

Collaboration Between Schools and Families During Special Education Meetings

by

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ABSTRACT

Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), schools and families collaborate to determine educational decisions for children with special needs. However, successful collaboration occurs when special education practitioners and families build strong partnerships. This study employed a mixed-methods action research design to examine the effectiveness of professional development training for school-based special education personnel to increase collaboration during special education meetings. The training centered around building participants' knowledge of special education regulations, policies, and procedures and providing strategies to facilitate a collaborative partnership between families and the school. Participants' knowledge gained from the training intervention was assessed using a pre-post-intervention survey, followed by semi-structured interviews. Useful aspects of the training intervention included gaining a foundational understanding of legal rights and responsibilities in special education and specific preparation and communication strategies for future family and school collaboration during special education meetings.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my son, Kamron, who set me on a path of wanting to make a genuine difference in my immediate environment.

To my husband, Ayoub, who encouraged me to pursue this doctoral degree. You unfailingly believe in me and know me better than I know myself. Now we truly are a “pair of docs,” or in other words, a paradox!

To my mom, who has always believed I can do anything, thank you for always being my cheerleader.

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PREFACE

In 2017, my son was born six weeks early and admitted to the NICU due to his small birth weight. I felt overjoyed that my son seemed healthy, despite being born early. Over the next two weeks, I spent every waking moment by his side. The doctors assured me he only needed to grow and get bigger, and then he could go home. During these two weeks, I noticed his heart rate was very high, but doctors assured me it was within the normal range. Finally, I begged the NICU doctor on duty that day to explore further, as I had what I could only describe as a mother's intuition that something was wrong. My son had trouble breathing. The doctor consented and agreed to a chest x-ray showing a slightly enlarged left side of his heart. The doctor then ordered an echocardiogram, where it was discovered he had a severe congenital heart defect and needed to undergo open-heart surgery the next day. That afternoon became a blur of meeting with his pediatric cardiologist and heart surgeon and watching my son be incubated in the pediatric intensive care unit (PICU). Later, the NICU doctor admitted that other doctors might not have gone past the chest x-ray. My son endured four additional surgeries before succumbing to complications and passing away at five months old.

During this time, I became an advocate for my son, ensuring information was carried through the shift changes and between his team of 11 specialists. Some specialists became lifelines as they took the time and cared to make sure I understood the decisions, and I continue to be grateful for their kindness. Other specialists tolerated my presence but were dismissive at times of my questions. As I took walks around the PICU, I saw

many children with no family members throughout the day. I felt extremely fortunate I could be by my son's side and had the resources and time to be able to do so.

Once my son came home, I applied for and began receiving early intervention services as he qualified under five different medical conditions and private therapy. I recall feeling angry that no one in the hospital told me about early intervention services; I applied due to my background as a special educator and understanding of the importance of early intervention services. However, while at the hospital, I met volunteers who shared about a community group for families with children with congenital heart defects. I also began receiving home nursing services from a non-profit organization.

After my son passed away, I reflected on my experience as a mother of a child with special needs. I could be at the hospital to hear firsthand all the information being shared from his specialists and the time to take him to his numerous specialists for therapies and appointments. I could ask questions and knew how to access community resources. My story would be quite different if I had needed to work during this time, had a language barrier, or could not access a support network. Even as a career special educator, navigating the early intervention system proved challenging at times, as the system is separate from the special education system for children ages 3-21 that I worked with and understood.

Applying my experience to special education, I reflected on the numerous special education meetings I conducted. Did all families have the time, knowledge, and access to resources needed to participate in the decision-making process for their children with special needs? Did they feel overwhelmed or go along with what the professionals

decided because they seemed knowledgeable? Did families think they were equal partners on the special education team or passive participants? Following this personal experience, my passion for thoroughly understanding special education policy and advocating for equitable partnerships between families of children with special needs and the schools began.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

National Context

In 1975, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act provided the first assurance for all children with disabilities ages 3-21 to receive a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) (US Department of Education, n.d.). Reauthorized in 2004 as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), this legislation continues to underscore a commitment to the education of all children. During the 2020-21 school year, 7.2 million children, or 15 percent of all public-school students ages 3-21, received special education services under IDEA (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). This reflects a continued increase in the number of students identified with disabilities under IDEA, from 6.4 million in 2011-2012, or 13 percent of the total enrollment of children in public schools (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022).

Under this law, the special education process begins when an evaluation is initiated by the school or the family (US Department of Education, n.d.). Families provide consent for an initial evaluation, and following the evaluation assessments, a Multidisciplinary Education Team (MET) comprised of the families or caregivers of the child, a general education teacher, a special education teacher, an agency representative, and an interpreter of evaluation results meet to determine if the child qualifies for special education services. If the child qualifies, families give consent for services and an IEP is developed around the child's needs. The IEP is reviewed yearly by the IEP team, which consists of the family of the child, at least one general education teacher, at least one

special education teacher, an agency representative, an individual to interpret instructional implications of the evaluation results, and other personnel as appropriate, such as related service providers or members invited by the family. A re-evaluation occurs every three years (US Department of Education, n.d.).

IDEA includes guidance around parental participation and the parental role in the special education process (H. R. Turnbull, 2005). The guidance, H.R.Turnbull (2005) contends, sets up both the expectation that schools engage in efforts to solicit parent involvement and that families are actively involved in the educational decisions for their children. At each special education evaluation and Individualized Education Program (IEP) meeting, families are offered a copy of the *Procedural Safeguards Notice Parents' Right under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act IDEA 2004*, or the rights families have throughout the special education process. The provision of these rights further reinforces the expectation that families will continually assess their parental rights and actively pursue recourse if they believe their rights have been violated (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004, n.d.).

The decision from Congress not to appoint an entity that oversees enforcement of IDEA is in contrast to similar legislation at the time (Pudelski, 2016). Pudelski cites Title VI of the Civil Rights Act in 1965 and Title IX of the Higher Education Act invoked in 1972 as examples of civil rights legislation whose enforcement is ensured by an overseeing agency. However, Pudelski (2016) asserts, IDEA was considered too large to be adequately monitored by a single agency. Even when families are informed of their rights, barriers occur in accessing mediation or due process when families feel their

children with disabilities are being denied a free and appropriate public education (FAPE). In a study examining special education mediation across seven states by Schrag & Schrag (2004), one third of the participants shared that they would not pursue mediation again in a consumer satisfaction survey. Reasons cited included perceptions that agreed upon solutions were not implemented or ineffective and that the outcome did not improve their child's educational experience (Schrag & Schrag, 2004). The other method of recourse, pursuing due process, is often unattainable due to the costs incurred in obtaining representation (Pudelski, 2016). Due process cases may take years for a decision to be finalized due to appeals (Pudelski, 2016).

Schools and local education agencies (LEAs) also feel burdened by barriers to comprehensive special education services. When Congress first enacted IDEA in 1975, the appropriations included reimbursement of school districts for up to 40% of the costs (Pudelski, 2016). However, federal funding has continued to be provided at significantly lower levels, with only 13% of the total expenses covered from the proposed Fiscal Year 2020 legislative budget (Council for Exceptional Children, 2020). This is a decrease from the 14.3% allotted in FY 2019 (Council for Exceptional Children, 2020). Federal underfunding will require state and local funding to cover the remaining costs as the provision of services are federally mandated.

Arizona Context

During the 2022-2023 school year, total enrollment for Arizona's public schools was reported at 1,132,567 students (Zetino, 2022). Arizona reported educating 145,835 students with disabilities this same year (Arizona Department of Education, n.d.-a). This

means that 12.8% of students enrolled in Arizona public schools received special education services during the 2022-2023 school year. In Arizona, special education is funded through federal IDEA grants, a special education fund, and through state aid, or add-on funding to the base level of funding for all students (Mannelly, n.d.). In 2017, approximately \$420 million was provided in state aid above the federal IDEA grant funding. This funding still does not cover all the costs associated with educating students with disabilities in Arizona (Mannelly, n.d.). A study of Arizona's special education costs conducted in 2007 found a \$98 million funding gap (Harrington, 2020). Current levels provide only \$13 per student annually under specific disability categories such as speech impairments or developmental delays and only \$842 per student annually under categories such as autism spectrum disorder (Allhands, 2021). A proposed Senate bill (1189) would have resulted in an additional \$56 million in appropriations to the current funding levels, but the measure did not pass (Allhands, 2021).

