

Rowan University

Rowan Digital Works

Theses and Dissertations

4-20-2004

Funding influences on special education program selection and implementation

Gregory Matthew Brown
Rowan University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://rdw.rowan.edu/etd>



Part of the [Elementary and Middle and Secondary Education Administration Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Brown, Gregory Matthew, "Funding influences on special education program selection and implementation" (2004). *Theses and Dissertations*. 1120.
<https://rdw.rowan.edu/etd/1120>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Rowan Digital Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Rowan Digital Works. For more information, please contact graduateresearch@rowan.edu.

FUNDING INFLUENCES ON SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAM
SELECTION AND IMPLEMENTATION

By

Gregory M. Brown

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Master of Arts Degree
of
The Graduate School
at
Rowan University
September 1, 2003

Approved by

Date Approved April 20, 2004

ABSTRACT

Gregory Matthew Brown
FUNDING INFLUENCES ON SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAM SELECTION
AND IMPLEMENTATION
2003/04
Dr. Robert Kern
Master of Arts in Educational Administration

The goal of the study was to identify the effects funding had on special education program selection and implementation in a small semi-rural district. The intern sought to identify the special education department's program offerings. The intern sought to reveal the sources of funding available to the special education department, and how the special education department implemented and developed its programs in accordance with funding guidelines. The primary purpose was to examine the degree of influence funding had on the target districts programs. Included in this was the purpose of determining how the special education department manages its program offerings. The study revealed a strong funding influence upon a special education department's program selection and implementation. The study findings indicate that funding guidelines will to a large degree determine the programs that a special education department can offer. The study indicated that one of the main steering mechanisms for program selection and implementation was the IEP. A student's IEP must be met and the programs offered by the special education department attempt to cater to the IEP

Acknowledgements

Lisa Brown (for all of her help and patience)

Dana Rose Brown (for entertaining me as I worked, as only a six year old can!)

Dr. Robert Kern (for his editing help)

Sue Stryker (Special Education Department Supervisor)

Chris Peters (Vice Principal)

Pat Soltys (VP Clerk Typist)

Table of Contents

	Page
Acknowledgements	ii
Chapter 1 Introduction	1
Focus of the Study	1
Purpose of the Study	2
Definitions	2
Limitations	11
Setting	12
Organization of the Study	20
Chapter 2 Review of Literature	21
Introduction	21
Review of Major Concept Related to the Problem	21
Chapter 3 Design of the Study	26
Research Design	26
Development and Design of the Research Instrumentation	26
Description of Sampling and Sampling Technique	26
Data Collection Approach	27
Data Analysis Plan	27
Chapter 4 Presentation of Research Findings	29
Research Findings	29

Chapter 5 Conclusions, Implications, and Further Study	34
Conclusions	34
Implications	36
Further Study	37
References	38

List of Tables

	Page
Table 1 District Wide Grading Format	16
Table 2 HSPA Statistics	17
Table 3 GEPA Statistics	18

Chapter 1

Introduction

How did funding affect program selection and implementation when servicing a large population of special education students in a small district? What choices were made when funding issues limited program implementation? The intern explored the idea that funding guidelines restricted the ability of special education administrators to enact programs they felt would help their special education population. A greater understanding of these funding issues may assist special education administrators in making better, more informed decisions.

Focus of the Study

The subject of this study was the Pinelands Regional Districts Special Education Department, and the programs offered by the department. The study focused on the department's staffing, programs, and student population. The study detailed the workings of the special education department. The study examined the sources of funding available to the special education department and the rules and regulations that governed their dispersal and allocations. The study examined the program offerings for both the Pinelands Regional Middle School and High School. The intent of the study was to reveal funding affect on special education program selection and implementation by school administration.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine and evaluate the effect affect of funding limitations on program choice and implementation as they pertain to the intern's districts special education department. The intern examined these topics in an attempt to reveal the issues that are handled by special education administrators. An understanding of these interactions and processes was the key to providing insights that the intern used to make proposals for special education program administrators to consider. The goal of greater efficiency and outcomes in special education programs will lead to educational improvements for our at-risk student population.

Definitions

Achievement/ability discrepancy: A criterion often used by child study teams and school psychologists to determine whether a child has a learning disability.

ADA - Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990: This federal law follows the principles established under Section 504 Nondiscrimination based on handicap in programs and activities receiving or benefiting from federal financial assistance. It provides for the protection from discrimination of persons with disabilities and allows claims for compensatory and punitive damages.

ADHD - Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder: This condition is also often called Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) because of that usage in a previous edition of DSM. It is a neurological syndrome that may be genetically transmitted. Its characteristics are distractibility, impulsivity, and restlessness. Although it is not a service category under IDEA, children with this condition may be eligible for service under other categories or under Section 504.

Advocate: An individual who is not an attorney, but who advises parents and students regarding their rights under federal and state laws in their dealings with school districts regarding the children's special education programs.

Affective: A term, which refers to emotions and attitudes, held by a person.

Alternate Standard Educational Program: Any of numerous options, which can exist within a school's curriculum, which do not involve students' being served in a special education class. For example, a school might have an intensive remedial program, a vocation program, etc.

Annual goals: A required component of an individual education plan set for special needs students in all public schools under Section 300.29 of the IDEA regulations. Goals are written for the individual student and can be for a maximum of one year.

