model disability labeling system to the one "Eligible for Special Education" label. This label change could restrict special services for her son who has been diagnosed with ADD. According to Spencer, who is also the mayor of Denville, New Jersey, the state policy will not categorize ADD as eligibility for special education services because it is not technically a learning disability. She maintained that if this one classification system is approved, ADD children will not be protected in the state of New Jersey (Bridgeton Evening News, 1996).

Core Curriculum Content Standards and Statewide Assessment

The third issue that was discussed was Core Curriculum Content Standards and statewide assessments. This aspect of the proposal included to the fullest extent possible, students with disabilities to meet the Core Curriculum Content Standards and participation in statewide assessments. In an interview with the Trenton Record (1996), Commissioner Klagholz emphasized the need and purpose for the Core Curriculum Content Standards and assessments. The standards were needed to present a clear foundation for New Jersey's education system and to identify the results expected of students graduating from high school. Assessment is designated for all students both regular and special education. Currently, large numbers of students with disabilities are not participating in statewide assessments due to instruction in educational programs that are not derived from regular

education curriculum standards (New Jersey Department of Education News Release, 1996; Education Week, 1994).

According to the *Comprehensive Plan For Educational Improvement and Financing* (1996), the Core Curriculum Content Standards laid a foundation for student achievement. These standards constituted what every student should achieve in every grade level and also established expectations which composed a thorough education. The process of developing these Core Curriculum Content Standards began in 1993. In 1995, Governor Christine Todd Whitman directed the Department of Education to include parents, college professionals, business representatives and educators in the developmental process. Drafts of competitive standards were written and refined in the following core areas: mathematics, science, language arts and literacy, social studies, world languages, comprehensive health/physical education, the visual and performing arts, and careers.

Assembly Task Force On Core Curriculum

In 1996, a task force was created to review and recommend changes in the drafts of the Core Curriculum Content Standards. After recommending modifications to the drafts for the sake of articulating the educational vision clearly, the task force issued a concern. Before assessment can be completed in each content area, adequate time for professional development and familiarity with the standards, local adaptation of a curriculum based on the new standards, and a state development of a curriculum framework must be implemented for student and teacher success. The task force also disagreed with the mandated world language requirement as a content area in the core curriculum (Final Report of the Assembly Task Force on Core Curriculum, 1996).

Core Curriculum Content Standards Approval

In May 1996, the Core Curriculum Content Standards were approved by the New Jersey State Board of Education. Commissioner of Education, Leo Klagholz, asserted

that the adoption of the standards represented a completed component to the New Jersey Constitution which stated over 120 years ago that a thorough and efficient education is a state responsibility (New Jersey Department of Education News Release, 1996).

The Core Curriculum Content Standards are not designed to serve as a curriculum guide for the schools of New Jersey. Its' purpose, rather, is to define the results expected of every student upon the completion of each grade level. It does not instruct which teaching methods or strategies should be implemented in the process of attaining those results. It can, however, serve as a framework in selecting or developing curricula for local school districts (New Jersey State Department of Education: Core Curriculum Content Standards, 1996).

Core Curriculum Content Standards and Assessment Reactions

Responses at the New Jersey State Board Hearing Meetings varied. Support for the inclusion of students with disabilities in statewide assessment was articulated. Others stated that modifications and adaptations will be necessary for students with disabilities to compete fairly with nondisabled students in statewide assessments. Students with disabilities who fail assessments with modifications should not be excused due to a disability. Another stated that including students with disabilities in statewide assessments based on the Core Curriculum Content Standards will set students with disabilities up for failure. Finally, support for linking IEPs and instruction according to the Core Curriculum Content Standards was asserted (State Board of Education: Comment Response Form, 1996).

Another resource showed support for the inclusion of students with disabilities in statewide assessments. According to Education Week (Olson, 1994), a report by the National Center on Educational Outcomes stated that students with disabilities should be included in national, state, and local assessment programs to the greatest extent possible. The report advises federal officials to adapt guidelines for the National Assessment of

Educational Progress to include students with disabilities. This federal program tests national samples of students in core academic areas. Currently, IEP team members can decide whether or not a student should participate in state or local assessments. It is assumed, according to this report, that any student with an IEP is automatically excluded from such assessments. This report further advocates that modifications be made so that students with varying degrees of disabilities could complete assessment measures. However, adaptations that could affect test results should be carefully studied. The National Center on Educational Outcomes goal is to develop an assessment system to monitor the performance of students with disabilities.

The American Federation of Teachers viewed subject matter standards and a core curriculum as a new concept in American education. Skepticism is to be expected when new ideas are presented as the key to innovation and student motivation. However, the Federation agreed that rigorous and realistic standards set for each grade level can be an opportunity for teacher, parent, administration, and student motivation if thorough preparation is mandated and allowed for. The need for clear and specific standards that are based in academic disciplines that lead to a core curriculum for all students was emphasized also (Educational Leadership, 1995).

The National Council on Educational Standards insisted that students be provided with ample opportunity to learn in order to succeed in statewide assessment. They further maintained that if core curriculum results were to be expected, then properly developed curricula is to be adapted in America's schools (Education Digest, 1992).

Commissioner Klagholz asserted that the development of these standards were a collaboration of many parties. Other states and even nations were investigated in order to research and compile innovative and challenging expectations for all New Jersey students. Standards were developed for each grade so that a time framework would bring closure and the next grade would present a new series of challenges (Bergen Reporter, 1996).

Conclusion

It is logical to conclude that parents, teachers, administrators, and legislators want to improve the quality of education and provide extensive opportunities through deregulation for both the nondisabled student and the student with disabilities. An optimistic and cooperative spirit may characterize dialogue and preliminary meetings. Specific changes in the school system and the acknowledgement that continued discussions and compromise are necessary for the cooperative advancement of educational improvement may be agreed upon without hesitation. But as time progresses, such optimism and cooperation fades into factions, power struggles, and suspicion. The original intent of improving education through deregulation is now colored with these variables and when decisions are made and the results published, the general public may still be divided over the outcome (Farkas, 1993; Fuhrman, 1995; Schnaiberg, 1996; Neus 1996; Lacet, 1996).

The above scenario illustrates what has occurred in the State of New Jersey. Divided concerns and responses over child study team, classification, the Core Curriculum Content Standards, statewide assessment and other special education policy proposals by Commissioner of Education Leo Klagholz, have left many with either an optimistic or a pessimistic outlook regarding future special education programs and services. Another special education proposal may further divide parents, teachers, administrators and the public in general. New Jersey Governor Christine Todd Whitman has proposed to limit special education funding to ten percent of all students in each school district. The Whitman Administration and the Klagholz policy proposals could be adopted by the State Board of Education by August of 1997 (Courier-Post, 1996).

Chapter Three Research Design

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to assess the viewpoints and opinions of educational personnel in both regular and special education, and to serve as an instrument of awareness and preparation for educational personnel should these policy proposals be approved by the New Jersey Department of Education.

Subjects/Setting

73 graduate students, 62 females and 11 males, (with a mean age of 35.8 and 33.6 years respectively), attending Rowan University of New Jersey, were participants in this Special Education New Jersey Administrative Code Policy Proposal Survey (figure 3.1). Educational foundation classes were selected for this survey since a variety of educational disciplines would be present in the enrolled student population. These graduate level foundation classes included *The Foundations of Education*, *The Foundations of Learning Disabilities*, *The Educational Psychology of the Exceptional Student*, and *The Foundations of Educational Policy Making*.

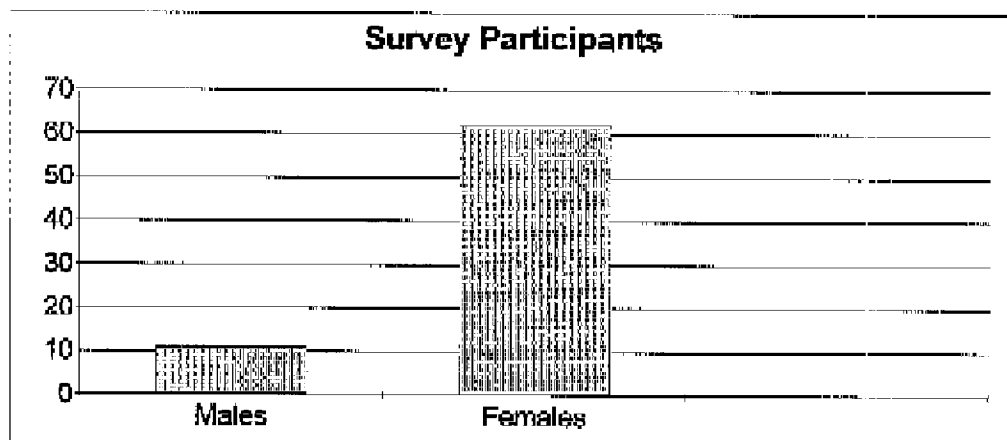


figure 3.1

Survey Implementation

Permission had to be granted from the professor of each class before the survey could be implemented. After permission had been granted, a date and time was arranged for the completion of the survey. Each professor had a preference as to how the survey was to be dispersed and collected. In two of the foundation classes, permission to deliver a brief presentation was given regarding the purpose of the survey before it was dispersed to the students. In the remaining classes, the professors dispersed the surveys with instructions of their own.

Survey Completion

Two professors allotted time at the beginning of their class for the completion of the survey. In another class, the professor opted to wait until the end of the class before the survey could be completed and collected. In the final class, the students were given one week by the professor to complete the survey and return it.

The survey was completed within three to fifteen minutes. Participants who did not comment on questions finished quickly, while those who chose to explain their responses generally required additional time to complete the survey.

Instrument Description

The instrument that was used in this survey consisted of an overview which briefly explained the policy proposals, an instructional paragraph, an age and gender indicator, a policy proposal familiarity level question, an educational employment setting question, and fifteen closed-ended questions regarding the policy proposals to the Special Education New Jersey Administrative Code 6:28 in classification, curriculum standards and assessment, child study team, notice and consent. Each question provided five Likert-type

rating scale optional answers. Lines were also provided below each question for an optional explanation of the answer chosen.

Survey Question Development

The fifteen closed-ended survey questions were developed from researching and reviewing several New Jersey Department of Education documents and news releases. The tone and specifics of each question were based on the research, comments, opinions and responses from and to each document and news release. Such documents included: *The Strategic Plan for Systematic Improvement of Education in New Jersey; The Core Curriculum Content Standards; The Report of the New Jersey Legislative Task Force on Special Education; The Final Report of the Assembly Task Force on Core Curriculum; The Comprehensive Plan for Educational Improvement and Financing; and The State Board of Education (Special Education) Comment/Response Form.* New Jersey Department of Education News releases included: *"State Board of Education Adopts Core Curriculum Content Standards"* (May 1, 1996), and *"Commissioner of Education Proposes More Flexibility in Provision of Special Education Services"* (August 7, 1996).

News releases from other sources also influenced the development of the fifteen survey questions. Such sources included the Bridgeton Evening News: *"State Blasted for Less Commitment to Disabled Students"* (October 17, 1996); The Courier Post: *"Special Ed Parents Fear State Changes"* (November 10, 1996), and a *"Transcript of Interview with Gov. Whitman and Commissioner Klagholz"* from The Record (September 5, 1996).