Since schools do not receive the funding needed to cover all costs for special education services, investing in collaborative school-family partnerships remains a worthwhile endeavor. When families pursue legal action, schools need to allocate additional funds in legal costs to resolve the grievance. Although collaborative partnerships do not prevent all complaints from occurring, strong family-school partnerships instigated by school personnel may reduce the quantity or likelihood of these situations.

Connection to Local Context

Federal regulations require all public schools to provide needed services for children with special needs (Allhands, 2021). Unfortunately, for some schools, this discrepancy means making difficult decisions to eliminate programs that benefit many students to fund special education services for individual students. From professional experience, each family is advocating for their child to receive FAPE, and are most likely not concerned with associated costs. Schools and families may also have different ideas about what FAPE should look like for each child. A family's recourse is to exercise their right to initiate state complaints, mediation, or due process when they feel their child's educational rights are not being met (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004, n.d.). Families can also choose to invite an educational advocate to the evaluation or IEP meetings (US Department of Education, n.d.). However, from professional experience, attending special education meetings where advocates were present, this addition can create tension depending on the advocates' style or tactics.

For example, I attended dozens of meetings where four different advocates were present over the course of one school year. Advocates' strategies were noted to range from making threats to file due process complaints, to acting as a mediator between the school and the family by asking questions and providing families explanations of the documents being reviewed. Adversarial meetings set up a tone, in my opinion, of the school vs. family, while collaborative meetings allowed everyone present to gain a common understanding of the child with disabilities' educational needs.

Using strategies such as increasing parental access to networks and community resources (Trainor, 2010) or training in advocacy (Murray et al., 2013) to ensure equitable special education meetings can potentially decrease adversarial relationships between the school and the families. Contentious special education meetings may result in increased costs to schools and districts, fewer resources for all students with special needs, and diminished trust between schools and families. Therefore, investing in methods to improve the special education process and school-family partnerships remains worthwhile. Funding challenges and conflicts during the special education process between families and schools are not only national issues, but also pervasive in the local context for this study. Further exploration of providing school personnel strategies to create collaborative school-family partnerships may support alleviating these struggles.

District Information

The local context for this study is Select Academy ¹a private, therapeutic day school that partners with school districts throughout the state of Arizona. The school is certified by the Arizona Department of Education to provide special education services using a school-wide Positive Behavioral Supports program in a highly structured environment ². In addition, the school offers alternative education classroom settings and alternative to suspension classrooms for students with and without special needs (see Footnote 2). Adhering to a school-within-a-school model, classrooms operate in 13

¹ Name has been changed to protect the identity of the school.

² The descriptive information was withheld for confidentiality purposes.

different districts or schools, and partner with districts to allow students in a separate placement to continue to go to school within their district (see Footnote 2).

In my setting as a Site Administrator, I oversee programmatic operations for four classrooms in three partner districts. I also supervise the general education teachers, special education teachers, behavior technicians, and lead behavior technicians who provide services for the three districts. Currently, two of the three districts operate a classroom serving students under the category of emotional disability in a Level D, or private, separate day placement. Once the IEP team determines that a Level D placement provides FAPE for a child, the district enrolls the student in our school. A Level D placement means the child spends more than 50% of their school day in a private or public separate day school for students with disabilities, but does not live at the facility (Arizona Department of Education, 2021).

The private therapeutic day school currently runs an Emotional Disability Program (EDP) that serves students in a Level D placement in grades 4-8 from across the district. The staffing ratio is one staff member for every four students, with a total of 12 students in each classroom. If the classroom has 12 students, the classroom will be staffed with one special education teacher and two behavior technicians. The school programs follow the district's school schedule and policies, as well as programmatic aspects specific to the private, therapeutic day school.

Context of Action

When a child with special needs transfers into a new school, the school either provides comparable services from the child's Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) or

holds an IEP meeting to create a new IEP aligned with the environmental setting of the child (IDEIA; 2004). However, if the child's evaluation is no longer current or can no longer be under the same eligibility category (such as moving from preschool eligibility to a school-age eligibility category), a new evaluation must occur (IDEIA; 2004). This evaluation must occur as soon as possible if the previous evaluation expired, or prior to the student changing eligibility categories (US Department of Education, n.d.).

In addition, due to the pandemic, many students began the 2020-2021 school year with expired IEPs or evaluations. If expired, the school must hold evaluation or IEP meetings with the family (IDEIA; 2004). Ideally, the school and the family would collaboratively determine the services and placement that would best serve the child. However, schools may not have access to the resources or funding they need (Allhands, 2021; Council for Exceptional Children, 2020; Harrington, 2020). In addition to the challenges of meeting each student's educational needs in relation to their IEP, families may have experienced adversarial relationships with schools in the past or may not have enough information about the law or policies to participate fully (Nowell & Salem, 2007). From professional experience, barriers may include a lack of knowledge surrounding the laws, availability of appropriate services, understanding of educational rights or adequate time to conduct all special education meetings.

Positional Context

As an educator, I held positions as a Special Education Teacher, General Education Teacher, Inclusion Coach, and Exceptional Student Services (ESS) Regional Coordinator. My current position is a Site Administrator for a therapeutic day school for

students with special needs or who need an alternative education setting. As an Inclusion Coach, I acted as an advocate for families throughout the initial special education evaluation process for children ages three to five years of age. Children can begin receiving school-based services at age three, under Part B of IDEA (US Department of Education, n.d.). In multiple situations across various Arizona school districts, families experienced difficulty even initiating the process. Families could not reach school personnel, school districts refused to meet with the families even with a written request, or schools did not adhere to the timelines outlined by state statutes. This experience led to the realization that families need to be empowered with information and resources to be able to assume an equal role in the initial special education evaluation process.

In my role as an Exceptional Student Services (ESS) Regional Coordinator, I provided consultative services for all aspects of ESS to a charter school chain with campuses in Arizona and Nevada. My role involved overseeing compliance with special education documentation and services. However, I did not serve in a supervisory role. Unlike the previous school districts where I worked, the school administrators primarily held the supervisory capacity of ESS staff. In my role, I attended all meetings where the family chose to bring an advocate, and in this capacity, my role was to support the IEP team with the decision-making process to serve the student best. I also supported schools during meetings they asked me to attend, such as to be able to further explain to the family their educational options or provide an outline of the special education process. During a meeting where an advocate was present, I noticed the advocate, and therefore the family, assumed a position of instructing the school of their expectations. However, in

meetings where the school asked me to attend without an advocate, I noticed the parent pleaded with the school for their expectations to be implemented. Given these personal experiences, one could question if this dynamic occurs regularly in IEP meetings everywhere.

In my current role as a Site Administrator for multiple sites in three districts in Arizona, I am in a unique role where we partner with school districts to provide Level D services. During evaluation or IEP meetings, I am a representative of the therapeutic day school, however, I am not the district representative. This is an important distinction, as I can offer my input, yet ultimately, the district representative makes the final decisions. Still, I am the supervisor for the special education teachers. When attending these meetings, I have noticed that each district has slightly different expectations and procedures for how the evaluation and IEP meetings proceed. While I can support the staff that I supervise with strategies to create collaborative IEP meetings, I do so within the confines of the district resources, and within my role overseeing three different district sites.

In all these roles, power differentials occur between the families and the schools. Ideally, all members should be equally involved in decision-making to create a collaborative process and experience. Schools should be provided with the training and resources to offer a full continuum of services and placements to every student who qualifies under IDEA and value the expert insights families have into the needs of their children. Families should have access to the information and knowledge needed to be empowered to understand the initial special education evaluation process thoroughly.