Autism: A new category of eligibility for special education services added by IDEA

Case study evaluation: A set of procedures specified within IDEA used to determine possible special education eligibility.

Categorical placement: Special education programs in which students are grouped based on their IDEA eligibility category. Alternative models include "non-categorical" placement and "cross-categorical" placement.

Chronologically age appropriate: A standard used to evaluate children's activities.

Instruction and materials should be directed at the student's actual age, rather than to the interests and tastes of younger children.

Cognitive: A term, which refers to reasoning or intellectual capacity.

Community-based: A program that uses the community rather than the classroom to teach skills in order to facilitate generalization and application of program goals.

Continuum of services: The range of services, which must be available to the students of a school district so that they may be served in the least restrictive environment.

Conference: Generic term that may refer to a multidisciplinary conference, IEP meeting, annual review, or other type of meeting.

Cooperative: Voluntary association of school districts that band together to provide special education services using a shared administrative structure.

Cued speech: Method of communication used by some persons with hearing impairments. Used to reduce the ambiguities in lip reading.

Curriculum: The subject matter to be learned. A curriculum is described in terms of its scope and sequence. One might examine the curriculum of a special school, for example, to determine whether it matches the IEP of a student whom had been recommended to go there.

Curriculum-based assessment: A methodology of increasing importance in special education in which a child's progress in the curriculum is measured at frequent intervals.

Delay: A child's mental and physical development, which does not occur within expected time ranges.

Disability: A physical, sensory, cognitive, or affective impairment that causes the student to require special education. NOTE: There are significant differences in the definitions of disability in IDEA and Section 504.

Due process: In general, due process includes the elements of notice, opportunity to be heard and to defend ones' self.

EHA - Education for All Handicapped Children Act: More commonly identified as P.L. 94-142. It became effective in 1975 and was significantly modified by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (1997) which emphasizes that students with disabilities are to be prepared for employment and independent living. In addition, specific attention is to be paid to the secondary education they receive.

Extended school day: A provision for a special education student to receive instruction for a period longer than the standard school day. This sometimes includes "double" kindergarten, later afternoons, or earlier starting times.

Extended school year: A provision for a special education student to receive instruction during ordinary school "vacation" periods.

EMH – Educable Mentally Handicapped: An eligibility category under IDEA including children whose cognitive development is approximately one-half to three-fourths the average rate and is accompanied by similar delays in adaptive behavior.

FERPA - Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act: A federal law that regulates the management of student records and disclosure of information from those records. The Act has its own administrative enforcement mechanism.

FAPE-Free Appropriate Public Education: Provision as required under IDEA.

Fine motor: Functions, which require tiny muscle movements. For example, writing or typing would require fine motor movement.

Functional curriculum: A curriculum focused on practical life skills and usually taught in community-based settings with concrete materials that are a regular part of everyday life. The purpose of this type of instruction is to maximize the student's generalization to real life use of his/her skills.

Gross motor: Functions, which require large muscle movements. For example, walking or jumping would require gross motor movement.

Heterogeneous grouping: An educational practice placing students of diverse abilities within the same instructional groups. This practice is usually helpful in the integration of children with disabilities.

Homogeneous grouping: An educational practice placing students of similar abilities within the same instructional groups. This practice usually serves as a barrier to the integration of children with disabilities.

Honig v. Doe: This case offers significant information on the nature of discipline that may be used with special education students.

IEP - Individualized Education Plan: The document developed at an IEP meeting, which sets the standard by which subsequent special education services are usually determined appropriate.

IEP meeting: A gathering required at least annually under IDEA, which develops an IEP for a student receiving special education.

IFSP - Individual Family Service Plan: Document, outlining the services to be delivered to families of infants and toddlers receiving special services.

Inclusion: A popular philosophical position based upon the belief that we need to return to one educational system for all students and that every student is entitled to an instructional program which meets his or her individual needs and learning characteristics.

IDEA - Individuals with Disabilities Education Act: Law that modifies and extends the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHA).

In-home interventions: Special education services delivered in a child's own home. This is sometimes done to facilitate generalization for children with cognitive disabilities and to generalize self-control strategies for children with behavioral problems.

Instructional placement: Phrase used to describe the situation in which a child spends at least half of his/her school day in special education.

Irving Independent School District v. Tatro ("Tatro"): A case that helped to distinguish (federally required) related services from "medical services" which are not required to be provided under IDEA.

Joint agreement: Also called a "cooperative". A joint agreement is a voluntary association of school districts who join to provide special education services.

LEA - local educational agency: A local public school district.

Learning disability: An eligibility category under IDEA and described in detail within the statute.

LRE - least restrictive environment: A requirement of IDEA. Placement of the student must be in an environment, which has the least barriers to their learning.

Mainstreaming: This term does not actually appear in the law. It refers to IDEA's preference for the education of every child in the least restrictive environment for each student and has been most widely used to refer to the return of children with mild disabilities to a regular classroom for a portion of each school day.

MDC - multidisciplinary conference: A required gathering under IDEA, which is the only body able to make certain determinations - specifically about a child's eligibility for special education.

Mediation: A voluntary dispute resolution process for which ISBE will provide mediators upon request.