Survey Results

The survey results will be diagnosed in chapter four. The categorical data will be illustrated through the use of charts, graphs and crossbreak tables. Such data will include the number of male and female survey participants, the average age of both genders, the familiarity level percentage, and the educational employment setting of the 73 survey

participants. Each survey question will be examined and the responses reported in percentages and averages. Questions that incurred a high percentage of positive or negative reactions will be noted with explanations provided by the survey participants. Written comments regarding the remaining survey questions will also be examined and developed. Interviewed responses regarding the surveyed policy proposals will be included as well. Finally, the overall reaction to the Special Education New Jersey Administrative Code Policy Proposal Survey, whether in support or opposition, will be revealed.

Chapter Four Analysis of Data

Introduction

In this study, I hypothesized that the reactions and concerns of educational personnel in regard to the recent policy proposals to the Special Education New Jersey Administrative Code 6:28 by New Jersey Commissioner of Education Leo Klagholz would be a composite of skepticism and optimism. This chapter will examine this hypothesis and reveal the results of the policy proposal survey.

Sample Description

The survey participants included 11 (15.1%) males and 62 (84.9%) females (figure 4.1). The age range of the male participants was 23 - 50 with a mean age of 33.6 years. The age range of the female participants was 22 - 50 with a mean age of 35.8 years.

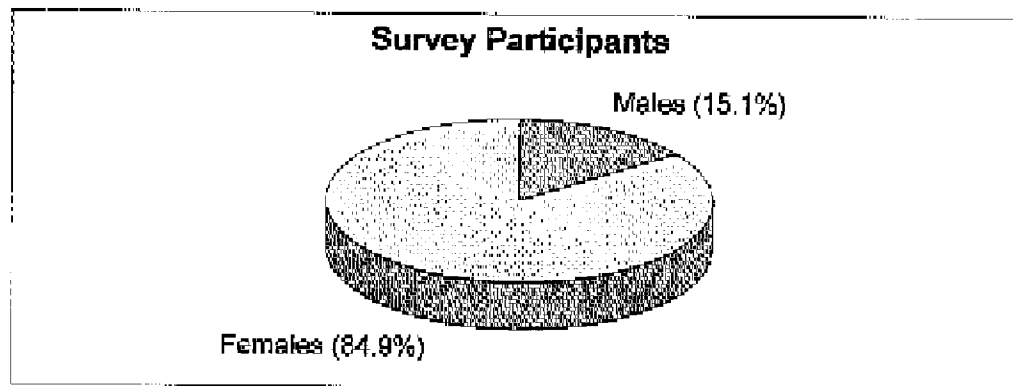


figure 4.1

Familiarity Level

10 (13.7%) survey participants indicated that they were *very familiar* with the policy proposals. 37 (50.7%) indicated that they were *somewhat familiar* and 26 (35.6%)

indicated that they were *not at all familiar* with the proposed changes to the Special Education New Jersey Administrative Code 6:28 (figure 4.2).

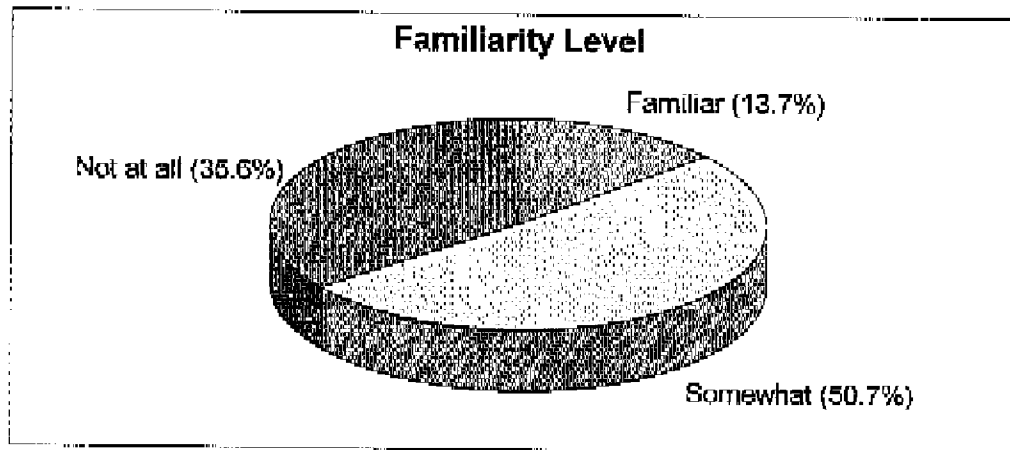


figure 4.2

Employment

21 (28.8%) of the survey participants were employed as regular education teachers and 26 (35.6%) as special educators. 3 (2.7%) were administrators (which included a related services coordinator), 2 (5.5%) were employed as members of child study teams (which included a learning disabilities teacher/consultant and a school psychologist intern), and 17 (27.4%) of the survey participants were employed otherwise (this included employment as basic skills teachers, college personnel, a college soccer coach, a drug and alcohol rehabilitation counselor, librarians, media specialists, a mental health worker, a regular teacher/administrative assistant, a remedial reading specialist, a special education teacher's aid/preschool, a special education art teacher, a substitute teacher, and a teacher's aid for the perceptually impaired). 2 of the survey participants were full time graduate students enrolled in an educational program and 2 survey participants were educators who were currently unemployed (figure 4.3).

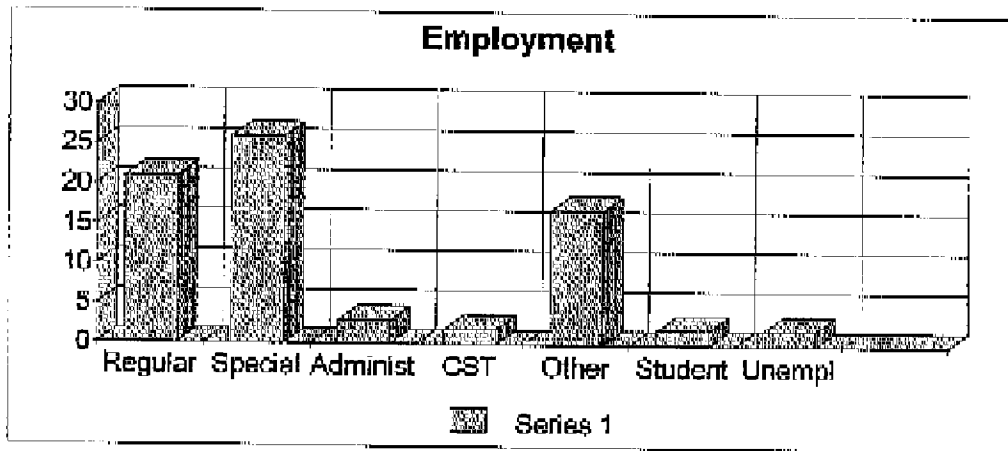


figure 4.3

Survey Questions

The fifteen survey questions regarding the policy proposals to the Special Education New Jersey Administrative Code 6:28 by New Jersey Commissioner of Education Leo Klagholz will be reiterated and the number of specific selected Likert-type rating scale optional answers to each question will be noted. Explanations provided by survey participants regarding response selection will be described following each question.

Charts

A chart indicating the percentages of those strongly supporting, supporting, opposed, strongly opposed, no opinion or no response will follow each policy proposal question. In charting each question's responses, strongly support will be charted as "R/A" (response "A"), support will be charted as "R/B" (response "B"), opposed will be charted as "R/C" (response "C"), strongly opposed will be charted as "R/D" (response "D"), no opinion will be charted as "R/E" (response "E"), and if a survey participant opted not to respond to a question, "N/R" (no response) will be used to indicate this. A three dimensional line chart will be used to plot the survey responses to each policy proposal question.

Survey Question #1

What is your opinion of the Commissioner's proposal in regard to the recommendation that "the current medical model disability labeling system should be changed to avoid overburdening children with disability labels?"

Response

8 (11.0%) survey participants strongly supported this policy proposal, 40 (54.8%) supported this proposal, 16 (21.9%) were opposed, 4 (5.5%) were strongly opposed, and 5 (6.8%) survey participants had no opinion in regard to this question (figure 4.4).

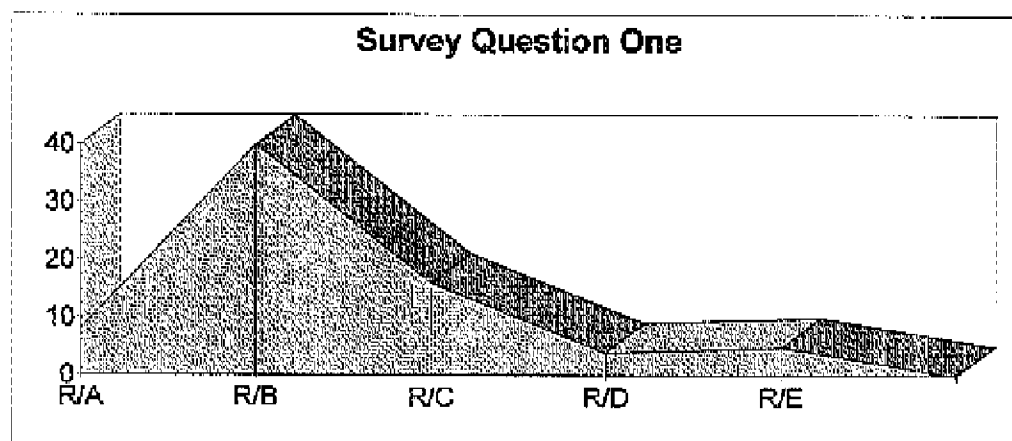


figure 4.4

Comments

Those who supported this proposal indicated that labels overburden both parents and students and are stigmatizing in that they may generate low self esteem, provoke negative reactions from educators, and create self fulfilling prophecies. Other supporting comments emphasized label necessity which enables the teacher to meet the classified student's needs, and the proposal is needed to avoid improper labeling.

Those who opposed this proposal indicated that a change in the labeling system would not accurately/appropriately address classified student needs, would not make a difference how the student is viewed or treated, would confuse professionals who work with the exceptional child, and would impede student priority when budget restraints are implemented.

Those who had no opinion regarding this proposal, indicated that more information was needed to accurately respond to the question.

Survey Question #2

What is your opinion of the Commissioner's proposal in regard to the establishing of one label, "Eligible for Special Education" for the purpose of classification?

Response

12 (16.4%) survey participants strongly supported this policy proposal, 33 (45.2%) supported this proposal, 21 (28.8%) were opposed, 4 (5.5%) were strongly opposed, and 3 (4.1%) survey participants had no opinion in regard to this question (figure 4.5).