Families should also be able to participate fully in this process while advocating for their child's educational needs to ensure FAPE. The purpose of this action research study is to provide special education personnel with information and strategies to ensure parent participation during special education meetings. The specific research questions guiding the study are as follows:

RQ1: As a result of the “Collaboration between Schools and Families” intervention, did special education practitioners change their a) knowledge of legal rights and responsibilities, b) actions taken to prepare for special education meetings, and c) collaboration skills?

RQ2: What did participants perceive as the most useful aspects of the “Collaboration between Schools and Families” intervention?

CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF SCHOLARLY AND PRACTITIONER KNOWLEDGE INFORMING
THE STUDY

Introduction

Chapter 1 outlined that federal and state statutes under IDEA require schools to conduct comprehensive evaluations, develop Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), and provide individualized special education services to all eligible students, regardless of cost (US Department of Education, n.d.). Under IDEA, families remain an essential and required member of the IEP team and must advocate for their children throughout the process (US Department of Education, n.d.). When families disagree with the school's proposal, mediation or due process serves as the method of recourse, creating a costly and lengthy ordeal (Pudelski, 2016). Therefore, developing an effective collaborative approach to conducting the special education meetings benefits both schools and families.

This chapter includes an overview of action research, an introduction of theoretical frameworks, a review of existing literature, and an explanation of results from previous research cycles that inform this study. The first section describes action research, and how this type of research is iterative in nature, building upon previously conducted investigations. The second section reviews the theory of cultural capital and literature regarding cultural capital and parent advocacy. The third section reviews empowerment theory and related studies in special education. The fourth section discusses parent-school collaboration during special education meetings and related literature. The fifth section outlines pertinent results from previous research cycles.

Finally, implications for the broader profession and the specific action inquiry study are explored.

Action Research

The study currently discussed in this dissertation is an action research study. Action research seeks to address a specific concern and find solutions to a contextual problem with cycles of action to remedy the issue within a specific organization (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). In education, practitioners use action research to identify a problem, gather and evaluate data, and execute a plan of action according to their results within their environment (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Action research may address a problem on a local, classroom or school-wide level, or aim at empowering or transforming individuals facing a restricting situation (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Once researchers conduct an initial cycle of inquiry, subsequent research cycles focus on improvements discovered by the previous cycle. Positioning educators as researchers allows for reflective, collaborative, democratic practices to occur (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). At the end of this chapter, the previous cycles of research that were conducted are explained in conjunction with how the results informed the current study.

Cultural Capital Theory

The theory of cultural capital, derived by Pierre Bourdieu, provides the primary framework for this study, as it underscores the importance of being cognizant of the various levels of knowledge and understanding that families possess when attending special education meetings. Bourdieu described cultural capital as knowledge and understanding of the dominant culture within a society (Bourdieu & Nice, 1987). The

authors identify three sources of cultural capital: objective, embodied, and institutionalized. Objective cultural capital refers to objects such as books, access to the arts, and other cultural experiences. Embodied cultural capital consists of the dominant language, mannerisms, and social norms. Institutionalized cultural capital includes educational qualifications and credentials.

Increased access, knowledge, and understanding of cultural capital, Bourdieu & Nice (1987) believed, equated to increased levels of power within the society. In addition, Bourdieu (1987) argued that families passed cultural capital to their children through experiences, exposure, and education. This transfer of cultural capital maintained the status of power, where children with access to these resources acted in alignment with the dominant and preferred cultural norms through their behavior, attitude, and language. Familiarity with and the ability to engage in unspoken societal standards provided an advantage to children, allowing them to succeed within the educational system and beyond.

Cultural Capital and Parent Advocacy

One application of cultural capital pertains to parent advocacy for their children with disabilities. Trainor (2010) asserts that the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA) implies that families are tasked with ensuring their children receive appropriate special education services. Administrators and school personnel, Trainor (2010) states, must balance responding to the needs of each student with disabilities and maintaining fiscal responsibility to their organization. The responsibility, therefore, falls to the family to advocate for their child. In a display of embodied cultural capital,

families accept the role of an advocate by attending the IEP meeting after they receive a parents' handbook of rights. However, the reading level of the handbooks may exceed parental reading skills, creating a barrier to successful advocacy (Fitzgerald & Watkins, 2006, as cited in Trainor, 2010). In addition, under IDEA, documents must be written in the native language of the family, unless the feasibility of doing so is unattainable (US Department of Education, n.d.). In these circumstances, families may be disadvantaged from understanding their rights due to language barriers.

Families who can join a support group or access a network of other families gain additional cultural capital (Trainor, 2010). Trainor (2010) continues that families who do so access information and emotional support to promote further advocacy efforts. IEP meetings follow explicit rules and guidelines, including conditions regarding how a meeting is arranged, who is invited, who is required to attend, and what topics can be discussed, creating a social structure of rules (Trainor, 2010). Therefore, the school personnel are well versed in the process, while families must not only learn the rules on their own, they must also be in a position to confront the school when the rules are not followed.

Through a lens of cultural capital, Trainor (2010) conducted individual and focus group interviews with a diverse group of families whose children received special education services. These interviews were designed to gain perceptions about cultural and social capital through open-ended questions. Trainor (2010) discovered that the families advocated for their children in four different ways, resulting in various degrees of

effectiveness: 1) intuitive advocate, 2) disability expert, 3) strategist, and 4) systems change advocate.

Families who engaged in an “intuitive advocacy” approach where they focused on their expertise as the parent of their child was most often disregarded by school personnel. This style was also deemed less successful by the participants. Families who could access extensive knowledge of special education policies, combined with connections in a social network and the ability to invest time in forming relationships with school personnel perceived the greatest amount of success. Families who used this “systems change advocate” method acknowledged the necessity of access to economic resources for a successful outcome (Trainor, 2010).

Although families from all racial and socioeconomic backgrounds advocated for their children with disabilities in Trainor’s (2010) study, the most favorable results came from the “systems change” style of advocacy that was exclusively used by Caucasian, non-free and reduced lunch parents. These families had the cultural understanding and economic ability to invest significant amounts of time creating connections with other families and the school. The theory of cultural capital demonstrates how families were able to use their resources to leverage better outcomes for their children with special needs. Access to resources allowed these families to be empowered as an advocate and actively participate throughout the special education process. However, cultural capital requires families to become agentive by seeking knowledge and connections to become better informed. The onus remains on the families to advocate for their child’s needs. Families, therefore, may need support to be empowered to become an agentive partner.

When special education practitioners understand the theory of cultural capital, they are better able to validate and recognize the diverse ways in which families communicate and collaborate during special education meetings. This awareness can create stronger partnerships when schools work to determine the knowledge families currently possess and provide support to families when gaps in understanding occur. In addition, Trainor (2010) asserts, school personnel who become aware of their role as advocates may, in turn, be positioned to facilitate shared advocacy during interactions between families and the school.

Empowerment Theory

The results of two studies that have used empowerment theory in a special education setting are described in this section. The first study involves the impact of parent participation in a special education course alongside preservice special education teachers. A second study proposes a “power continuum” model demonstrating the evolution of family-professional partnerships during the special education evaluation process through the lens of empowerment theory. This section examines a second framework, empowerment theory, as this theory frames the importance of the role special education practitioners can take in creating a collaborative environment that empowers families to be partners during special education meetings. Empowerment theory, developed by Julian Rappaport, refers to both the individual’s resolve over their own life and participation in their own community (Rappaport, 1987). Rappaport (1987) contends that the concept of empowerment pertains to individual or personal control and the influence of the social environment, including political and legal interests. Community

participation often occurs through social structures such as schools, churches, or neighborhoods (Rappaport, 1987).

He further explains empowerment as a contextual process by which individuals and communities or organizations gain control over their surroundings. Living in a diverse community inevitably leads to concerns over empowerment, leaving the unempowered compelled to seek a solution (Rappaport, 1987). Employing a lens of empowerment refers to the “entire class of phenomena that we want our research to understand, predict, explain, or describe; that we want our applications and interventions to stimulate, facilitate, or create, and our social policies to encourage” (Rappaport, 1987, p. 129).