Occupational therapy: A special education related service which is usually focused upon the development of a student's fine motor skills and/or the identification of adapted ways of accomplishing activities of daily living when a student's disabilities preclude doing those tasks in typical ways (e.g. modifying clothing so a person without arms can dress himself/herself).

Offsite: A location outside the primary educational facility that houses students who are segregated from the general population.

OSEP - The US Office of Special Education Programs: An office within OSERS charged with assuring that the various states comply with IDEA.

OSERS - US Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services: An agency of the federal government's executive branch within the Department of Education.

Permanent record: A brief document upon which essential information is entered and preserved. The contents of the permanent record are specified in the Illinois Student Records Act.

Placement: The setting in which the special education service is delivered to the student. It must put to use the student's IEP.

Present levels of educational performance: A required IEP component. Details of the student's current performance levels.

Referral: Notice to a school district that a child may be in need of special education. Although good practice suggests making referrals in writing, an oral referral may be valid. A referral sets certain timelines in place.

Regression/recoupment: The amount of loss of skills a child experiences over an instructional break (primarily summer vacation) and the amount of time it takes him/her to recover the lost skills. Standards for when regression and recoupment concerns require summer school are developed in case law and in state and federal policy letters.

REI - regular education initiative: A concept promoted by former Assistant Secretary of Education Madeline Will. The goal of the REI is to merge the special education and regular education systems into a unitary system.

Related services: IDEA requires that school districts provide whatever related services (other than medical care, which is not for diagnostic purposes) a child needs in order to benefit from his or her special education program.

Resource placement: A special education placement for less than half a child's school day. Such a classroom is usually called a "resource room".

Respite care: A service provided to the families of children who require extraordinary forms of care so that the family can take vacations, handle business affairs, and have some relief from the duties of caring for the child.

Satellite program: A classroom operated in another facility. For example, a special education cooperative might rent classrooms in its member school districts' facilities to operate classes for students who are able to move out of the cooperative's segregated special education facility.

Section 504: Provision of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which prohibits recipients of federal funds from discrimination against persons with disabilities.

Section 504 hearing: An evolving area of administrative procedures. School districts must make a Section 504 hearing process available, but that process need not be the same as the IDEA hearing mechanism.

Self-contained placement: See “instructional placement”.

Seriously emotionally disturbed: An eligibility category under IDEA, which is described in detail within the statute. Caution must be exercised not to confuse such children with “socially maladjusted” children, who are not eligible for services.

Short-term objectives: A required component of an IEP. Each annual goal must have at least one short-term objective.

Standardized tests: Tests, which have norms reflecting a larger population (usually these are age or grade based norms reflecting the performance of children throughout the country on the same tests).

Supplementary aids and services: Accommodations, which could permit a student to profit from instruction in the least restrictive environment.

Temporary record: A student’s temporary record is a very extensive document including any diagnostic special education materials.

Therapeutic day program: An instructional placement for students with serious emotional disturbance in which aspects of treatment for the emotional difficulty are incorporated into the school program. Depending on the theoretical orientation of the school, these services may include psychotherapy, behavior management, positive peer culture, or other types of intervention.

TMH – trainable mentally handicapped: An eligibility category under IDEA including children whose cognitive development is approximately one-fourth to one-half the average rate and is accompanied by similar delays in adaptive behavior.

Total communication: An instructional strategy in which teachers instruct children with severe hearing loss both by speaking to them and by using sign language. The theory is that if the children can learn to speak, then the stimulation is being presented. Even if they do not learn to speak, they will still be provided with a language-rich environment.

Transition planning: At a minimum, this is planning for adolescents' post-school lives and must begin by age 14-1/2. This involves preparation of a document called an Individual Transition Program (ITP). Good practice may involve planning for earlier transitions as well as incorporating such plans into the child's IEP.

Traumatic brain injury: A new disability category added for eligibility under IDEA.

Visual-motor: Coordination of what is seen with an action. For example, one uses visual-motor coordination when catching a ball.

Youth Based Services: A program that provides health and social services for eligible students.

Limitations

This study could not be replicated elsewhere due to the small sample size, the uniqueness of the setting and the sub-group being studied, and the time limits imposed due to the thesis deadline. The sample group was comprised of one district's special education department. The structure and operations of this department are unique unto itself. The methods of operations are unique to this district. The methods of operation were partially developed in-house. The in-house environment created a department that

operates to serve the unique needs of its population. Therefore, findings may only be valid for the given sample group.

Setting

The district is classified as a rural community located in Ocean County New Jersey. The population of the four sending districts totals 22,413. The total area of the four districts comprises 147 square miles. The district's location is approximately 60 miles east of Philadelphia, 120 miles south of New York City. Pinelands Regional school district services a large rural area that is composed of three sending townships and one borough. Municipal government in the three regional townships and borough operate under the "township" form of government that consists of an elected council and mayor serving four-year terms. These include Little Egg Harbor Township, Eagleswood Township, and Tuckerton Borough, all located in Ocean County; and Bass River Township located in neighboring Burlington County. Little Egg Harbor Township is the largest sending district in terms of population with a total of 16,019. Tuckerton Borough, Bass River Township, and Eagleswood Township follow it with populations of 3,517, 1,510, and 1,441 respectively. All population sizes are as of the 2000 census. The average racial makeup of the townships are 98.87% White, 0.07% African American, 0.07% Native American, 0.13% Asian, 0.00% Pacific Islander, 0.13% from other races, and 0.73% from two or more races.