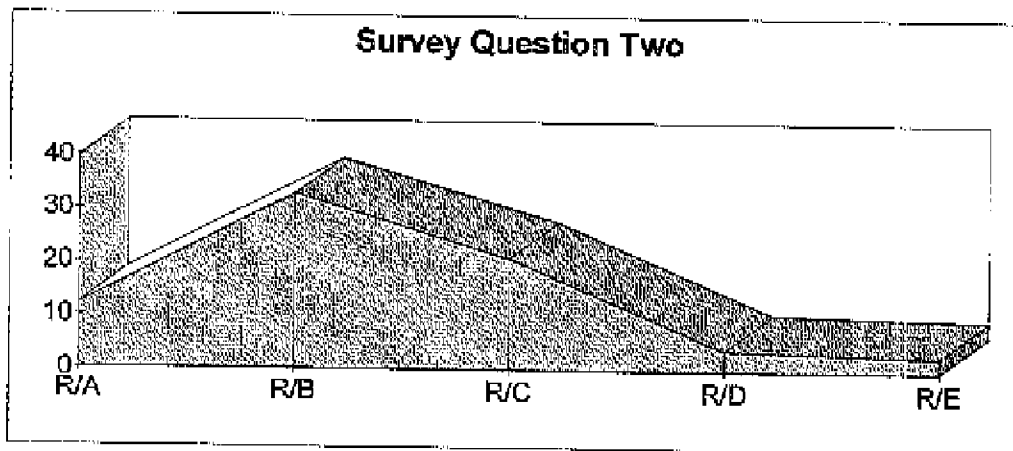


figure 4.5

Comments

Those who supported this proposal indicated that such a change would not be as stigmatizing to the classified student, would allow for more collaboration, would improve social peer acceptance, would increase teacher expectations regarding student performance, and would reduce the misuse of labels. While supporting this proposal, others indicated that specifics regarding each child's disability would be necessary to properly provide remedial services.

Those who disagreed with the proposal indicated that the label was too broad and may eventually include students who need remedial services but are not classified, does not adequately explain the exceptional student's problem, was concerned that all disabilities would be grouped together in an educational setting, thought that the policy proposal would erroneously lump together mild and major disabilities, was being changed for the sake of fiscal reasoning, would make it easy for students to become classified who would otherwise not fall into the classified categories, and thought that this proposed change should be tested and studied before policy adaptation.

Comments were not written for those who indicated "no opinion."

Survey Question #3

What is your opinion of the Commissioner's proposal in regard to the designating and establishing "Eligible for Special Education" as a new classification system with specific criteria for eligibility?

Response

9 (12.3%) survey participants strongly supported this policy proposal, 42 (57.5%) supported this proposal, 13 (17.8%) were opposed, 2 (2.7%) were strongly opposed and 7 (9.6%) survey participants had no opinion in regard to this question (figure 4.6).

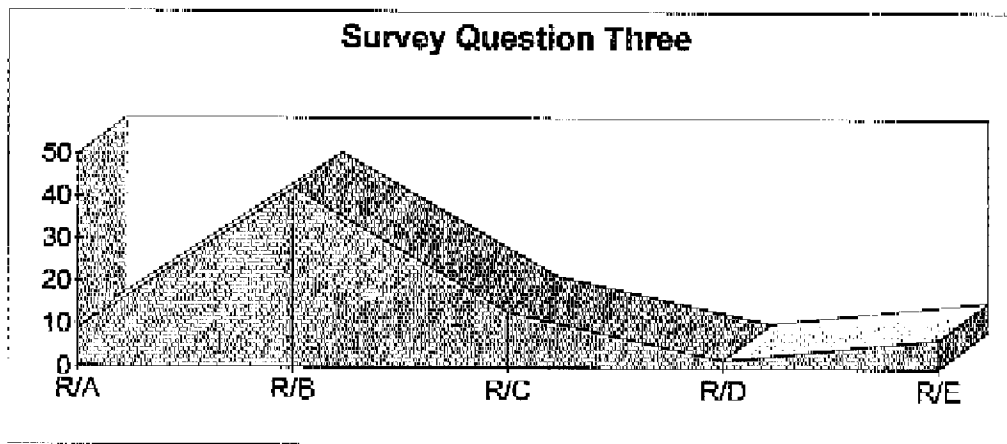


figure 4.6

Comments

Those who agreed with this proposal agreed conditionally. Support was indicated for this proposal as long as it wasn't used to exclude needy students from special services, included strict criteria, and was specific enough to serve students who truly necessitated services. Other supporters thought that it was an excellent idea and would simplify the classification process.

Those who opposed this proposal indicated that the new classification system was just a different label that would not solve classification problems, would like to read and study the specific criteria before supporting the proposal, and suggested that this proposal be tested and studied for a number of years before policy implementation.

Comments were not written for those who had indicated "no opinion."

Survey Question #4

What is your opinion of the Commissioner's proposal in regard to the deleting the categorical definitions of perceptually impaired and neurologically impaired and replacing them with definitions for specific learning disability and traumatic brain injury?

Response

9 (12.3%) survey participants strongly supported this policy proposal, 38 (52.1%) supported this proposal, 14 (19.2%) were opposed, 3 (4.1%) were strongly opposed, and 9 (12.3%) survey participants had no opinion in regard to this question (figure 4.7).

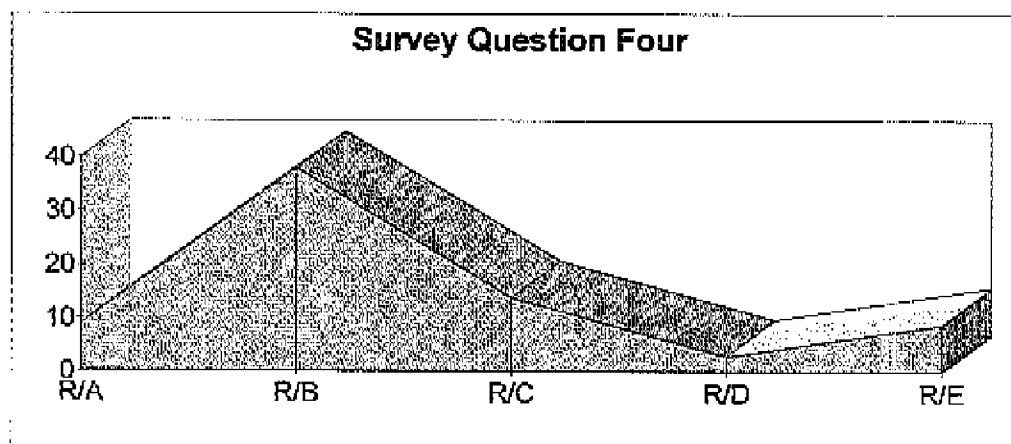


figure 4.7

Comments

Those who supported this proposal indicated that specific definitions would be beneficial to both regular and special education teachers, would assist in developing learning activities for a specific disability, would improve referrals and related service treatment, indicated that the categorical definitions of perceptually and neurologically impaired were antiquated terms that needed to be replaced, once replaced the new terms would include definitions that increase classification requirements, and stated that classified children need a specific definition because each exceptional student is unique.

Those who opposed this proposal indicated that traumatic brain injury was too harsh of a label, would make parents uneasy and would be difficult to get parental consent,

would produce a discriminatory effect, was just a euphemism for the same disabilities, would be a waste of taxpayers money when the real issue is the special education program itself, and such a change would be cumbersome overall.

Those who had no opinion regarding this policy proposal either indicated that more information was necessary or wrote that it was still a label and all should be eligible regardless of disability.

Survey Question #5

What is your opinion of the Commissioner's proposal in regard to mandating to the fullest possible extent students with disabilities to participate in state and districtwide proficiency tests?

Response

7 (9.6%) survey participants strongly supported this policy proposal, 29 (39.7%) supported this proposal, 20 (27.4%) were opposed, 9 (12.3%) were strongly opposed, and 8 (11.0%) participants had no opinion in regard to this question (figure 4.8).

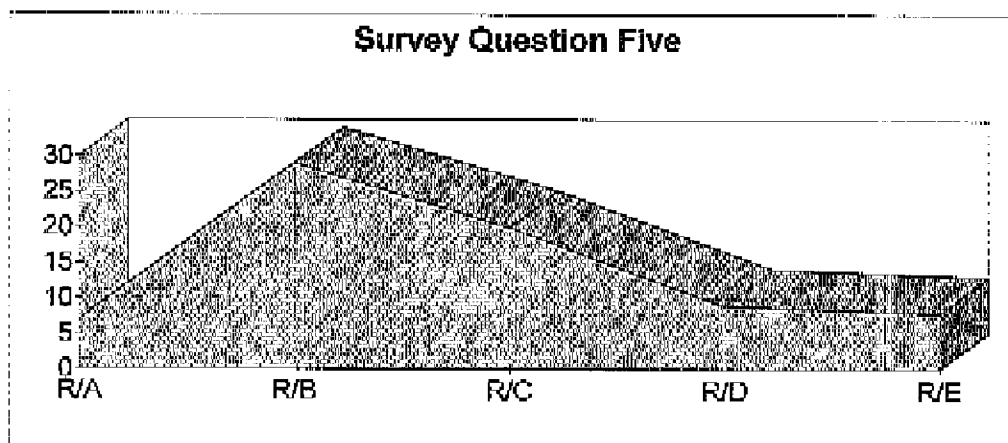


figure 4.8

Comments

Those who supported this proposal indicated that it would provide feedback regarding student progress, would increase teacher accountability, would encourage student accountability for what is taught, would put exceptional students in the "mainstream" instead of setting them apart from regular students, and would contribute to diagnosing individual student programs, needs, curriculum evaluation, and teaching strategies.

Others supported this proposal with caution. Several made it clear that exceptional students should participate with allowances or modifications. Exceptional students should not be forced into participating but should be given the opportunity if it is academically and emotionally appropriate. Test results of the exceptional student should not be pooled into the entire school population, but rather scored separately so as to not influence the overall scores of a school district, and school districts should establish a common criteria mandating to what extent the student with disabilities should participate in the state and districtwide assessment process.

Those who disagreed with this policy proposal indicated that it would put unnecessary pressure on the special needs student, the teachers, and school districts in general. It would also contribute to stigmatization when test results indicate that the student performed under grade and/or age level. Another survey participant indicated that if the scores of the exceptional student population are pooled in with the regular students, overall norm averages may plummet thus resulting in lowered expectations and standards for both special needs and regular students. Others indicated that it would raise teacher accountability, making them responsible for variables beyond their control.

Those who had no opinion regarding this policy proposal indicated that it depended on the disability of the student, assessment should be unique for each, and wanted more specific information as to how the proposal was to be implemented.

Survey Question #6

What is your opinion of the Commissioner's proposal in regard to the requiring that IEPs be linked to the local district's regular education curriculum with whatever modifications or adaptations are necessary?

Response

14 (19.2%) survey participants strongly supported this policy proposal, 44 (60.3%) supported this proposal, 10 (13.7%) were opposed, 1 (1.4%) was strongly opposed, and 4 (5.5%) survey participants had no opinion in regard to this question (Figure 4.9).