Rappaport’s (1987) theory refers to three ways that terms of empowerment can be deduced. The first refers to the definitions, words, and meanings (both figurative and literal) that are used. The second way includes the conditions or parameters of the environment to produce specific outcomes. The third way references periods of time. When studying empowerment, Rappaport (1987) suggests observing people going about their everyday lives. When applied to special education practitioners, they can facilitate collaboration with families through the words, environment, and relationship that they cultivate. Not only can school personnel be empowered to foster such conditions, schools can work to empower families to become partners and advocates as well.

Parental Empowerment

Murray et al. (2013) extend Rappaport’s (1987) theory of empowerment to explore parental empowerment, and families’ perceptions of their ability to take control

and advocate for the needs of their family. The authors' (2013) study consisted of collaborating with school districts and community partners to develop training to create collaborative family-professional partnerships between preservice special education teachers and families of children with special needs. Parent participants attended a 16-week long class alongside special education teacher candidates, contributing during class sessions. The preservice educators also spent time with an assigned parent participant to gain insight into the families' experiences in school, home, and community settings. Following course completion, families were asked to use their newly acquired skills to teach other families with children who had special needs within their community.

The (2013) study results revealed that following the course, families felt a personal connection with the preservice teachers. Families also enhanced their feelings of confidence to advocate for their child's needs and experienced an increased sense of trust with the school or district. Families also displayed positive and hopeful feelings for engaging in future family-professional partnerships. Overall, the authors contend that the families' experience contributed to parent empowerment by allowing families to become agents of change by supporting preservice educators to become family-oriented in their emerging practice. Families also gained a sense of belonging and a changed perception of school professionals, which they attributed to the communication and personal interactions with the preservice teachers. While the study demonstrates the power of increased knowledge on the part of the families, developing a model by which schools empower families during the initial special education evaluation process could benefit all families and their children with special needs.

Collective Empowerment Through Family-Professional Partnerships

A.P. Turnbull and colleagues (2000) present models of parent-professional partnerships spread across a power continuum. In the authors' model, partnerships span the continuum from relationships where schools have power over the families, power with the families, or, ideally, power through the families. An older model of a parent-professional partnership is the parent counseling/psychotherapeutic model (A. P. Turnbull et al., 2000). The service provider assumes a power-over role in this structure, while the families are relegated to a subordinate role. Such a model occurs through the school's perceived role as more knowledgeable due to their professional education and command over available school resources. A more recent model, family-centered partnerships, recognizes family members' expert knowledge regarding their child (A. P. Turnbull et al., 2000). This model constitutes a power-with dynamic, where schools and families collaborate to make shared decisions. According to the authors, the most recent iteration and most effective is the collective empowerment model (A. P. Turnbull et al., 2000). This model creates a power-through relationship, building upon personal knowledge to create group decisions that transcend what individuals can create alone. New resources are created through an insightful and vibrant process.

In A.P. Turnbull et al.'s (2000) collaborative empowerment model, families do not need to advocate independently, nor are they expected to hold all of the knowledge. Families are empowered to direct the plan for their child's educational needs. Within this model, assumptions include the central nature of the family, family preference during decision making, and family capabilities. The model emphasizes participation, resource

acquisition, and community considerations. As equal participants, schools provide families with the information needed to make decisions, facilitate family choices of available resources, and support the creation of new resources. The authors contend that greater levels of satisfaction are achieved through this model because new and renewable resources are created through this partnership, and families perceive themselves as the navigator of their child's services (A. P. Turnbull et al., 2000).

Literature Review on Collaboration During Special Education Meetings

As described earlier, benefits occur for both schools and families when a collaborative process ensues to determine the best educational program for a child with special needs. A review of relevant literature explores the history of how parents have participated in IEP meetings and reveals four important aspects of effective collaboration between schools and families during special education meetings.

A study by Valle (2011) provided an overview of how families have been perceived as a member of the special education team for the past three decades since the passage of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA). During the 1970's, Valle (2011) recounted, mothers were viewed as too emotional to meaningfully participate during IEP meetings, and in need of direction from professionals to make decisions. Families were expected to take a passive role and were not often provided clear explanations of test results, nor opportunities to meaningfully participate in team decisions (Valle, 2011). During the 1980s and 1990s, Valle (2011) asserted, families continued to be disadvantaged due to a lack of knowledge of technical language used and a lack of understanding of test results. Recently, researchers acknowledged the

divide between professionals and families, and have actively worked to improve parental involvement and school communication (Valle, 2011). A review of the relevant literature uncovered four important components of effective collaboration during special education meetings: communication, knowledge, equality, and trust.

Communication

Communication can derail collaboration when there is a perceived lack of follow-up or follow-through, a mismatch of the frequency or timing of communication, or misunderstandings (Lake & Billingsley, 2000). Blue-Banning et al. (2004) found that both the quantity and quality of conversations during IEP meetings mattered for families. Families preferred frequent communication that was open and honest, without glossing over or hiding information (Blue-Banning et al., 2004). School personnel should take care to avoid using jargon or overly technical terms as a strategy to increase collaboration (Blue-Banning et al., 2004; Fish, 2008).

Language barriers may also hinder communication between families and schools during special education meetings. Under IDEA, Procedural Safeguards (which outline families' rights) and Prior Written Notices (which detail the decisions made during special education meetings) must be translated into the family's native language if this is reasonable to attain (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). The Arizona Department of Education has translated the Procedural Safeguards into English and Spanish (Arizona Department of Education, n.d.-b).

For other documents such as evaluation reports or IEPs (Individual Education Program), while the school must ensure the family understands the events of the meetings, there is

no requirement for written translations (U.S. Department of Education, n.d). In a communication letter from the Office of Special Education Programs under the U.S. Department of Education, oral translations or a translated summary of documents may be adequate (Ryder, 2016). Depending on the district's resources, a qualified translator may not be available, creating further communication challenges between the school and the family.

Knowledge

When families gain knowledge of special education laws and key terms, they become more agentive participants during special education meetings (Fish, 2008; Murray et al., 2013; Trainor, 2010). Fish (2008) contends schools assume families attend meetings with sufficient knowledge to participate during the decision-making process. In addition, Fish (2008) continues, families remain reluctant to convey their lack of special education knowledge during meetings. Families could positively impact outcomes by proactively seeking out knowledge of the special education process and laws (Fish, 2008). School personnel can prepare families by providing drafts before the meetings (Fish, 2008). Lake & Billingsley (2000) extend the importance of knowledge to include school personnel's understanding of problem-solving and communication strategies during conflicts. Fish (2008) echoes this assertion by suggesting that school personnel who attend special education meetings be trained in conflict resolution and problem-solving skills.

Equality

Conflicts can arise when families do not feel valued or feel they were treated in a condescending manner (Lake & Billingsley, 2000). Either side may feel lied to or that important information was withheld during a special education meeting (Lake & Billingsley, 2000). Positive perceptions of special education meetings occurred when parental input was valued, and families felt respected as equal decision-makers (Fish, 2008). Fish (2008) suggests providing drafts of special education documents to families prior to meetings. By doing so, families have an opportunity to understand what actions the schools are planning to propose, which allows for questions or input to be prepared in advance. Blue-Banning et al. (2004) suggests validating team members, exploring all options, creating opportunities for reciprocity between parties, and promoting a harmonious environment as ways to foster equality during special education meetings. Special education practitioners have multiple opportunities to facilitate collaboration before, during, and after special education meetings through personal interactions and communication with families.

Trust

When families trust school personnel, they are willing to give schools the benefit of the doubt when they are unsure of information being given or services being proposed (Lake & Billingsley, 2000). However, when families do not trust school personnel, they experience challenges accepting their suggestions (Lake & Billingsley, 2000). Blue-Banning et al. (2004) contend that mutual trust regarding other team members' reliability or dependability contributes to collaborative special education meetings. Schools can

build trust with families by including at least one familiar team member during special education meetings and encouraging families to bring an advocate to the meetings (Fish, 2008). In addition, families may experience a change in perception of educators following communication and personal exchanges (Murray et al. (2013). Therefore, when special education practitioners take the time to build relationships with families, an increased sense of trust may occur, allowing for greater opportunities to collaborate.