The communities making up the district are experiencing a great deal of change in both size and character. Originally, the character of the region was one of a small population of several founding families, whereas currently it is one of dynamic change. Explosive growth related to nearby resort and casino commerce has altered the

community and school environment. A complex mix of old and new has created a fluid and changing environment. The value placed upon education has increased with the influx of a higher socioeconomic population. However, there is little tax income from large commercial or manufacturing rateables. Single-family property owners support a great deal of the educational budget with local taxes providing 46% of the district's funds. To date, the percentage of budget defeats has been low at 8%, however the last two budgets did not pass. The PEA (Pinelands Educational Association) and the district have taken steps in hopes of reversing this trend. The district office is involved in community outreach programs through the local PSTA (Parent Student Teacher Association). These include public awareness meetings and information mailings. In addition, the PEA reminds prospective voters of the upcoming budget ballot through phone and mail.

The Board of Education is composed of nine citizens elected to serve terms of three years each. Representatives are elected based on constituent population, one from Bass River Township, one from Eagleswood Township, six from Little Egg Harbor Township, and one from the Borough of Tuckerton. The Board of Education meets on the fourth Wednesday of each month.

The Pinelands Regional School District is comprised of the Senior High School, (10-12), and Junior High School, (7-9). The current combined enrollment is 2,032 students. Of this population, 23% have IEPs, defining them, as special needs students. The student to teacher ratio is 25:1 in the high school, and 22:1 in the middle school. The district opened in September 1979. The faculty holds certified staff accreditation. The curriculum offered is multi-faceted multi-level and is accredited by the Middle States Association

New Jersey's Department of Education. Length of class period averages 47 minutes; classes meet 5 periods per week. Science lab classes meet an additional 94 minutes per week.

The Special Education Department at Pinelands Regional is the largest department in the school district. As such it consumes the largest portion of the total school budget. The intern examines the sources of school funding and the rules that govern their distribution focusing on the Special Education Department's budget and expenditures, and seeks insight into the financial factors that affect program choice and implementation.

Programs in the Special Education Department vary from mainstreamed, to in-class support, resource center, departmentalized and non-departmentalized cycle, self-contained, an off-site facility, and combinations of all as determined by the IEP Team. The department also offers vocational education programs through Ocean County Vocational-Technical Schools and out-of-district programs at private or public school placement. The purpose of special education services is to meet individual needs by providing a free and appropriate public education for students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment. The special education staff is comprised of teachers, instructional aides, speech/language therapists, interpreters, social workers, psychologists, learning disability teacher consultants, special needs counselors, and secretarial support staff. Consultants outside this staff include the school nurse, school doctor, child psychiatrists, child neurologist, occupational and physical therapists as well as other specialists as deemed necessary. IEP Teams are comprised of Pinelands staff, parents, and students who make team decisions on what are the most appropriate services for the student.

The after graduation tracking for the class of 2002-03 is as follows: Four Year College 40.1%; Two Year College 18.8%; Trade-Vocational School 4.2%; Work 21.9%; Military 5.6%; Undecided 1%; Vocationally Trained 8.4%; Total 100%. Of the 165 members of the faculty, 34 hold Masters Degrees, and two hold Doctoral Degrees.

The district-wide grading system, quality points, class rank, and weighted grades use the format found in Table 1. All students are ranked according to grade point average. This is obtained by multiplying the final average for the course by the credit value of the course, adding these products, and dividing by the number of credits attempted. All courses, academic and non-academic, grades 7 through 12 are included.

Table 2 contains the Pinelands Regional School District's HESPA statistics for the 2002-2003 school year. Table 3 contains the Pinelands Regional School District's GEPA statistics for the 2002-2003 school year.

Table 1

District Wide Grading Format

<u>Grade</u>	<u>Scale</u>	<u>Points</u>
A+	98-100	4.5
A	93-97	4.0
B+	90-92	3.5
B	85-89	3.0
C+	82-84	2.5
C	77-81	2.0
D	70-76	1.0
F	69-0	0.0
IP	In Progress	0.0
WP	Withdraw Pass	0.0
WF	Withdraw Fail	0.0
M	Medical Excuse	0.0

Table 2

HSPA Statistics

<u>Category</u>	<u>Student Numbers</u>	<u>Student Percentage</u>
Language Arts		
Advanced Proficient	21	11.3
Proficient	145	78.0
<u>Partially Proficient</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>10.8</u>
Mathematics		
Advanced Proficient	38	20.3
Proficient	134	71.7
Partially Proficient	15	8.0

Table 3

GEPA Statistics

Category	Student Numbers	Student Percentage
Language Arts		
Advanced Proficient	*	*
Proficient	183	71.5
Partially Proficient	64	25
Mathematics		
Advanced Proficient	27	10.6
Proficient	132	52
Partially Proficient	95	37.4
Science		
Advanced Proficient	36	13.9
Proficient	188	72.6
Partially Proficient	35	13.5