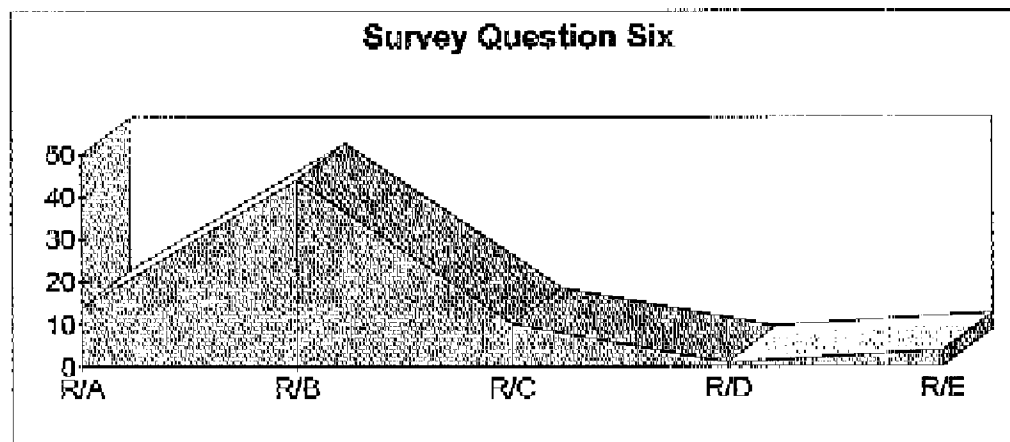


figure 4.9

Comments

Those who supported this policy proposal indicated that developing IEP goals based on the regular curriculum was necessary for inclusionary purposes, this proposal would clearly show the special needs students capabilities, and their education needs to be related as much as possible to the regular curriculum.

Others supported this policy proposal with reservations indicating that the regular curriculum may not be appropriate for mentally retarded and handicapped students.

Those who opposed this policy proposal indicated that this proposal would lead to inclusionary settings where the regular teacher would be responsible for the exceptional student, thought it would be best to focus on functional skills, indicated a link to the regular curriculum would magnify student failure, and suggested the proposal be tested and studied before implementation.

Those who had no opinion regarding this policy proposal indicated that more information was needed to accurately respond to the question.

Survey Question #7

What is your opinion of the Commissioner's proposal in regard to the development of special education programs that will lead to the achievement of the Core Curriculum Content Standards?

Response

12 (16.4%) survey participants strongly supported this policy proposal, 41 (56.2%) supported this proposal, 10 (13.7%) were opposed, 4 (5.5%) were strongly opposed and 6 (8.2%) had no opinion in regard to this question (figure 4.10).

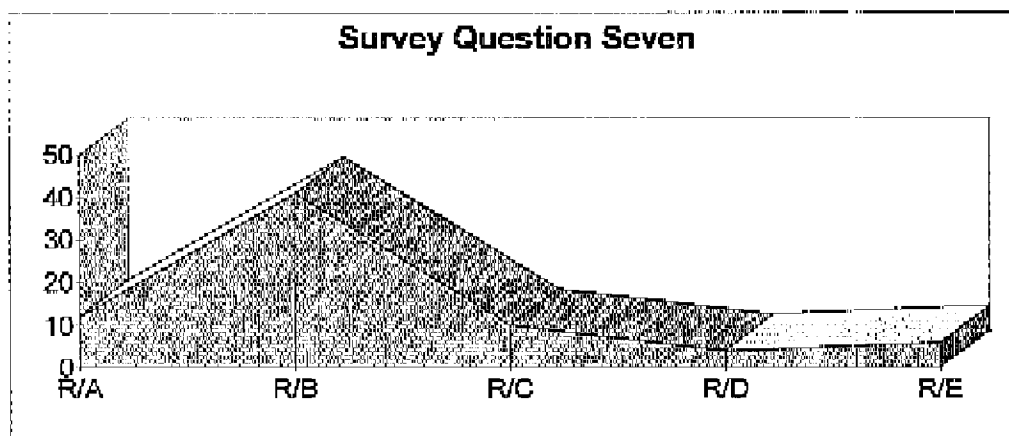


figure 4.10

Comments

Those who supported this policy proposal indicated that the policy proposal would establish certain educational standards, would help special education students feel as if they were an integral part of the school, special education students should have to strive as others do, would please parents who favored inclusion, exceptional students need to be accountable to the same standards as others, would increase proficiency in special needs students and enable them to meet standards that they wouldn't have met before, and would assist in preparing special education students for the real world.

Those who agreed with reservations indicated that allowances must be made for learning disabled students and their achievement standards, and this policy proposal would be appropriate for some special needs students but not all.

Those who disagreed with this policy proposal indicated that this policy proposal would place too much performance pressure on students, should not be a requirement of students who need a more functional curriculum, and a portion of the modified regular curriculum may be beneficial to the exceptional student (modifications are necessary).

Those who had no opinion regarding this question had several feelings both ways, and/or wanted more information to accurately respond to the question.

Survey Question #8

What is your opinion in regard to the present method of exempting students from the Core Curriculum Content Standards due to instructional programs that are not reflective of regular education curriculum standards?

Response

4 (5.5%) survey participants strongly supported this present method, 33 (45.2%) supported this method, 21 (28.8%) were opposed, 1 (1.4%) was strongly

opposed, 12 (16.4%) survey participants had no opinion regarding this question, and 2 (2.7%) did not respond to the question (figure 4.11).

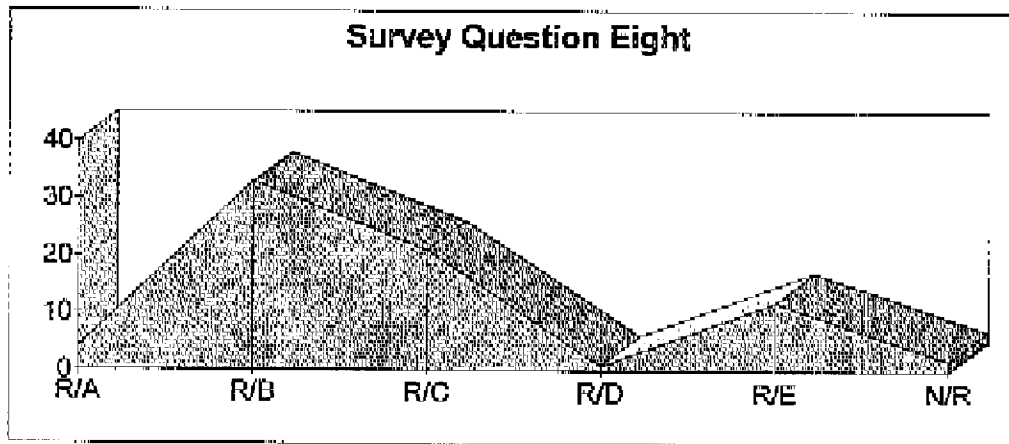


figure 4.11

Comments

Those who supported this present method of exempting students from the Core Curriculum Content Standards indicated it was necessary to view each student on an individual basis, it depended on the classified situation of each special needs student, is appropriate if each student is receiving a suitable education, is necessary to exempt a severely disabled child who learns in a different way and has certain goals and objectives beyond the Core Curriculum Content Standards, and needs to remain as an option for special education students who may not completely benefit from a Core Curriculum Content Standard mandate.

Those who opposed this current method of exemption indicated that it would deprive exceptional students from achieving proficiency in the Core Curriculum Content Standards, exemption would only be necessary in extreme cases, and many who should be exempted from these programs are currently enrolled and expected to achieve the Core Curriculum Content Standards.

Those who had no opinion indicated that it depended on individual student need, was contingent on the disability, and needed more information to accurately respond to the question.

Survey Question #9

What is your opinion of the Commissioner's proposal in regard to the reducing the number of required initial evaluation assessments from four evaluations to two?

Response

3 (4.1%) survey participants strongly supported this policy proposal, 10 (13.7%) supported this proposal, 35 (47.9%) were opposed, 15 (20.5%) were strongly opposed, 8 (11.0%) survey participants had no opinion in regard to this question, and 2 (2.7%) did not respond (figure 4.12).

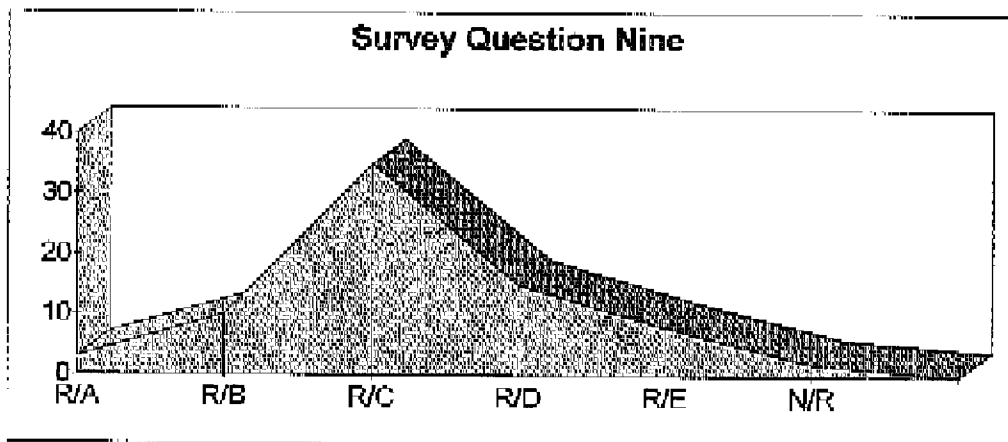


figure 4.12

Comments

Only two comments were written in support of this policy proposal. One survey participant indicated that it would prove to be cost effective in the long run, and the other

indicated that two people assessing the student would increase familiarity with the student situation as opposed to four.

Those who opposed this policy proposal indicated that this proposal was not in the student's best interest and was developed primarily as a cost cutting measure. Several indicated that reducing mandated evaluations added to student detriment, would not provide a complete analysis of the student's abilities and deficits, and may lead to impulsive classification and remediation. Others indicated that the multidisciplinary approach is most thorough and efficient, different professional viewpoints ensure a proper diagnose, thought it was ludicrous to develop a child's IEP and school setting based on two evaluations, test results may increase in error if this policy proposal is implemented, and two evaluations may not be sufficient enough to control variables that four evaluations would be able to. Other comments indicated that classifications should not be made without a thorough assessment, and teachers need as much information as possible to provide optimal service to the exceptional child.

Those who had no opinion in regard to this question indicated that more information was necessary to accurately respond to the question.

Survey Question #10

What is your opinion of the Commissioner's proposal in regard to allowing the Child Study Team to determine which assessments are needed for pupils on an individual basis?

Response

13 (17.8%) survey participants strongly supported this policy proposal, 32 (43.8%) supported this proposal, 16 (21.9%) were opposed, 2 (2.7%) strongly opposed, 9 (12.3%) had no opinion in regard to this question, and 1 (1.4%) did not respond (figure 4.13).

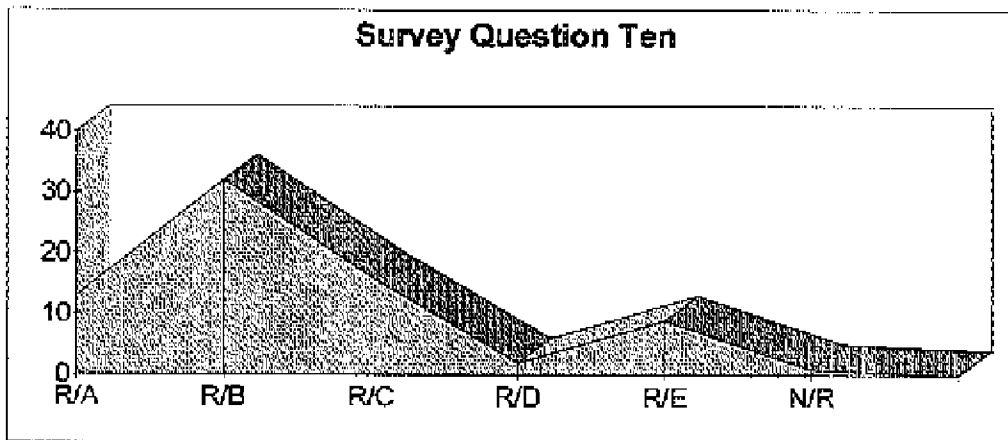


figure 4.13

Comments

Those who supported this policy proposal indicated that it was a good idea and time effective, would truly benefit the child, child study teams are professionals and experts in their fields and should have the authority to decide assessment issues, assessments should be on an individual basis since children learn differently and at varying rates, and implementation of this policy proposal would avoid repetitive testing and information gathering.