Previous Cycles of Research Informing this Study

This study involves Action research which initiates within a specific context or organization, where a concern or problem is identified, and cycles of research are conducted to seek a solution (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

First Cycle

The first cycle consisted of semi-structured interviews (n=3) conducted with various community members who hold roles within the special education evaluation process. Each participant provided insights into their unique experiences, including a family advocate, a special education specialist/teacher, and a parent of a child who recently (< 1 year) went through the evaluation process to determine the need for special education services. Interview questions aimed at discovering information or resources provided to families, actions taken to ensure parent participation, and currently held perspectives regarding the special education process. A sample question asked during the family advocate interview included “What is the most common area or reason for disagreement that you have experienced during the initial special education evaluation process?” From the special education specialist/teacher interview, a sample question was

“In what ways have families participated during the process?” During the parent interview, a sample question included “What information was given to you to inform you of the process?” The interview protocol for all three interviews is included in Appendix A.

Analysis of the interviews uncovered themes of agency and access to resources to create greater collaboration. For example, the special education specialist/teacher indicated that agency remained difficult for families when they did not understand the special education process. Despite having taught special education for five years, the parent interviewee spoke of feeling overwhelmed and daunted during the evaluation process, sharing that being the parent was different than being the educator. The family advocate also contemplated agency, stating that her organization’s goal was to support the empowerment of families through the special education process. This interviewee conveyed how families who had accessed community resources demonstrated increased engagement during the process and attributes this involvement to having received foundational knowledge through the community organizations.

All three interviewees discussed the importance of accessing resources to be informed, thereby increasing the ability to participate throughout the special education process. The special education specialist stated the families they worked with experienced difficulty understanding their rights and the special education process due to language barriers or a lack of time to gain understanding. The parent interviewee shared that they wished they had access to someone who could have explained the special education process to them beforehand. The organization the family advocate worked for

offers training, consultations, and additional resources to parents. This organization recognized the need for providing the community with resources and support so families could make informed decisions regarding their children's education. Together, this information underscores the benefits of providing families access to resources and using strategies to collaborate so that families become agentive in their ability to equally participate in the educational decision-making process.

Second Cycle

The second cycle was conducted at the researcher's current workplace and consisted of conducting a survey to further explore special education staff's perspectives of current levels of collaboration during special education meetings and levels of knowledge of special education laws. Participants from Cycle 2 (Clinical Specialists and Fellows, Special Education Teachers, General Education Teachers, Teaching Fellows, and Site Administrators) were asked open-and-closed questions to gather demographic data and information regarding current knowledge of Arizona special education laws and current perceptions of parent engagement throughout special education meetings. Participants were asked to rank their opinion (strongly disagree, disagree, slightly disagree, slightly agree, agree, and strongly agree) on questions on a six-point Likert Scale. Sample questions included: "Parents currently take an equal role when participating during special education meetings" and "I am confident about my knowledge regarding Arizona special education laws." In addition, participants answered open-ended questions such as "What strategies do you use or you have seen used to

ensure parent participation during special education meetings” and “What do you wish you knew more about, if anything, regarding Arizona special education laws?”

Results indicated that while participants felt confident overall regarding their knowledge about Arizona special education laws, they wished they knew more specific information such as updated laws to ensure that special education meetings were compliant with these laws. Participants suggested that while they believed families took an equal role during special education meetings, families did not understand Arizona special education laws or understand the purpose of the different types of special education meetings. Some families took active roles during meetings such as providing input for educational decisions, sharing perspectives, and addressing concerns. Other families took passive roles by attending meetings and providing consent for an evaluation or the provision of special education services. Participants increased parent participation through communication, such as asking for parent input beforehand, and emailing or calling to schedule the meeting or to provide reminders. Participants also built relationships with families, such as emphasizing positive aspects, sharing information, minimizing jargon, and giving families opportunities to have a voice during the decision-making process.

Participants wished families knew more about the Arizona and IDEA laws, and how to advocate for their children. For example, participants wished families had knowledge of how children with special needs are educated, and that families understood their crucial voice and right to disagree with the school. Special education staff wished they could increase parent participation through gaining increased knowledge of Arizona

special education laws, and how to write compliant documents that adhered to these laws. Through this cycle, participants indicated that opportunities to connect with other parents would be helpful, such as parent group events.

Summary of Cycles of Research

Action research involves multiple cycles of research to further inform possible solutions in a specific context (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Taken together, the cycles of research suggested that when families have access to resources and knowledge of special education laws, they can become agentive participants during special education meetings. Barriers existed, however, preventing families from accessing this information and resources independently. Special education staff are well-positioned to use strategies to increase family participation by providing resources that give families a better understanding of the special education process and special education laws. However, special education staff currently need to have a better understanding of strategies to encourage family participation and of current special education laws to be able to provide this information to families. Therefore, special education staff would benefit from training to gain knowledge of these laws along with knowledge of strategies to increase collaboration with families. Through common understanding of these laws, the families and schools can work collaboratively to make decisions calculated to produce the best educational outcomes.

Summary

This chapter outlined the primary theoretical framework of cultural capital and the secondary theory of empowerment. Additional sections in this chapter include a review

of relevant literature pertaining to collaboration during special education meetings, and an overview of previous cycles of research informing this study. Families with greater access to cultural capital are more likely to perceive their own advocacy efforts as successful over families who experience a lack of resources. Special education practitioners, with training, can learn to recognize and respond to the differences in knowledge and resources that families possess. Following this responsiveness, practitioners can also support families to engage in shared advocacy to jointly decide the best educational plan for the child. Families who gain opportunities to communicate and interact with educators feel empowered to collaborate with school personnel as an equal partner. Training educational specialists in strategies on collaboration with families can support special education practitioners to build relationships and facilitate communication during special education meetings. Overall, families need school personnel to communicate the reasons behind actions taken and limitations when inaction occurs (Blue-Banning et al., 2004).

The cycles of research confirm findings taken from the literature, where effective collaboration occurs through communication, knowledge, equality, and trust. Families benefit from knowledge of special education laws and their rights regarding the educational decisions for their children with special needs. School personnel can provide resources and knowledge to families, while also using strategies to engage families. However, school personnel need training to gain strategies to increase parent engagement and knowledge of current special education laws. Families and school personnel benefit from creating equitable partnerships and a mutual sense of trust. Ultimately, families

need to be informed, heard, and valued for their knowledge and expertise. A reciprocal relationship with the school can act as a catalyst by which changes or improvements in collaboration are made. Incorporating opportunities for families to capitalize on their prior knowledge and experience is a method for helping families feel successful. This study will build upon previous cycles of research and provide special education practitioners training to recognize and advance the cultural capital of families while engaging in collaborative special education meetings. Specifically, special education practitioners will receive training in communication skills, special education laws, strategies to increase equality between stakeholders, and building trust. As a result of the training, the hope is that special education practitioners will increase their skills in the areas of communication, knowledge, and strategies to build equality and trust, resulting in collaborative special education meetings between families and schools.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Chapter 2 outlined the theoretical perspectives and relevant literature informing this study. This chapter provides a description of action research and the completed study, including the setting and participants, the position of the researcher, the intervention, data collection methods, and strategies used for data analysis.

Research Design

The study employed a mixed-method action research (MMAR) design. MMAR consists of both quantitative and qualitative data collection, where the results are evaluated together to produce reliable results (Ivankova, 2015). For this study, quantitative and qualitative data were collected to evaluate and inform the intervention. Quantitative data was collected before and after the intervention to determine its effectiveness, and qualitative data was collected following the intervention to provide further insight into the perceived impact of the intervention.

Interpreted together, the qualitative and quantitative data provided rich data from the study. Both data sources were triangulated to create greater confidence in the inferences drawn. Quantitative data provides information describing the trends of a population, while qualitative data provides multiple perspectives on a topic (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Mixed methods, Creswell & Guetterman (2019) assert, maximizes the strengths of both types of data to provide alternative views. When qualitative and

quantitative data are integrated, the conclusions drawn become increasingly credible and meaningful (Ivankova, 2015).