The New Jersey School Based Youth Services Program is a collaborative partnership between the New Jersey Department of Human Services, Pinelands Regional School Board, and local community agencies. Implemented in 1988, the program provides social services to students in the middle and high school using a one-stop shopping approach. Core services include individual and family counseling, primary and preventative health services, and employment assistance. Recreational services are also an integral part of the program. The goal of the program is to help teens achieve their full potential: to graduate, to be mentally and physically healthy, to be drug free, and to leave school ready to enter employment or continue their education. This state-funded initiative links the education and human services systems in addressing the problems adolescents and families encounter in our rapidly changing society. The New Jersey program has received national recognition. In 1990, it was awarded the American Public Welfare Association's Successful Projects Initiative Award and in 1991, the program received the prestigious Ford Foundation/Harvard University Kennedy School of Government Innovations in Government Award. Services include recreation, primary, and preventative health care, family therapy, individual counseling, family planning information, drug and alcohol abuse counseling, pregnant teen & teen parent services, transportation and, a 24-hour teen crisis hot line. Pinelands Regional School District offers community-learning programs funded by the United States Department of Education. The 21st Century Community Learning Center Program provides support services during non-school hours to promote high educational achievement, youth development and family support services. The Quality Education Program offers high caliber curriculum and instruction to enable all children to meet challenging academic standards and access to resources for enhanced

learning experiences. The Middle School Summer Enrichment/Transition Program offers peer tutoring, homework clubs, computer programs, and vocational programs. The Youth Development Program enables young people to develop their assets and talents, form positive relationships with peers and adults, and serve as resources for the community. Offerings include recreation programs/social events, club activities, and drug abuse prevention programs. The Cultural Activities Family Support Program offers coordinated social services to build individual strengths and enhance family life. Included within this program are counseling services, crisis intervention and, parenting education.

Organization of the Study

The remaining chapters of the study are organized in the following way. Chapter 2 is titled Review of Literature. This chapter reviews and cites articles pertinent to this study. Chapter 3 is titled Design of the Study. This chapter describes the project's plan of action and the research tools used to carry out that plan. Chapter 4 is titled Presentation of Research Findings. This chapter contains the information garnered from the project research. Chapter 5 is titled Conclusions, Implications, and Further Study. This chapter is a summative narration of the study's findings. Implications of the findings and areas of further study are also considered in this chapter.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

Introduction

Funding is the lifeblood of all educational programs. Without appropriate funding the best-laid plans and intentions may have difficulty succeeding. Educational mandates often present administrators with difficult choices when it comes to distributing the funds to best serve the students needs. The intern's intention is to reveal the processes that lead to decisions about program selection and implementation with funding as the steering agent.

Review of Major Concept Related to the Problem

Funding for the Special Education Department comes from various sources and is determined by numerous laws. The intern examined the sources of funding and then the rules and regulations that control their distribution.

According to President George W. Bush the federal government must fulfill its responsibilities to all of America's citizens. He believes that no child should be left behind, including those with disabilities. The executive branch will work with Congress to increase funding for special education with the goal of meeting the federal obligation under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Originally passed by Congress in 1975, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, or IDEA, ensures that children with disabilities would have a free public education that would meet their unique needs. However, the federal government has not been providing sufficient funding for IDEA. Because the federal government has failed to provide its fair share of the responsibility, state and local governments have been burdened. Additionally the president believes that

it is equally important to emphasize preventive efforts to identify children with special needs. Early detection of needs will greatly benefit children by giving students the necessary help early (Bush, 2000). Funding will focus on students in the elementary grades, where math and reading difficulties can be corrected before children are diagnosed as needing special education services. States who choose to draw from the fund will be required to initiate: a reading diagnostic test for students in K-2 to determine where students need help, a research-based curriculum, training for K-2 teachers in reading preparation, and intervention for students who are not reading at grade level in K-2.

“Special education funding in Michigan: robbing Peter to pay Paul?” (Sielke & Russo, 1999) examined the effect of the *Durant v. State of Michigan* case on funding for special education. The case involved the issue of whether, within the meaning of state law, special education and special education transportation were state-mandated services. The Supreme Court of Michigan found that the state had a duty to fund special education. According to the authors it seems that the state is interpreting this decision to meet its own needs. The state has been shifting funds appropriated for general membership state aid in the form of a foundation allowance to a category for special education, the authors suggest that Michigan seems to be searching for ways to lessen its responsibility for special education funding. The state appears to believe that its only responsibility is to provide a basic education for all students and that it has little or no duty to fund the extra needs of children and young adults with disabilities (Sielke & Russo, 1999). The authors believe that this may set a precedent for other states to follow if Michigan is permitted to continue under-funding special education.

In *Durant V. State of Michigan* the Supreme Court of Michigan addressed the important issue of funding special education. When initially passed in 1975, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was authorized to reimburse states for up to 40 percent of the cost of special education. Yet, since 1975 the federal government has never provided anywhere near this level of support. In actuality, states have been reimbursed for only 6-7 percent of these costs. The Omnibus Consolidated Appropriation Act for the Fiscal Year 1997 raised this amount to 10 percent. As school districts must ultimately fund special education out of their general budgets, they are forced to adopt a kind of "robbing Peter to pay Paul" tactic whereby resources that would otherwise support students in regular classes and programs are diverted to pay for special education (Sielke & Russo, 1999). The possible ripple effect upon other states makes this article relevant to this study.