Others who supported this policy proposal indicated that it was valid if it provided for teacher and parental input, and was justified and accepted by the student's teacher.

Those who opposed this proposal indicated that if implemented, districts may enforce assessment limits due to financial restraints, child study teams may cut corners in the process, feared that cost would determine assessment provisions, elements in the assessment process may be missed, and it shouldn't be limited to child study team decisions alone.

Those who did not have an opinion regarding this question indicated that more information was necessary to accurately respond to the question.

Survey Question #11

What is your opinion of the Commissioner's proposal in regard to the elimination of the required medical evaluation when ascertaining a potential special needs student?

Response

3 (4.1%) survey participants strongly supported this policy proposal, 6 (8.2%) supported this proposal, 45 (61.6%) were opposed, 11 (15.1%) were strongly opposed, 7 (9.6%) had no opinion in regard to this question, and 1 (1.4%) did not respond (figure 4.14).

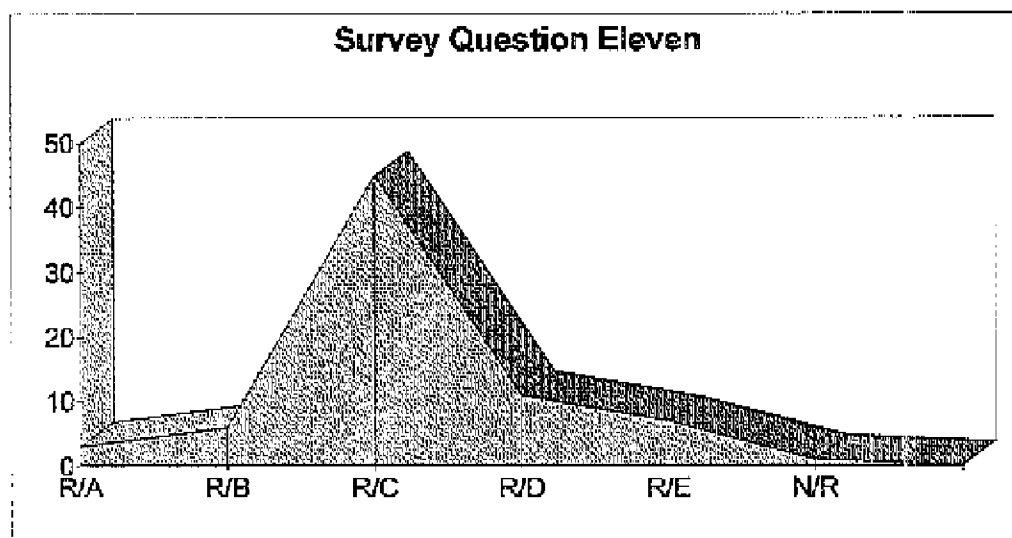


figure 4.14

Comments

Those who supported this policy proposal indicated that the medical evaluation may be omitted if there are no contributing factors, could be used primarily for the physically and mentally handicapped, and believed that the medical evaluation could result in impulsive labeling.

Those who opposed this policy proposal indicated that medical information was necessary for a complete and accurate diagnose, medical evaluations should continue in case there is a medical problem related to learning, and doctors provide critical information about the student.

Comments were not written for those who had indicated "no opinion."

Survey Question #12

What is your opinion of the Commissioner's proposal in regard to the elimination of requiring each child study team member to observe the pupil outside of the test setting and now requiring that only one member conduct such an observation?

Response

2 (2.7%) survey participants strongly supported this policy proposal, 12 (16.4%) supported this proposal, 31 (42.5%) were opposed, 20 (27.4%) were strongly opposed, 7 (9.6%) survey participants had no opinion in regard to this question, and 1 (1.4%) did not respond (figure 4.15).

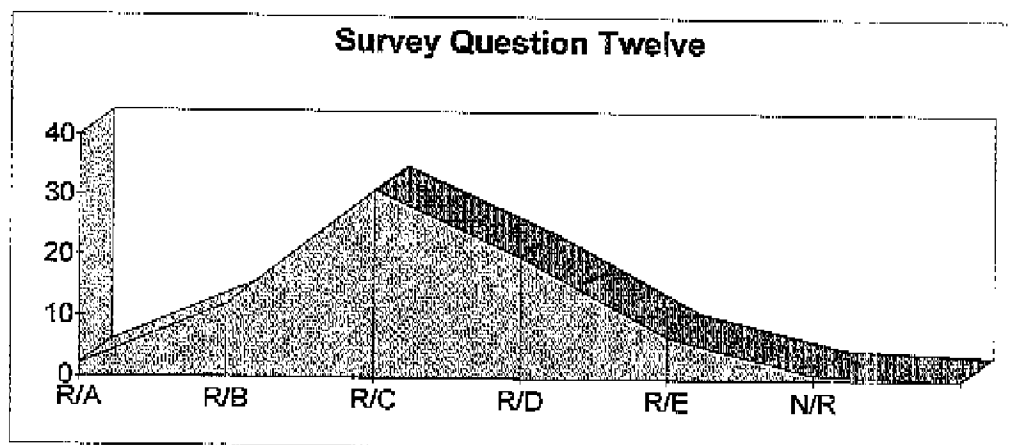


figure 4.15

Comments

Those who supported this policy proposal indicated that an observation by one Child Study Team member would be sufficient, observations of referred pupils should be on an "as needed" basis, didn't feel that observations by each child study team member was necessary but the child should be observed by at least two members and this policy proposal was already mandated by most states.

Those who opposed this proposal indicated that one child study team member would produce observational bias, and at least two observations should be required to produce greater reliability, different observational settings produce different results thus the multidisciplinary approach is the most effective, observing the child in more than one testing situation is of most importance, contributions from other disciplines will add to the objectivity of student diagnose, this measure is being proposed to reduce the work load of the child study team, there are too many students to observe and it is not in the best interest of the referred student.

Comments were not written for those who indicated "no opinion."

Survey Question #13

What is your opinion of the Commissioner's proposal in regard to the development of multidisciplinary teams which are to be composed of one child study team member and other professionals for the purpose of identification, evaluation, classification, IEP development and placement?

Response

10 (13.7%) survey participants strongly supported this policy proposal, 36 (49.3%) supported this proposal, 13 (17.8%) were opposed, 4 (5.5%) were strongly

opposed, 9 (12.3%) survey participants had no opinion in regard to this question, and 1 (1.4%) did not respond (figure 4.16).

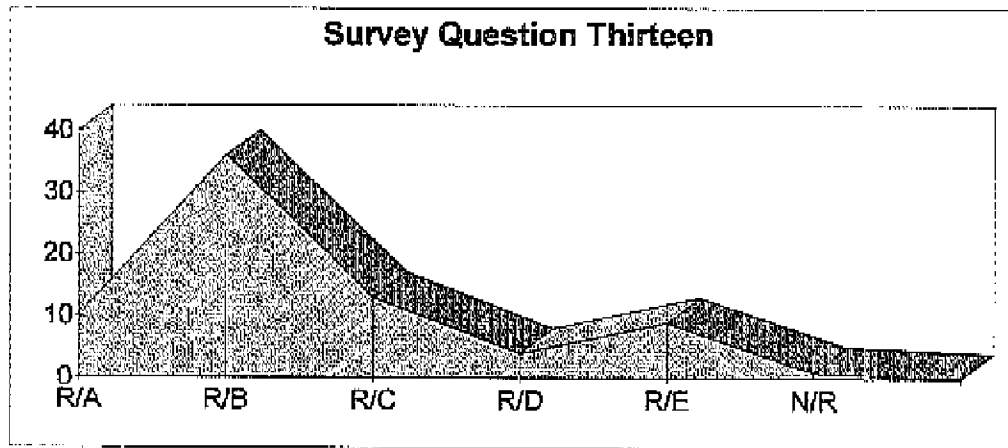


figure 4.16

Comments

Those who supported this policy proposal indicated that children should be evaluated in as many ways as possible to get a clear understanding, thought it was a great idea, would provide for a wider area of expertise, would give different perspectives, and the implementation of the policy proposal would effectively meet each individual child's unique needs.

Those who opposed this proposal indicated that the present make up of the child study team was sufficient, thought that more than one child study team member should be on the proposed multidisciplinary team, the proposed team may not be cost effective, the development of the proposed multidisciplinary team should result from the input of many professionals, would depend on what professions would compose the proposed teams, and is currently a trend that is developing in the mental health setting.

Those who had no opinion in regard to this question needed more information to accurately respond to the question.

Survey Question #14

What is your opinion of the Commissioner's proposal in regard to the reduction of parental notice from 15 to 10 days for the purposes of identification classification, evaluation, educational placement or the provision of a free, appropriate public education?

Response

5 (6.8%) survey participants strongly supported this policy proposal, 28 (38.4%) supported this proposal, 20 (27.4%) were opposed, 4 (5.5%) were strongly opposed, 15 (20.5%) survey participants had no opinion in regard to this question, and 1 (1.4%) did not respond (figure 4.17).

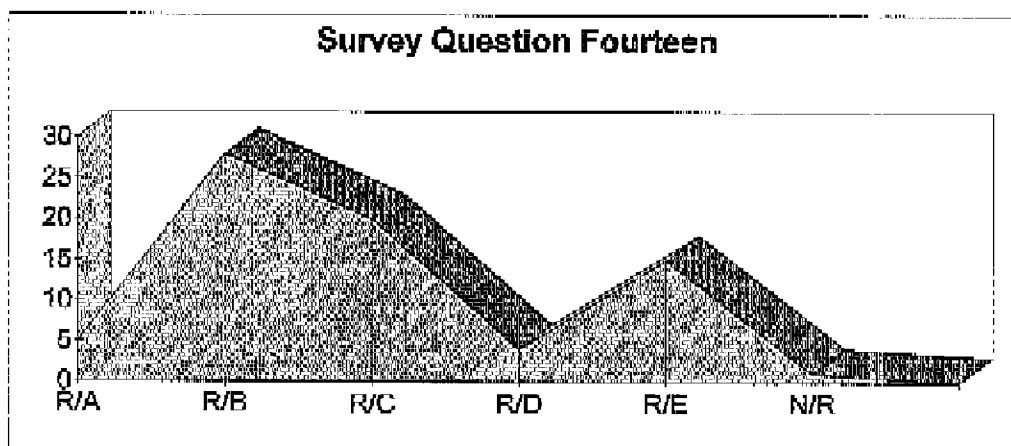


figure 4.17

Comments

Those who supported this policy proposal indicated that it would speed up the identification, evaluation, classification, and placement process, desired quick implementation of the proposal for faster results, and felt that a 5 day reduction wouldn't make a difference either way.