Setting & Participants

This cycle of research took place during the Fall semester of 2022. All participants were recruited from seven regional areas in Arizona, in districts where the private, therapeutic day school partners with districts to provide services. Demographic data regarding the specific district participants was gathered from the participants. The training intervention and all data collection occurred virtually.

Participants were recruited through purposeful sampling, which is characterized by recruitment for their expertise or knowledge of the subject being studied (Ivankova, 2015), or based on a characteristic identified by the researcher (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). For this study, all participants were special education practitioners who attended special education meetings. Special education staff members (Clinical Specialists, Clinical Fellows, Special Education Teachers, General Education Teachers, Teachers-in-Residence (for both special and general education classrooms and Site Administrators) were invited to participate. Only participants from Select Academy in Arizona were recruited due to the differences in state special education laws and policies followed by the private, therapeutic day schools under the same parent company in other states.

Within Select Academy schools in Arizona, Special Education Teachers draft the IEP and facilitate the IEP meetings. Clinical Specialists and Clinical Fellows contribute input for evaluation and IEP meetings, but do not facilitate or write evaluation reports. General Education Teachers & Teacher-in-Residence attend evaluation and IEP meetings

to provide input regarding the student's progress in the general education setting. Site Administrators attend evaluation and IEP meetings as administrators or agency representatives, but not as the Local Education Agency Representative or District Representative. These distinctions remain important as Select Academy staff members provide special education services within the parameters set by the administrators of the school districts that partner with Select Academy schools.

From the group of approximately 69 potential participants, 10 ultimately completed the study. Prior to the first training intervention, 46 participants completed the pre-intervention survey. Following the second training intervention, 10 of the original 46 participants completed the post-intervention survey. Finally, six of the 10 participants completed the semi-structured interviews. Numerous factors may have influenced the number of actual participants, including research commencing at the beginning of the school year. Even though the sample size is small, each participant was able to contribute and draw upon their unique circumstances, such as their role in the special education meeting process, and the specific needs of each child for whom a meeting is held. The demographics of the participants are depicted in Table 1 below and identified by a number to maintain confidentiality.

Table 1*Participant Demographics*

| Participant Number | Current Position | Years of Experience Working with the Special Education Population | Research Study Participation |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|--|---|
| 1 | Clinical Specialist | 11 | Both trainings, Pre-post-intervention survey, interview |
| 2 | Special Education Teacher | 13 | Both trainings, Pre-post-intervention survey |
| 3 | Site Administrator | 13 | Both trainings, Pre-post-intervention survey |
| 4 | Special Education Teacher | 3 | Both trainings, Pre-post-intervention survey |
| 5 | Clinical Specialist | 9 | Both trainings, Pre-post-intervention survey, interview |
| 6 | Special Education Teacher | 5 | Both trainings, Pre-post-intervention survey |
| 7 | Site Administrator | 12 | Both trainings, Pre-post-intervention survey, interview |
| 8 | Special Education Teacher | 13 | Both trainings, Pre-post-intervention survey, interview |
| 9 | Special Education Teacher | 8 | Both trainings, Pre-post-intervention survey, interview |

| | | | |
|----|------------------------------|---|---|
| 10 | Special Education Teacher | 7 | Both trainings, Pre-post-intervention survey, interview |
|----|------------------------------|---|---|

Role of the Researcher

During this intervention, the researcher positioned themselves as a participant observer. Clark & Creswell (2015) describe this role as one where the researcher engages in activities while simultaneously observing the environment. By participating in the activities and facilitating the intervention, an “insider” role will be assumed (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). In this study, the researcher conducted all training sessions and collected both survey and interview data.

Intervention

The research study intervention aimed to increase collaboration between families and the schools during special education meetings by developing and implementing a series of two professional development training sessions for special education personnel (Clinical Specialists, Special and General Education Teachers, and Site Administrators). The training sessions collectively titled “Collaboration between Schools and Families” focused on providing strategies and knowledge that school personnel can use to create increased collaboration with families during future special education meetings. Researchers have found that most families do not feel confident in their knowledge of special education laws, policies, and procedures (Murray et al., 2013; Trainor, 2010). Therefore, the first training provided an overview of these regulations and best practices on how school personnel can impart this knowledge to families to allow them to become

agentive in their ability to equitably participate in the decision-making process. The first training covered the following topics: Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), special education policies and procedures, Child Find, IDEA and Arizona state regulations regarding evaluations and IEPs, and Behavior Manifestation meetings. The second training provided specific strategies for participants to emphasize the importance of collaboration and increase collaboration with families before, during, and after special education meetings. Strategies presented aimed at increasing special education practitioners' skills in the areas of communication, knowledge, building equity, and trust. All training was conducted virtually, allowing increased participation from the special education practitioners who reside throughout Arizona. An outline of the training sessions format and content is included in Appendix B.

Data Collection Procedures

Participants were asked to attend the session 30 minutes before the training if interested in completing the pre-intervention survey to evaluate the effectiveness of the two training sessions. Interested participants were directed to the Qualtrics platform and created a unique identifier code for pre-post intervention survey analysis. An initial 46 participants completed the pre-intervention survey which was administered to gather information on special education professionals' existing knowledge of federal and Arizona special education policies and procedures, as well as the collaborative techniques they currently use before, during, and after special education meetings. After the end of the second training, 10 participants completed a post-intervention survey online through Qualtrics. This survey assessed the knowledge gained by the participants and any

changes in their actions preparing for or conducting IEP meetings. Approximately three-six weeks following the training, semi-structured interviews were conducted with six willing participants to gain more in-depth insight into the special education school practitioners' perceptions of collaboration with families, their increase in knowledge of special education laws, their ability to implement strategies learned during the training sessions, and their perceptions regarding the strategies learned.

Pre-Intervention Survey

The pre-intervention survey was administered online through Qualtrics, and participants were asked 25 closed-ended and 3 open-ended questions. The pre-intervention survey was self-administered, to increase the ease of responses as suggested by Fowler, Jr (2014). This method is intended to collect the data quickly and efficiently. Closed-ended questions included five questions to collect demographic information, such as the participant's current position and the number of years they have been in this position. The remaining closed-ended questions were asked on a 6-point Likert scale to assess how knowledgeable participants perceived they were regarding specific laws, and how often they engaged in specific collaborative techniques prior to the training. While the survey consisted of a few open-ended questions to assess participants' perceptions regarding collaboration, this type of question was used sparingly. Fowler, Jr (2014) asserts open-ended questions on self-administered surveys do not often result in useful data due to the inability to probe further and the difficulty in coding responses. The pre-intervention survey is included in Appendix C.

Post-Intervention Survey

The post-intervention survey mirrored the pre-intervention survey (minus the five demographic questions) in order to assess the knowledge gained by the participants from before to after the training, and to determine how, if at all, participants' knowledge of laws and perceptions toward collaboration during special education meetings changed as a result of the training. An additional open-ended question asked participants what they thought was the most useful aspect of the training intervention. The post-intervention survey is included in Appendix D. Participants who attended both training sessions and completed both the pre-and-post intervention surveys received a \$25 Amazon gift card as an incentive for time and willingness to participate in this study.

Semi-structured Interviews

Out of the 10 participants who completed both training sessions and the pre-post intervention surveys, six participants agreed to complete a virtual semi-structured interview. The semi-structured interviews were conducted after the intervention was complete, centering around eight open-ended questions regarding participants' perceptions of collaboration with families during special education meetings, implementation of knowledge learned during the training, what the participants felt was most and least useful within the intervention, and information to inform future research into collaboration. Interviews allow the researcher to answer participant questions, probe further into responses, and ask complex questions (Fowler, Jr, 2014). Data analysis of the pre-post-intervention survey responses informed the open-ended questions on the interview protocol. Adhering to Charmaz's (2014) method for intensive interviewing, the

interviews relied on open-ended questions to explore and gain a deeper understanding of their personal perspectives and experiences. The mixed-method approach of collecting both quantitative and qualitative data through open-and-closed ended questions allowed for triangulation of the data, capitalizing on the strengths of both methods (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). The interview protocol is included in Appendix E. Participants who completed a semi-structured interview were given a \$15 Amazon gift card as an incentive for agreeing to participate in this study.