Further insight into funding special education programs in New Jersey comes from the NJDOE (New Jersey Department of Education) Special Education Plan. The NJDOE through the offices of Special Education Programs and educational Support Services is responsible to ensure that special education programs and services are provided to all students with disabilities. Districts of residence are required to fund all costs related to the programs and services specified in the IEPs of children with disabilities ages three through 21 years who are within the jurisdiction of the district. Each state facility is responsible to provide the educational program, including related services. The student's district of residence pays for the educational programs and services through an automatic debit of its state aid. Disputes regarding a determination of residency and thus the

financial responsibility of the district are resolved through the Division of Finance in the Department of Education.

Krista Kafer, senior education policy analyst for the Heritage Foundation, writes in her article "Making Good on Promises to Increase Funding for Special Education" that Congress could increase funding for special education by billions of dollars through the transfer of funds from ineffective and low-priority programs into special education (Kafer, 2002). She states that President George W. Bush urged Congress to cut numerous ineffective programs in his budget recommendations, and "stopping the cycle of funding decisions based on wishes rather than on performance information and ensuring that taxpayer dollars are directed to the activities known to be effective in improving student outcomes" (Kafer, 2002).

She concludes that by transferring funds to special education programs, Congress could commit far more toward the maximum federal contribution recommended in the original IDEA law, 40 percent of the average per-pupil expenditure for each child in special education, which until recently has not exceeded 12 percent. Her recommendations would transfer funds worth \$974,434,000. The author provides the following partial list of programs she believes could be cut and supports the President's arguments with some of her own findings:

- Historic Whaling and Trading Partners Exchange Program,
- Small Learning Communities,
- Coping Skills Program to Avoid Heart Disease,
- Physical Education Program,
- Women's Educational Equity Act,
- Ready-to-Teach Television,
- Star Schools,
- Gifted and Talented.

A number of these programs duplicate other similar programs, and others have not proven to be effective. An example of duplicating is funding for struggling schools, mentoring, alcohol abuse, and computer technology which are available under other Elementary and Secondary Education Act programs. In addition, a recent statewide study showed that National Board-certified teachers had on average no more impact on student achievement than their non-certified peers did. This study is but one of many demonstrating no connection between teacher certification and student achievement. While the Women's Educational Equity Act aims to help girls gain an equitable education, it is boys who have fallen behind girls with regard to an array of academic indicators, ranging from test scores and honors awards to high school and college graduation rates. Still other programs, such as the Historic Whaling and Trading Partners Exchange Program, are clearly designed to cater to the needs of special-interest groups (Kafer, 2002).

Proposals such as these could have far reaching effects on both special and general education. When program funding was changed by federal mandate, program selection and implementation decisions had to be reconsidered by both general and special education administrators.

Chapter 3

Design of the Study

Research Design

For a long period Special education administrators have faced with the difficult decisions of program selection and implementation. The intern addresses this issue as it pertains to the minimal setting of the intern's district. This study examines federal, state, and local funding formulas and their influence upon a single district's special education programs.

Information used in this study was based on archival data, and person-to-person interviews. Interviews were conducted individually by the intern with local administrators and staff associated with the district. Interviewee selection is based on position, degree of influence, and pertinence to the study.

Development and Design of the Research Instrumentation

The intern used a case study approach to provide an in-depth analysis of a bounded system (the district's special education department). The focus is on this specific organization's development of policy and planning as related to funding issues. As such, the case study provides an immersed analysis of a single entity, which is carefully defined and characterized by time and place. This represents the historical organizational case study model.

Description of Sampling and Sampling Technique

The intern engaged in purposive sampling by selecting individuals in the special education department, board office employees, and others who are or were actively engaged in special education program selection and funding issues. These participant

interviews use semi-structured questioning. Artifacts and documents pertinent to the study are included in the sampling.

Data Collection Approach

The intern compiles data through qualitative collection techniques. Participant's perspectives are gathered through person-to-person interviews using semi-structured questions. In addition the intern uses information collected from artifacts and documents. These artifacts and documents include in-district sources such as the school budget, and out-of-district sources such as state, federal, and private grants.

Data Analysis Plan

Data analysis entails the division of data into workable units. Categories of funding sources and program expenditures were developed to clarify where the funding sources were coming from and where the expenditures were going to. A coding process categorizes and organizes the data into these units, which are analyzed for relationships leading to the intern's inferences and interpretations. All interviews are transcribed, and analyzed by topical area. In addition, federal and state statutes and regulations, along with various state and local programs, documents, and research studies augmented the interview data. Someone who has direct experience with the phenomena, organization, or group being studied writes primary source material in the first person. Secondary sources are secondhand documents, such as descriptions of an event based on what is learned from others, or a summary of more extensive primary information.

Qualitative methods describe the school's special education programs to provide functional definitions. Reliability and validity are enhanced through checking consistency of information across informants and from interview to written documents. The intern

discerns themes and information obtained from various sources. Follow-up interviews verify inconsistent information and obtain additional data. The analysis proceeded in three stages: (a) exploration, (b) description, and (c) verification.