Those who opposed this proposal indicated that this reduction in notification would place time restraints on the child study team, would hurt communication and cooperation with parents, would restrict time that parents need to make a reflective decision, seek a second opinion, and prepare their children for the evaluation process, and was primarily a money making proposal designed to eliminate think time for parents.

Those who had no opinion regarding this proposal emphasized that parents must agree with this proposal before it is implemented.

Survey Question #15

What is your opinion of the Commissioner's proposal in regard to redefining consent to mean that a proposed action may take effect immediately?

Response

5 (6.8%) survey participants strongly supported this policy proposal, 29 (39.7%) supported this proposal, 22 (30.1%) were opposed, 2 (2.7%) were strongly opposed, 14 (19.2%) survey participants had no opinion regarding this question, and 1 (1.5%) did not respond (figure 4.18).

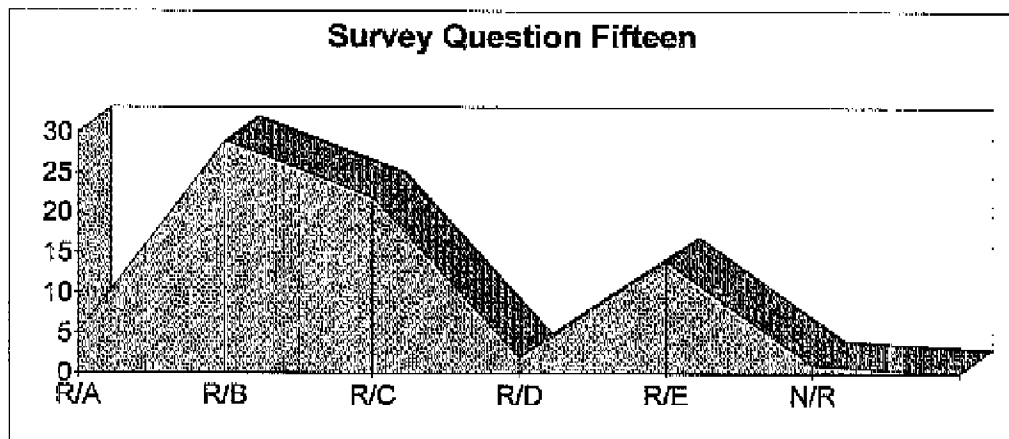


figure 4.18

Comments

Those who supported this policy proposal indicated that the proposal should be implemented as soon as possible so the exceptional child will not lose learning opportunities and grow frustrated in the process. Others indicated that they agree as long as parents must first agree before implementation, and that it will benefit those students who are neglected due to "red tape."

Those who disagreed with the policy proposal indicated that this was a fiscally focused proposal, parental notification and approval is top priority, parent's rights need to be preserved and respected, parents need time to provide input and evaluate the process before a decision is hastily made regarding their child, and parental anger could be stirred and cause them to become defensive in the process.

No comments were written for those who indicated "no opinion."

Supportive Vs Opposed

In describing the specific results, "supportive Vs opposed", to the Special Education New Jersey Administrative Code Policy Proposal Survey, the percentage of response option "a" (strongly support) and response option "b" (support) will be combined and designated "*supportive*." The percentage of response option "c" (opposed) and response option "d" (strongly opposed), will be combined and designated "*opposed*." Taken together these combined responses will be indicated as "*specific response*" below each policy proposal survey question.

Interviewed Response

Each survey question will have an interviewed response. These interviewed comments were based on written explanations from the survey and from speaking with various graduate students in the *Foundations of Learning Disabilities* class.

SURVEY QUESTION #1

What is your opinion of the Commissioner's proposal in regard to the recommendation that "the current medical model disability labeling system should be changed to avoid overburdening children with disability labels?"

Specific Response

65.8% of survey participants supported this policy proposal versus 27.4% who were opposed. This left a discrepancy of 38.4% between supportive and opposed.

Interviewed Response

The general response from surveyed participants when questioned regarding the high percentage of support was that labels are necessary for diagnosing and application but must be adjusted so as not to serve to the detriment of the student.

SURVEY QUESTION #2

What is your opinion of the Commissioner's proposal in regard to the establishing of one label, "Eligible for Special Education" for the purpose of classification?

Specific Response

61.6% of surveyed participants supported this policy proposal versus 34.3% who were opposed. This left a discrepancy of 27.3% between supportive and opposed.

Interviewed Response

The general response for surveyed participants when questioned regarding the high percentage of support for this policy proposal was that it would reduce stigmatization and serve to the student's advantage (i.e. social acceptance within peer group).

SURVEY QUESTION #3

What is your opinion of the Commissioner's proposal in regard to the designating and establishing "Eligible for Special Education" as a new classification system with specific criteria for eligibility?

Specific Response

69.8% of survey participants supported this policy proposal versus 20.5% who were opposed. This left a discrepancy of 49.3% between supportive and opposed.

Interviewed Response

The general response from surveyed participants when questioned regarding the high percentage of support for this policy proposal was that the classification system needs to be changed and specific criteria added to eliminate students from special education who should not be classified (or were inadvertently classified), and to benefit classified students through the specific criteria additions which would assist in redefining individual educational plans, learning strategies, placement issues, and curriculum selection.

SURVEY QUESTION #4

What is your opinion of the Commissioner's proposal in regard to the deleting the categorical definitions of perceptually impaired and neurologically impaired and replacing them with definitions for specific learning disability and traumatic brain injury?

Specific Response

64.4% of survey participants supported this policy proposal versus 23.3% who were opposed. This left a discrepancy of 41.1% between supportive and opposed.

Interviewed Response

The general response from surveyed participants when questioned regarding the high percentage of support was that classification labels need to be as specific as possible in order to ensure an optimal intervention plan for the exceptional student. New definitions will provide guidelines that will enable educators to select curriculum and plan specific strategies to the exceptional student's benefit.

SURVEY QUESTION #5

What is your opinion of the Commissioner's proposal in regard to the mandating to the fullest possible extent students with disabilities to participate in state and districtwide proficiency tests?

Specific Response

49.3% of survey participants supported this policy proposal versus 39.7% who were opposed. This left a discrepancy of 9.6% between supportive and opposed.

Interviewed Response

The general response from surveyed participants when questioned regarding the low discrepancy between the two responses was that the policy proposal was too controversial in that it depended on the classification level of each student and their ability to participate.

SURVEY QUESTION #6

What is your opinion of the Commissioner's proposal in regard to the requiring that IEPs be linked to the local district's regular education curriculum with whatever modifications or adaptations are necessary?

Specific Response

79.5% of survey participants supported this policy proposal versus 15.1% who were opposed. This left a discrepancy of 64.4% between supportive and opposed.

Interviewed Response

The general response from surveyed participants when questioned regarding the high percentage of support was that it was important to include the exceptional student in the regular curriculum so that a core curriculum would be established for this population, the modification aspect of the proposal makes it appealing, and adaptations will be necessary to serve the various levels of classified students.

SURVEY QUESTION #7

What is your opinion of the Commissioner's proposal in regard to the development of special education programs that will lead to the achievement of the Core Curriculum Content Standards?

Specific Response

72.6% of survey participants supported this policy proposal versus 19.2% who were opposed. This left a discrepancy of 53.4% between supportive and opposed.

Interviewed Response

The general response from survey participants when questioned regarding the high percentage of support was that a core curriculum is necessary for the special needs population, yet special programs need to be developed to ensure as much success as possible to achieve the Core Curriculum Content Standards and give each exceptional child the opportunity to participate in the Core Curriculum.

SURVEY QUESTION #8

What is your opinion in regard to the present method of exempting students from the Core Curriculum Standards due to instructional programs that are not reflective of regular education curriculum standards?

Specific Response

50.7% of survey participants supported this policy proposal versus 30.2% who were opposed. This left a discrepancy of 20.5% between supportive and opposed.

Interviewed Response

The general response from surveyed participants when questioned regarding the high percentage of support was that students who are not receiving instruction based on the regular education curriculum standards should be exempt from the Core Curriculum Content Standards because the Core Curriculum reflects regular education standards.

SURVEY QUESTION #9

What is your opinion of the Commissioner's proposal in regard to the reducing the number of required initial evaluation assessments from four evaluations to two?

Specific Response

17.8% of surveyed participants supported this policy proposal versus 68.8% who were opposed. This left a discrepancy of 50.6% between supportive and opposed.

Interviewed Response

The general response from surveyed participants when questioned regarding the high percentage of opposition was that four evaluations ensure a complete and accurate

diagnose of the student's strengths, deficits, and abilities. To reduce the required evaluations to two is detrimental to the student and serves only to restrict fiscal spending.

SURVEY QUESTION #10

What is your opinion of the Commissioner's proposal in regard to allowing the Child Study Team to determine which assessments are needed for pupils on an individual basis?

Specific Response

61.6% of survey participants supported this policy proposal versus 24.6% who were opposed. This left a discrepancy of 37% between supportive and opposed.

Interviewed Response

The general response from surveyed participants when questioned regarding the high percentage of support was that the child study team (composing of a School Psychologist, a Social Worker, and a Learning Disabilities Teacher/Consultant) are professionals who are able to ascertain the best assessment for each referred child based on each members proficient viewpoint.

SURVEY QUESTION #11

What is your opinion of the Commissioner's proposal in regard to the elimination of the required medical evaluation when ascertaining a potential special needs student?

Specific Response

12.3% of survey participants supported this policy proposal versus 76.7% who were opposed. This left a discrepancy of 64.4% between supportive and opposed.

Interviewed Response

The general response from survey participants when questioned regarding the high percentage of opposition was that the medical evaluation needs to be part of the process to ensure that nothing is overlooked and to provide an accurate and complete diagnose. The medical evaluation may find something that the other evaluations overlooked.

SURVEY QUESTION #12

What is your opinion of the Commissioner's proposal in regard to the elimination of requiring each child study team member to observe the pupil outside of the test setting and now requiring that only one member conduct such an observation?

Specific Response

19.1% of survey participants supported this policy proposal versus 69.9% who were opposed. This left a discrepancy of 50.8% between supporting and opposed.

Interviewed Response

The general response from survey participants when questioned regarding the high percentage of opposition was that one observation by one member is not sufficient in that it may be biased and overlook variables that contribute to the students behavior and/or disability.

SURVEY QUESTION #13

What is your opinion of the Commissioner's proposal in regard to the development of multidisciplinary teams which are to be composed of one child study team member and other professionals for the purpose of identification, evaluation, classification, IEP development and placement?

Specific Response

63% of survey participants supported this policy proposal versus 23.3% who were opposed. This left a discrepancy of 39.7% between supportive and opposed.

Interviewed Response

The general response from survey participants when questioned regarding the high percentage of support was that multidisciplinary teams composed of one child study team member and other professionals will contribute various adept viewpoints that will benefit each child in the referral process, and such teams can be tailored to meet specific needs that a regular child study team composite may not be able to.

SURVEY QUESTION #14

What is your opinion of the Commissioner's proposal in regard to the reduction of parental notice from 15 to 10 days for the purposes of identification, classification, evaluation, educational placement or the provision of a free, appropriate public education?

Specific Response

45.2% of surveyed participants supported this policy proposal versus 32.9% who were opposed. This left a discrepancy of 12.3% between supportive and opposed.