Timeline and Procedure

The intervention took place during the Fall semester (July-November) in 2022. Each of the following steps will be discussed in this section: a) recruitment of participants, b) design and implementation of pre-intervention survey, c) design and presentation of training sessions, d) administration of post-intervention survey, e) conducting semi-structured interviews. Documentation submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) from the Office of Research Integrity and Assurance at Arizona State University for this study is included in Appendix F.

To recruit participants from Select Academy, the researcher created an email in July sent to the Site Administrator of each special education team along with a flyer advertising the study and the training intervention. The email asked the Site Administrators to distribute the flyer to their team members who participate in special education meetings. The flyer directed all interested parties to contact the study's co-investigator and included a participation consent form that participants also viewed on the

pre-and-post intervention surveys. These documents are included in Appendix F. A copy of the Institutional Review Board approval is included in Appendix G.

The researcher had an opportunity to present the first training to every eligible participant, and 46 subjects completed the optional pre-intervention survey directly prior to the start of this first training session. Participants viewed an electronic version of the consent form as the first step of the pre-intervention survey. The consent form acted as a cover letter that provided an overview of how the pre-intervention survey fit into the study, instructions for completing the pre-intervention survey, and a review of the entire study. The cover letter is included in Appendix H.

The first training was presented three separate times in the month of July to all eligible participants virtually from seven campuses. This training consisted of an overview of IDEA and federal regulations, such as FERPA and Child Find, along with Arizona state-specific timelines and laws. During the second training, specific strategies to increase collaboration and parent engagement before, during, and after special education meetings were discussed. Part of each training session included time for a question-and-answer portion, where participants asked questions about the training content or shared their individual experiences. Each training lasted around an hour, with 30 minutes provided before the first training and 30 minutes provided after the second training to complete the pre-post intervention surveys.

Directly following the second training, participants were asked to complete the post-intervention survey through the Qualtrics platform. To ensure responses were provided promptly, the 30-minute time window was provided at the end of the final

training to complete the survey. This second training and completion of the survey occurred over six sessions offered to allow maximum opportunities for participants to attend the training according to their schedules. These sessions occurred between the end of August to the end of September, or six-to-eight weeks after the final session of the first training. This survey data informed the questions asked during the semi-structured interviews that took place following the training.

Approximately three-to-six weeks following the completion of the post-intervention survey, participants were asked to complete semi-structured interviews regarding their experiences and perceptions regarding the training and implementation of collaborative strategies between schools and families during special education meetings. Recruitment took place through an email directed at all participants, scheduled through the software “when2meet” or through email responses. Participants who responded to the researcher and indicated interest in being interviewed were scheduled for an individual interview time. All interested participants were interviewed by the researcher. The interviews took place between mid-October and mid-November. The recruitment email for the semi-structured interviews is included in Appendix F alongside additional documentation for IRB. A list of attempts to recruit participants is provided in Appendix I.

Data Analysis

Quantitative Data Analysis

Information collected from the pre-post intervention survey were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Demographic data was analyzed using descriptive

statistics to find the range, mean and standard deviation to describe the characteristics of the population of participants. Descriptive statistics (mean, range, standard deviation) was also used to analyze the Likert-scale questions. Inferential statistics (paired-sample *t*-tests) were used to compare the answers from the pre-and-post intervention surveys. Only the results from participants who completed both the pre-and-post intervention surveys ($n = 10$) were included in the analysis. When considering the range of participants' backgrounds, training, and positions, it became clear there may be differences in responses due to these factors. To further examine participant responses, post-hoc independent sample *t*-tests were performed on the pre-post score differences between two groups: special education teacher and non-special education teachers. The non-special education teachers group consisted of Clinical Specialists and Site Administrators. The Clinical Specialists and Site Administrators were combined due to the small number of total participants and the even smaller number of participants in each of the non-special education teacher participant groups. First, the difference between the pre-post scores was calculated. Next, participants were divided into the groups of special education teachers and non-special education teachers. Finally, the independent sample *t*-tests were conducted to compare the means between the difference in pre-post scores for the two groups. The reported means for each group reflect the average difference in pre-post intervention survey scores for the group as a whole. These tests allowed for comparisons to see if there were statistically significant differences between the mean scores.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Open-ended questions from the pre-post intervention survey and the responses from the semi-structured interview questions were analyzed using an iterative, constant-comparative method as described by Strauss & Corbin (1998). First, words and concepts were sorted into initial codes using In Vivo coding. This method creates a code using a word or short phrase directly from the data source (Saldana, 2021). Saldana (2021) supports the use of In Vivo coding as a primary method for first cycle coding, and especially for interview transcripts. Next, the codes were gathered into broader categories using Focused coding. This method follows In Vivo coding and hones in on the most frequent or salient codes to describe the data (Saldana, 2021). Finally, themes were derived from the categories. The three open-ended survey intervention questions were analyzed together to look for initial codes, categories, and themes related to areas of focus within each research question.

Each participant who completed the semi-structured interviews was included in the analysis, $n = 6$. To enhance triangulation of the quantitative and qualitative results, only participants who completed both the pre-and-post intervention surveys were invited to complete an interview. Each participant answered eight open-ended questions regarding their use of strategies learned at the intervention training, how perceptions have changed, if at all, following the intervention training, and additional methods suggested to further increase collaboration with families. For the semi-structured interviews, each transcript was analyzed separately for initial codes and categories, then compared across all interviews for the final themes. Data triangulation occurred through comparing the

quantitative results from the pre-and-post intervention surveys, and the qualitative results from the open-ended survey questions and the semi-structured interviews in answer to each research question. To stay organized and compare data across all interviews, the HyperRESEARCH software program was used. The data analysis plan procedures by type of data, data source, and research questions are outlined in Table 2.

Table 2*Data Analysis Procedures*

| Research Questions | Data Source | Analysis Strategies |
|---|---|--|
| RQ 1: As a result of the “Collaboration between Schools and Families” intervention, do special education practitioners change their: a) knowledge of legal rights and responsibilities, b) actions taken to prepare for special education meetings, and c) collaboration skills? | Pre-post intervention survey | Likert-style questions on laws and collaboration strategies. Paired samples <i>t</i> -tests were used to compare questions in these three areas. Post-hoc Independent samples <i>t</i> -tests were conducted to compare responses from teacher participants and non-teacher participants. |
| | Pre-post intervention survey open ended questions | Open response questions: In Vivo and Focused coding strategies with inductive analysis. |
| | Semi-structured interviews | |
| RQ 2: What did participants perceive as the most useful aspects of the "Collaboration between School and Families" intervention? | Post-intervention survey Open ended question | Open response questions: In Vivo and Focused coding strategies with inductive analysis. |
| | Semi-structured interviews | |

Summary

Chapter 3 provided an outline of this action research, mixed-methods study. The study setting, participants, intervention, data collection methods, and methods of data analysis were described. Providing an intervention of professional development training

aimed to support special education practitioners to increase their knowledge, collaboration skills, and actions to support families during special education meetings. This study aimed to determine the change special education practitioners experienced because of the training intervention, and the aspects of the intervention that participants found most useful for their future practice. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected through a pre-post intervention survey, and further qualitative data informed by the survey results was collected through semi-structured interviews. The data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, along with an iterative method to analyze themes that emerged from the qualitative data. Using a mixed-methods approach, the data combined provided robust information that further informed the problem of practice.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Introduction

This action research study's purpose was to determine if special education practitioners changed their knowledge, actions, and skills to further collaborate with families following a training intervention. In addition, this study aimed to gauge the participants' views of the most useful aspects of the training intervention. The focus of this chapter provides the results of this mixed-methods study in reference to each proposed research question. Each section of the first research question is answered through the presentation of the quantitative data (pre-post intervention survey data) first, then through the qualitative (pre-post intervention survey open-ended questions & semi-structured interview questions) second. A summary of the qualitative data is then presented to answer the second research question. The research questions are as follows:

RQ1: As a result of the “Collaboration between Schools and Families” intervention, did special education practitioners change their a) knowledge of legal rights and responsibilities, b) actions taken to prepare for special education meetings, and c) collaboration skills?