Chapter 4

Presentation of the Research Findings

Research Findings

In this chapter the intern presents the research findings. The data was collected through interviews with Pinelands Regional School District's Special Education Supervisor, Superintendent, and Business Administrator. The intern's questions probe the relationship between special education funding sources, rules and regulations, and their effects on a small districts special education program selection and implementation. The tone of the interview questions sought to first give an overview of the districts mission and the programs offered, then probe the funding issues that may influence these programs. The following paragraphs highlight these questions and information obtained.

The district's special education administrator provided the answers to the following questions. What is the mission of the special education department? The mission of the department is to serve children with exceptional conditions and mainstream them as much as possible with their non-disabled peers. Exceptional conditions include multiply disabled (Cycle M), low cognitive (Cycle L), and emotionally disturbed (Cycle E). What programs does the special education department offer? The department offers multiply disabled programs previously referred to as Cycles M, L, and E., these programs are offered in both the High School and Middle School. Low cognitive students are considered very low functioning and are usually placed in a self-contained classroom. Cycle E students are classified as emotionally disturbed and are also placed in a self-contained environment although with some modifications. Cycle E students move rooms throughout the day amongst a team of three teachers. Resource cycle is offered in the

Middle School for the 7th and 8th grade students. Resource cycle permits the students to circulate from resource room to resource room some students in the resource cycle are scheduled to go out to in-class support, in this way there are no conflicts with FAPE guidelines. The district also offers in-class support and inclusion classes. There is an important distinction that should be made between in-class support and inclusion. The in-class support environment provides two teachers at all times in a “normal” classroom setting. Inclusion mainstreams students into a “normal” single subject teacher environment. The department also offers a 9th grade transition class. This class helps the students prepare for High School, jobs, and other responsibilities they may encounter. In 9th grade at the resource level most students are mainstreamed into in-class support classes not a resource room. The district also provides an off-site program. This program keeps the troubled students, who are considered too much so for mainstreaming, separated from the general population but in-district. The department also offers out-of-district placement. At a cost of \$25,000 to \$100,000 per student the department finds out-of-district placement for students whose needs cannot be served in-district. Special education students in 7th and 8th grade are also offered a program called learning strategies. In this program a teacher follows the students throughout their school day providing them with in-class support. This same teacher also has the students in their own learning strategy class. In the High School Resource, and Cycles L, M, and E are all offered. The High School also offers Transition Class to 10th, 11th, and 12th grade students. In this class special education students are exposed to higher academics through college visits and vocational education through job shadowing. Job placement is another

function of the class, at this writing two students work part-time in the district. The department also offers counseling services and child psychology assessment.

The previous paragraph provides an overview of the programs and services offered by the districts special education department. The following set of questions shift the focus towards the sources of funding their regulations and how they affect the department's programs. How many students are enrolled in the district's special education program? There are approximately 500 students in the entire district. Do all students receive the same degree of services? The department tries to provide for all their educational needs but all students have different needs. The degree of services each student receives is dependent upon their IEP. What is the approximate cost per/pupil and is it evenly distributed among all students? The approximate cost per/pupil is \$12,676. Once again expenditures per/pupil are dependent upon that students IEP and the services required by that IEP. What are the sources of funding for the special education department? Most funding comes from the local taxes. The district's current budget allocates 40% of its funds to special education; this amounts to \$6,338,153. Other sources include state aid, which provides \$1,679,040, and federal aid, which provides \$375,000. This is a federal grant that is overseen by the SEA. Are there parameters that define how the monies available to the special education department are to be spent/distributed? Parameters are strictly defined especially those monies provided by IDEA grants. IDEA requires that you use the money by the end of the fiscal year or you lose the money. At this time our department like many others is unclear on some of the future funding issues due to the dynamics that are occurring between IDEA and NCLB. Who regulates the distribution of the funds? The state of New Jersey, the federal government, and private organizations

that provide grants regulate the distribution of funds. How much leeway does a special education department head have on funds distribution? It is limited, basically the number of special education students in the district, what the testing shows, and the student's IEPs, determines fund distribution. Do you, as the special education department head, feel restricted in any way by the regulations related to funding? Yes, very much, there are strict guidelines, which must be followed. If you were able to operate with no restrictions as to program selection and implementation placed upon you, would you change the programs offered by this district? If yes, how would you change them? I would make no changes, I believe we provide excellent programs. Are you able to provide feedback to those institutions that are responsible for the rules and regulations you must follow? If yes, do you see any changes that have come about from such suggestions? Feedback can be given through directors meetings and then passed along to the top. At a personal level I have seen very little change enacted from the bottom up, most of our direction comes from the state and federal governments, some is politically driven from the top down. Are there any minimal spending limits imposed upon the program? No. Are there any maximal spending limits imposed upon the program? None, other than those directed by the student's IEP. Are there any funding formulas you must follow? If yes, who is responsible for implementation and monitoring? State and federal laws set the funding formulas for school budgets. It is important to note that state aid has been frozen since 2002. The effect has been for our district to do more with less. Our student population has been increasing and our state funding has remained stagnate. Are there any special circumstances, which allow for flexibility in program selection and implementation? Yes, these are determined by the child's needs. Are there penalties for infractions involving

distribution of funds and or program implementation? Infractions could result in funding being withdrawn. Program selection is strictly enforced.