Interviewed Response

The general response from surveyed participants when questioned regarding the low discrepancy between the two responses was that depending on each referred students/family situation, 15 days is more than enough time to give notice and consent whereas in other situations to reduce notice and consent to 10 days would serve as an injustice.

SURVEY QUESTION #15

What is your opinion of the Commissioner's proposal in regard to redefining consent to mean that a proposed action may take effect immediately?

Specific Response

46.5% of survey participants supported this policy proposal versus 32.8% who were opposed. This left a discrepancy of 13.7% between supportive and opposed.

Interviewed Response

The general response from survey participants when questioned regarding the low discrepancy between the two responses was that in some cases this may be conducive whereas in other situations it may serve as an unintentional injustice to the referral process and the student/student's parents.

Survey Supportive Response Chart

The chart below signifies the support level of each survey question/policy proposal. It ranks from the greatest support to the least supportive. The chart can then be read in reverse to rank opposition level from greatest to least (figure 4.19).

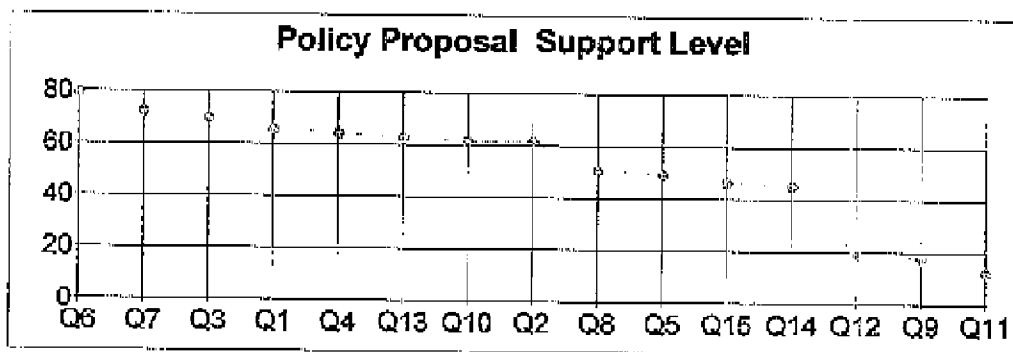


figure 4.19

Policy Proposal Overall Response: Support or Opposition?

The crossbreak table below indicates the number of responses to each question and the specific answer options selected for each (figure 4.20).

	R/A	R/B	R/C	R/D	R/E	N/R
Q1	8	40	16	4	5	
Q2	12	33	21	4	3	
Q3	9	42	13	2	7	
Q4	9	38	14	3	9	
Q5	7	29	20	9	8	
Q6	14	44	10	1	4	
Q7	12	41	10	4	6	
Q8	4	33	21	1	12	2
Q9	3	10	35	15	8	2
Q10	13	32	16	2	9	1
Q11	3	6	45	11	7	1
Q12	2	12	31	20	7	1
Q13	10	36	13	4	9	1
Q14	5	28	20	4	15	1
Q15	5	29	22	2	14	1
Responses:	116	453	307	86	123	10

figure 4.20

Total Number of Responses: 1095

Chapter 5 Discussion

Introduction

In this thesis, it was hypothesized that the reactions and concerns of educational personnel in regard to the recent policy proposals to the Special Education New Jersey Administrative Code 6:28 by New Jersey Commissioner of Education Leo Klagholz would be a composite of skepticism and optimism. This hypothesis was based on the research question: What are the reactions and concerns of educational personnel in regard to the recent proposed amendments to the Special Education New Jersey Administrative Code 6:28?

The results of the research indicated support for the policy proposals. Many participants indicated concern for the exceptional student, and presented challenging statements regarding special education, the teachers, parents and the child study team. It also revealed that real change in special education does not come without some sort of opposition, opposition which is not necessarily negative, but which rather serves as a safety net forcing the examination of opinions, facts, and viewpoints from all who are concerned for special education and the exceptional student.

Discussion

Fuhrman & Elmore (1995) indicated that in the beginning of programs that encouraged educational innovation and deregulation of codes and guidelines, enthusiasm, expectation, and a high percentage of support is widespread among educators, administrators, parents, and the school district in general. The survey participants verified the findings of Fuhrman & Elmore. The largest percent of responses (52%) indicated support for the policy proposals. Optimistic comments included an eagerness to implement the proposals, the need for flexibility, the necessity of student and teacher

accountability, the need to raise educational standards, and the desire to modify educational programs for special needs students.

A considerable number (35.9%) of survey participants opposed the policy proposals. As stated in Chapter four, opposition can serve as a safety net forcing the examination of opinions, facts, and viewpoints from all who are concerned for special education and the exceptional child. Fuhrman & Elmore (1995) verified the necessity of opposition to such programs whose purpose is to establish a variable of caution. Restraint and the development of rules towards deregulation forces states to take a cautious approach to such programs. In their concern for health, safety, and civil rights, states have maintained fundamental regulations such as mandated curriculum essentials to ensure a level of restraint as deregulation options are implemented.

Comments regarding opposition to the policy proposals indicated primary concern for the exceptional student. Various survey participants asserted that the policy proposals may be detrimental to the exceptional child's individual educational program. They also may reduce effective service delivery, may loosen the safeguards that currently guide assessment, observation, and evaluation procedures, may threaten parental rights and reduce the effectiveness of child study teams.

A sense of skepticism was noted in various forms throughout the survey. Funding was noted as the fundamental reason for proposing these policies. The need to reduce funding was veiled in the guise of "flexibility." Reducing child study team assessments and allowing one member to be part of a multidisciplinary team was indicated as stretching the tax dollar thus cheapening the quality of services. The elimination of the medical and evaluation assessments was also an indicator of a cut in funding.

Including the special needs student in the state and districtwide proficiency tests also received some skeptical remarks. It was indicated that this proposal was unrealistic and would encourage failure. The achievement of the Core Curriculum Content Standards also received similar criticism.

Despite optimism and skepticism, the overall flavor of the survey participants response to the Special Education New Jersey Administrative Code 6:28 was concern for the student. How will these changes effect the quality of education and service delivery for the exceptional student? How will the proposed changes in the referral process serve to benefit a potential special needs student or screening in general? Is the proposal of mandating statewide and district testing for exceptional students feasible and realistic? Would it serve to motivate them to academic excellence, or will it serve to remind them of their limitations? Will the mandating of the achievement of the Core Curriculum Content Standards serve to motivate or serve to eliminate exceptional students from the mainstream? Will the proposal to reduce assessments and evaluations lead to classifying students who may only need curricular adjustments and assistance, or will it serve to increase the rate of classification? Concerns such as these warrant serious consideration of what each policy is proposing, how it will affect special education in general, and whether it will serve to the detriment or the benefit of the exceptional student.

Implications

The 73 survey participants response to the Special Education New Jersey Administrative Code Policy Proposal Survey revealed genuine interest, a professional concern, and several thought provoking comments, statements, and answer selections regarding special education programs and how these policy proposals will serve to the benefit or detriment the special education student. It also revealed the necessity of providing opportunities to share professional concerns and viewpoints regarding issues such as these policy proposals for the purpose of developing options and facilitating dialogue. It further revealed the nature of change and its' implications. Changing or amending policies leads to controversies, heated debate, dissension's, and political division (State Board of Education: Comment Response Form, 1996, Bridgeton Evening News, 1996; Courier Post, 1996). Nevertheless, change serves as a reminder that when decisions

are considered, not everyone will be in agreement, and when changes or amendments are implemented, not everyone will be pleased with the implementation.

Numerous comments revealed optimistic and cautious support. Other comments were skeptical, laced with concern, and peppered with opposition. Therefore, it can be suggested that impending change also serves as a motivator. In this case, it may motivate the special educator and the numerous other professionals who are involved with special education to reevaluate their own performance, the academic progress of the exceptional child, parental involvement, professional competencies, assessment issues, and accountability factors. For example, it is speculated that if special needs students are required to achieve the Core Curriculum Content Standards and participate in state and districtwide proficiency tests, then teacher and school districts will be held accountable for the results. If this is to be, then it suggests that educators accurately reevaluate how they document teaching, learning strategies, modifications, assessments, curricular adaptations and achievements of each student as a safeguard against suspected state, district, and legal ramifications.

Child study teams will have the option of determining which assessments are most beneficial for each student on an individual basis should these proposals become amendments. This may provide flexibility in assessing deficits, however, it may also prove to lead to indirect negligence. Time factors may provoke child study team members toward incomplete assessment procedures. If this policy proposal is to be amended to the Special Education New Jersey Administrative Code 6:28 than an accountability factor must be implemented as a safeguard against such provocations.

Classification revisions such as Commissioner Klagholz's proposal to establish "Eligible for Special Education" as a new classification system with specific criteria for eligibility may ease label burdens, yet it also may neglect the need to specify particular disabilities, deficits, and disorders. Teachers will need to know specifics of each child's

disability so that special education programs may be developed and tailored to remediate each child's needs.

The reduction of notice from 15 days to 10 days may not give parents enough time to weigh and consider options regarding evaluation and classification procedures. For some parents, this length of time may be sufficient, yet for others, it may increase anxiety and overwhelm. Child study team members may, however, appreciate this policy proposal. Reduction of notice may serve to their benefit in regard to the scheduling of numerous meetings, observations, assessments, and evaluations.

The policy proposal redefining consent also may serve to the benefit of the child study team. Immediate implementation of a proposed action may allow them to render services quickly. Immediate implementation of a proposed action may also allow the child study team to invest quality time in coordinating services and in case management. Parents who desire immediate action regarding their children may agree with this policy proposal. However, parents who prefer to have time on their side for consideration of proposed amendments, may, like the reduction of notice, feel compelled to render immediate consent.

Another area of concern is state implementation. If these policy proposals are approved they may not be readily accepted by school districts and educational personnel. For example, these revisions may lead to frequent mainstreaming and inclusion for the purpose of adapting the Core Curriculum Content Standards to the exceptional child. If the Core Curriculum is already taught in the regular classroom setting, it then may be considered logical to place special needs students in the regular classroom with support staff. This however, may not be accepted by all teachers. If a teacher is forced to instruct or include students with disabilities in the regular classroom, an attitude of resistance may emerge which may hinder quality service to both nondisabled and exceptional students. Forcing teachers to adapt to a new policy may not enhance the quality of education, and may even be detrimental to staff moral. Before such policy can be implemented, several

in-service seminars may need to be scheduled to educate and train teachers to meet the challenge of such revisions. Even so, educational personnel may still be divided over the policy proposals. This division may cause undue stress upon the school district in general, affect student achievement, and prevent the birth of a common vision. School districts may also find it necessary to discuss such policy implementations with concerned parents. This may be in the form of school board meetings or in a town hall atmosphere. Literature reflecting the policy proposals and their effects on the school districts may have to be prepared and published for the benefit of the local community. Concerned citizens may take notice, and demand that with the policy proposal implementation, accountability factors be established to safeguard optimal academic opportunity for both nondisabled and exceptional students. It is hoped that the compelling reason for these policy proposals is the special needs student. Despite the controversies, the disputes, disagreements, the support and the opposition to these proposed changes to the Special Education New Jersey Administrative Code 6:28 by Commissioner of Education Leo Klagholz, there is an expectancy that in the end educational personnel, whether they agree or disagree, will continue to render quality service to the exceptional student in a professional and dignified manner.

Limitations

Although, the representation of the survey participants (61 female and 11 male) reflected a common ratio of graduate students enrolled in educational programs at Rowan University, this sample may or may not have accurately represented the opinions of educational personnel in New Jersey. Educational personnel who are pursuing graduate degrees and certifications tend to be motivated individuals who have chosen to return to college to achieve excellence in their particular discipline. There are, however, numerous teachers serving in New Jersey who are well qualified based on undergraduate credentials and have not yet enrolled in an educational master's program. These teachers were not

represented in the survey. To control for this variable, perhaps the survey could have been implemented in a different fashion. Letters and surveys could have been sent to school districts throughout the state of New Jersey where a more accurate representation of educational personnel, in this regard, may have been present in the number of survey participants. However, it was decided from the beginning of this study not to access this option. This decision was made due to time constraints and the cost of paper and postage. The time factor would have been strained while gathering and waiting for the responses from each district. This decision regarded surveying school districts in only one county, such as Burlington County, as well due to the same factors as indicated in the speculated statewide distribution of surveys. It was therefore decided to survey master students enrolled in foundational education courses at Rowan College. This decision not only would control time factors, but would also serve to reduce cost and present accessibility to the researcher.

The timing of survey implementation could have been strategically planned to correlate with the news media. In the fall of 1996 (based on my own observations), the issue of revising special education in the state of New Jersey was reported more frequently in the news media as opposed to the winter of 1997 when the surveys were implemented. The survey participants familiarity level (13.7%) may have been higher if the survey was implemented in the fall of 1996 due to media exposure. This also applied to the survey participants who indicated somewhat familiar (50.7%) on the survey itself. The completion of the survey in the fall of 1996 would have also provided quality time to produce thorough interviews regarding the policy proposals. Thorough interviews may have provided some more detailed insight into the support and opposition of specific policy proposals.

It would have been interesting to survey and interview parents of exceptional children and report their specific needs and concerns. Perhaps, they could have added some insight into the support/opposition level regarding specific policy proposals as well.

Another interesting and key individual to have interviewed for this study would have been Commissioner Klagholz who developed the policy proposals to the Special Education New Jersey Administrative Code 6:28. Speaking with Dr. Klagholz would have revealed the perspective from a commissioner's viewpoint as to why specific policy proposals were suggested and how they benefit the exceptional child, the parents, the teachers, and the educational community in general. Perhaps, Dr. Klagholz would have provided some professional insight into the support/opposition level regarding specific policy proposals.

Other individuals that may have been surveyed and interviewed are numerous child study team members, board of education members, administrators, superintendents, and parents who do not have special needs students but who may be concerned with how these policy proposals may affect their children and their children's education. Obviously, these options would have also required much time, funding, and research.

In regard to presenting the survey to the master students, the best response was when the survey was explained to them, its' purpose, and how it may benefit and hold implications for their own professions. Opportunity was given for this to occur in two foundational classes. In these two classes, each student completed the survey. In the two remaining foundational classes, opportunity to explain the survey was not presented and thus the student response lacked enthusiasm which resulted in several incomplete surveys. Time needed to be allotted to explain the survey, its' purpose, and how it may benefit and hold implications for the student's professional future to control for the mortality of survey completion. Perhaps, arranging a meeting and presenting the study to the professors in advance would have granted time to explain the survey before it was distributed.

Nevertheless, based on time constraints and other variables beyond control, the Special Education New Jersey Administrative Code Policy Proposal Survey was overall satisfactory and provided insight into support and opposition factors regarding the policy proposals by Commissioner of Education Leo Klagholz.

Follow Up

In replicating this study, perhaps the focus could be adjusted to researching, interviewing and surveying one or more specific policy proposal. For example, a proposal seeks to establish one label "Eligible for Special Education" for the purpose of classifying students. A study could be conducted regarding labeling and classification in the state of New Jersey. A survey could then be developed based on research and this specific proposal. Insight could be provided through surveying and interviewing special education teachers, child study teams, and special interest support groups such as the Council for Exceptional Children and the Learning Disabilities Association. This focused approach could be adapted to any of the specific policy proposals such as the mandating the achievement of the Core Curriculum Content Standards, the participation in state and districtwide proficiency tests, reduction of evaluation assessments, the elimination of the required medical model, child study team adjustments regarding observation, testing, and the development of multidisciplinary teams, parental notice and consent.

This options for several follow up studies, such as these suggested, are numerous and available through the foundation established by this policy proposal survey.

Conclusion

What were the reactions and concerns of educational personnel in regard to the recent proposed amendments to the Special Education New Jersey Administrative Code 6:28? The results of this research question and study indicated a primary concern for the exceptional student and support for the policy proposals. Concerning the exceptional child, survey participants indicated that the policy proposals needed to benefit the student and if implemented, policy makers need to keep in mind that the needs and concerns of children are a priority. General support for these policy proposals (52% supportive vs 35.9% opposed vs 11.2% no opinion vs 0.9% no response) was indicated with and

without reservation. Supportive survey participants were eager for its implementation and other participants were supportive with caution.

The overall response from the 73 survey participants to the Special Education New Jersey Administrative Code Policy Proposal Survey serves to remind the educational community to render quality professional services to all students, both regular and exceptional, despite differences of opinion.

Appendix

*The Special Education
New Jersey
Administrative Code
Policy Proposal Survey*

Commissioner of Education Leo Klagholz has proposed a new set of policies to the State Board of Education that would provide school districts with increased flexibility in the provision of special education services. This new proposed policy would provide for a shift in the provision of special education services from a system that is focused on procedural issues to one that will result in high academic achievement and challenging programs for students.

Among the policy recommendations is the elimination of the current medical model disability labeling system and, an establishing of a new classification system with the single designation "Eligible for Special Education." Under this one classification, specific criteria will be established, based on current and revised categorical definitions. The definitions of perceptually impaired and neurologically impaired are being deleted and will be replaced with definitions for specific learning disability and traumatic brain injury which are the federal categories.

The department's proposal will also provide school districts with flexibility in the use of child study teams. While child study teams will still consist of the same professionals, the proposed rules are designed to permit greater flexibility in the composition and functioning of team personnel. School districts will have the option of utilizing the current child study team model or convening a variety of multidisciplinary teams which include at least one child study team member and other specialists in the area of disability. The multidisciplinary teams would be responsible for identification, evaluation and Individualized Education Program (IEP) development.

A primary goal of the proposed changes is to assure, to the greatest extent possible, that special education pupils will be provided programs leading to the achievement of the Core Curriculum Content Standards. Toward that end, the Department of Education will develop rules requiring that IEPs be linked to the local district's regular education curriculum with whatever modifications or adaptations are

necessary. In addition, pupils with disabilities will be included in statewide or districtwide assessments to the fullest extent appropriate.

Directions

Please answer each question as honestly as possible. Completely circle the letter and answer representing your viewpoint. If you would like to briefly explain your answer, feel free to write your comments on the lines provided below each set of questions.

Male _____ Age _____

Female _____ Age _____

How familiar are you with the proposals?

- a. very familiar
- b. somewhat
- c. not at all

Are you employed in an educational setting as a

- a. regular teacher?
- b. special education teacher?
- c. administrator?
- d. member of a child study team? (Please list title _____)
- e. other? (Please list _____)

1. What is your opinion of the commissioner's proposal in regard to the recommendation that "the current medical model disability labeling system should be changed to avoid overburdening children with disability labels?"
- a. strongly support
 - b. support
 - c. opposed
 - d. strongly opposed
 - e. no opinion

Please explain your answer

2. What is your opinion of the commissioner's proposal in regard to the establishing of one label, "Eligible for Special Education" for the purpose of classification?
- a. strongly support
 - b. support
 - c. opposed
 - d. strongly opposed
 - e. no opinion

Please explain your answer

3. What is your opinion of the commissioner's proposal in regard to the designating and establishing "Eligible for Special Education" as a new classification system with specific criteria for eligibility?
- a. strongly support
 - b. support
 - c. opposed
 - d. strongly opposed
 - e. no opinion

Please explain your answer

4. What is your opinion of the commissioner's proposal in regard to the deleting the categorical definitions of perceptually impaired and neurologically impaired and replacing them with definitions for specific learning disability and traumatic brain injury?
- a. strongly support
 - b. support
 - c. opposed
 - d. strongly opposed
 - e. no opinion

Please explain your answer

5. What is your opinion of the commissioner's proposal in regard to mandating to the fullest possible extent students with disabilities to participate in state and districtwide proficiency tests?
- a. strongly support
 - b. support
 - c. opposed
 - d. strongly opposed
 - e. no opinion

Please explain your answer

6. What is your opinion of the commissioner's proposal in regard to the requiring that IEPs be linked to the local district's regular education curriculum with whatever modifications or adaptations are necessary?
- a. strongly support
 - b. support
 - c. opposed
 - d. strongly opposed
 - e. no opinion

Please explain your answer

7. What is your opinion of the commissioner's proposal in regard to the development of special education programs that will lead to the achievement of the Core Curriculum Content Standards?

- a. strongly support
- b. support
- c. opposed
- d. strongly opposed
- e. no opinion

Please explain your answer

8. What is your opinion in regard to the present method of exempting students from the Core Curriculum Standards due to instructional programs that are not reflective of regular education curriculum standards?

- a. strongly support
- b. support
- c. opposed
- d. strongly opposed
- e. no opinion

Please explain your answer

9. What is your opinion of the commissioner's proposal in regard to the reducing the number of required initial evaluation assessments from four evaluations to two?

- a. strongly support
- b. support
- c. opposed
- d. strongly opposed
- e. no opinion

Please explain your answer

10. What is your opinion of the commissioner's proposal in regard to allowing the Child Study Team to determine which assessments are needed for pupils on an individual basis?
- a. strongly support
 - b. support
 - c. opposed
 - d. strongly opposed
 - e. no opinion

Please explain your answer

11. What is your opinion of the commissioner's proposal in regard to the elimination of the required medical evaluation when ascertaining a potential special needs student?
- a. strongly support
 - b. support
 - c. opposed
 - d. strongly opposed
 - e. no opinion

Please explain your answer

12. What is your opinion of the commissioner's proposal in regard to the elimination of requiring each Child Study Team member to observe the pupil outside of the test setting and now requiring that only one member conduct such an observation?
- a. strongly support
 - b. support
 - c. opposed
 - d. strongly opposed
 - e. no opinion

Please explain your answer

13. What is your opinion of the commissioner's proposal in regard to the development of multidisciplinary teams which are to be composed of one child study team member and other professionals for the purpose of identification, evaluation, classification, IEP development and placement?

- a. strongly support
- b. support
- c. opposed
- d. strongly opposed
- e. no opinion

Please explain your answer

14. What is your opinion of the commissioner's proposal in regard to the reduction of parental notice from 15 to 10 days for the purposes of identification, classification, evaluation, educational placement or the provision of a free, appropriate public education?

- a. strongly support
- b. support
- c. opposed
- d. strongly opposed
- e. no opinion

Please explain your answer

15. What is your opinion of the commissioner's proposal in regard to redefining consent to mean that a proposed action may take effect immediately?

- a. strongly support
- b. support
- c. opposed
- d. strongly opposed
- e. no opinion

Please explain your answer

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