Chapter 5

Conclusions, Implications, and Further Study

Conclusions

Program selection and implementation for a district's special education department is highly regulated. The choices available to the department administrators are limited by the regulations that control the funding parameters and the laws that describe the IEP's of the students. For example, the processes for identifying and classifying students are clearly defined by state law N.J.A.C 6A: 14-3.3. Initially, all students with disabilities who are in need of special education and related services are located, identified, and evaluated according to the law. Defined procedures range from the development of child find materials for distribution to public announcements and mailings to area physicians seeking the names of children who may need special education services. Within this framework the district has some leeway in pursuit of these endeavors but it must adhere to state and federal guidelines when doing so.

The depth and offerings of mandated programs is affected by several internal factors that would vary from district to district. The intern asked the question; do all students receive the same degree of services? The response to this was that the district tries to provide for all their educational needs but all students have different educational needs. The special education student's IEP's are a strong determinate in program selection and implementation. They define the services required by each student and in turn influence to a great extent the type and depth of these offerings.

The intern asked the question; what programs does the special education department offer? The answer to this was detailed and extensive. The programs fulfill the district's

state and federal requirements. In this aspect there is little choice in their offerings, but they do so within a context that was created and nurtured within the district. Therein lies the choice in program selection and implementation. As long as the district fulfills the mandated state and federal special education requirements then the districts can do so within a context that best satisfies the needs of it's disabled students.

The intern also asked the question; how much leeway does the special education department supervisor have on fund distribution? The response indicated that it was very limited, but not just by the direction of the regulations themselves but by the number of special education students enrolled in the district. Not only is the population of special education students a controlling factor but of at least equal importance are the testing results and the IEP's developed from these results. Consider the cost of sending a special needs student out of district. The cost can range from \$25,000 to \$100,000 dollars a year for a single student depending upon their disability. A district with several such students may find that it may no longer be able to offer the "extra" services and programs that went beyond the state mandated ones. It may have to find ways to streamline the mandated ones while still trying to maintain quality and conformance. If such a student were to enter the district at mid-year (after final budget) there may be a need to shift funds from other areas and alter programs to service this child's needs. The intern asked the question; do you as the special education department head feel restricted in any way by the regulations related to funding? The response was affirmative, the interviewee noted that they are strict guidelines. Although the special education department head noted that the mandated guidelines were strict she did not express the opinion that they were not effective. This can be seen in her response to the question; if you were able to

operate with no restrictions as to program selection and implementation placed upon you, would you change the programs offered by this district? She would make no changes, supporting this with the belief that the district provides excellent programs.

Implications

This study revealed the necessity for school administration to be fully aware of the guiding parameters of state and federal regulations pertaining to special education. The intern believes the implications go beyond those who work directly with classified children. The entire staff should have a basic working knowledge of special education's guiding rules and regulations. Being knowledgeable about forces guiding others actions strengthen the working relationships that are essential in a productive learning environment. Those in administrative positions should have much more than a basic understanding of the rules and regulations. Being in positions of leadership requires administrators to make numerous decisions on a daily basis. It is important that these decisions do not interfere with the mandates required under special education laws. With mainstreaming being the norm for most disabled children a department administrator is highly likely to have daily dealings with these special needs children. If planning new programs or approving a field trip are on that day's agenda than the well-informed department administrator is likely to make the best decisions regarding these activities. All too often actions and plans are made that do not fully take into account the needs associated with disabled children. This can cost the district money, time, and resources.

When a special education administration develops programs they should consider the implications that funding restrictions will have. But just as important is the realization that these guidelines do not stop at the special education department's doorstep. When

40% of a district's budget goes towards special education the effect is felt far and wide in all areas of the district. Whether it is a gym class a physics class or a soccer game the funding and programs of special education may project some influence. We are in the business of educating all students. The rules and regulations of special education are not meant to create barriers but to break them down. Understanding these guiding rules and their district wide influences is imperative to creating a productive learning environment, which fulfills the needs of all students.

Further Study

The intern suggests no need for further study. The rules and regulations under which special education departments must operate are rigid and well defined. This is reflected in the student IEP requirements. Since IEPs determine to a great extent what type of programs the district must offer the intern suggest that any further study would only verify this finding.

References

- Amundson, E., Holcomb, S., & Ralabate, P. (2000). The new IDEA survival guide: NEA Professional Library.
- Bush, G. (2000). The presidential candidates speak out. *The-Exceptional Parent*, 24, 47-80.
- Comegno, J. (2003). Bringing New Jersey special education law into focus. NJ: Professional Development Network
- Lange, C. Ysseldyke, J. (1998). School Choice Policies and Practices for Students with Disabilities. *Exceptional-Children*, 8, 255-270
- Kafer, K. (2002). Making good on promises to increase funding for special education. The Heritage Foundation, Article 1585. Retrieved September 10, 2003, at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/Education/bg1585.cfm>.
- McLaughlin, M. & Verstegen, D. (1998) Increasing regulatory flexibility of special education programs: Problems and promising strategies. *Exceptional Children*, 6, 371-384.
- Moran, M. (1999) Standards and assessments: The new measure of adequacy in school finance litigation [Electronic version]. *Journal of Education Finance*, 3, 33-80.
- Sielke, C. & Russo, C. (1999) Special education funding in Michigan: Robbing Peter to pay Paul. *Journal of Education Finance*, 8, 81-96