RQ2: What did participants perceive as the most useful aspects of the “Collaboration between Schools and Families” intervention?

Quantitative Data Results

The mean, standard deviation, and p-values are included in tables illustrating the results for each question. For all questions, it was expected that the training would

improve participants' mean scores (that the post-intervention survey responses would be higher than the pre-intervention survey responses). Therefore, statistically significant results are reported with the one-tailed results. Levene's Test for Equality of Variances was conducted on the independent samples *t*-tests. For most items, equal variances were assumed, but when equal variances could not be assumed, the results were either statistically significant or not statistically significant for both equal variances assumed and not assumed.

Qualitative Data Results

Qualitative data results are derived from the pre-post intervention survey open-ended questions, and from answers obtained through the semi-structured interview questions. Chapter 3 includes a complete description of the coding process that was used to identify codes and themes within the qualitative results.

Research Question 1a: Practitioners' Knowledge of Legal Rights and Responsibilities

This section outlines the quantitative and qualitative results pertaining to part "a" of the first research question asking how practitioners changed their knowledge of legal rights and responsibilities as a result of the "Collaboration between Schools and Families" training intervention.

Quantitative Results

Participants were asked questions about their understanding of laws such as FERPA, Child Find, and timelines for completing special education documents. Table 3 below provides the results from paired-sample *t*-tests on the closed-ended Likert-scale

questions pertaining to current knowledge of special education laws and policies. The 6 Likert scale response choices were as follows: 1 = *strongly agree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *slightly disagree*, 4 = *slightly agree*, 5 = *agree*, and 6 = *strongly agree*. The closer the mean score was to 6, the more participants indicated agreement with the statement or question.

Table 3

Differences in Participants' Knowledge of Legal Rights and Responsibilities on the Pre-Post Intervention Surveys

| Legal Rights and Responsibilities | Pre-Survey <i>M</i> (SD) | Post- Survey <i>M</i> (SD) | <i>p</i> |
|--|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|----------|
| I understand what steps I can take to maintain student confidentiality | 5.70 (.48) | 5.90 (0.32) | .08 |
| I understand what families' rights are under FERPA | 5.30 (0.68) | 5.50 (0.53) | .22 |
| I understand the school's responsibility regarding Child Find for children ages 2 yrs 9 months to 5 years of age | 4.80 (0.63) | 5.00 (1.25) | .25 |
| I understand the school's responsibility regarding Child Find for children in kindergarten to 12 th grade | 4.90 (0.88) | 5.00 (1.25) | .34 |
| I currently know what responsibilities each team member has during evaluation meetings | 5.10 (0.99) | 5.70 (0.48)* | .04 |
| I currently know what responsibilities each team member has during IEP meetings | 5.60 (0.52) | 5.80 (0.42) | .08 |
| I currently know all timelines of when documents are due within the special education process | 5.00 (.67) | 5.40 (0.70)* | .02 |
| I currently know who must have a Behavior Manifestation meeting due to student | 4.30 (1.34)* | 5.40 (0.84)* | .01 |

Note. *n* = 10. * *p* < .05

For every item on the knowledge of legal rights and responsibilities section of the pre-post intervention survey, participants' mean scores were higher on the post-intervention survey when compared to the pre-intervention survey, although the majority were not significantly changed. Overall, on the pre-intervention survey, participants agreed they understood issues around confidentiality, such as FERPA. They also agreed they understood each team members' responsibilities during evaluation and IEP meetings, and the timelines around each step in the special education process. Participants slightly agreed they understood Child Find requirements and parameters around who must have a Behavior Manifestation meeting on the pre-intervention survey. On the post-intervention survey, participants agreed they understood all aspects around legal rights and responsibilities that were covered during the intervention training. Of the questions asked in this section, three items were statistically significant. The first item was a significant increase in current understanding of what responsibilities each team member has during evaluation meetings, $t(9) = -1.96, p = .04$. The second item indicated a significantly increased understanding of all timelines and when documents are due within the special education process, $t(9) = -2.45, p = .02$. The final item demonstrated significantly increased understanding of who must have a Behavior Manifestation meeting, $t(9) = -2.70, p = .01$.

Post hoc independent *t*-tests were conducted to determine if there was a statistically significant difference in mean scores between special education teachers and non-special education teachers due to the differences in background, training, and position of participants. First, to compare the two groups, the difference between the pre-

post scores was calculated. Next, participants were divided into the groups of special education teachers and non-special education teachers (Clinical Specialists and Site Administrators). Last, the independent samples *t*-tests were conducted to compare the means between the difference in pre-post scores for the two groups. The mean scores reported reflected the change from pre-post scores between non-special education teachers as a group, and special education teachers as a group. For example, a score of 0.00 reflected no change in that groups' pre-post scores. The results are reported in Table 4 below.

Table 4*Difference in Changed Scores of Special Education Teachers vs. Non-Special Education**Teachers' Knowledge of Legal Rights and Responsibilities*

| Legal Rights and Responsibilities | Non-Sped Teacher <i>M (SD)</i> | Sped Teacher <i>M (SD)</i> | <i>p</i> |
|--|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------|
| I understand what steps I can take to maintain student confidentiality | 0.00 (0.00) | 0.33 (0.52) | .12 |
| I understand what families' rights are under FERPA | 0.25 (0.50) | 0.17 (0.98) | .44 |
| I understand the school's responsibility regarding Child Find for children ages 2 yrs 9 months to 5 years of age. | 0.25 (0.50) | 0.17 (1.17) | .45 |
| I understand the school's responsibility regarding Child Find for children in kindergarten to 12 th grade | 0.00 (0.82) | 0.17 (0.75) | .37 |
| I currently know what responsibilities each team member has during evaluation meetings | -0.25 (0.50) | 1.17 (0.75)* | .006 |
| I currently know what responsibilities each team member has during IEP meetings | 0.00 (0.00) | 0.33 (0.52) | .12 |
| I currently know all timelines of when documents are due within the special education process | 0.25 (0.50) | 0.50 (0.55) | .24 |
| I currently know who must have a Behavior Manifestation meeting due to student conduct | 0.00 (0.00) | 1.83 (1.17)* | .008 |

Note. $n = 10$. * $p < .01$

The results show that for most questions, there was no statistically significant difference between changes in responses from special education teachers and non-special education teachers. However, two items did demonstrate a statistically significant difference. The first item showed a difference regarding knowledge of responsibilities that each team member has during evaluation meetings, $t(8) = -3.28, p = .006$. The second item also revealed a difference regarding knowledge of who must have a Behavior Manifestation meeting due to student conduct, $t(8) = -3.07, p = .008$. This suggests that non-Special Ed teachers already had a high amount of knowledge of legal rights and responsibilities, as several areas showed 0.00 change in their ratings from pre- to post-survey results. However, special education teachers' knowledge of legal rights and responsibilities significantly increased or improved in those two areas.

Qualitative Results

The following section first provides the results of the open-ended pre-post intervention survey questions. Then, the responses from the semi-structured interview questions are discussed.

Open-Ended Pre-Intervention Survey Question.

Table 5 below outlines the responses gathered from the following open-ended question asked on the pre-intervention survey: What steps, if any, have you taken to help parents gain knowledge of the special education process within the last year?

Table 5

Results for the Steps Taken to Help Parents Gain Knowledge of the Special Education

Process Question on the Pre-Intervention Survey

| Themes from the Pre-Intervention Survey | Example Quotes |
|---|--|
| Provide information & communication | “Sped law and email updates from organization” “Provide a copy of procedural safeguards” “Consistent check-ins” |
| Collaboration with school district partners | “Refer to them [sic] to the correct people” “Collaborating with school district partners” |
| Minimal support provided | “Unfortunately, not many steps have been taken” “Making myself available to answer questions that arise” “Minimally” |

Information gathered from the open-ended responses on the pre-intervention survey indicated that participants felt they could provide information to families if it was readily available, such as information from our organization or Procedural Safeguards that schools are required to provide to families annually. Participants also felt capable of referring families to school district partners or to “the correct people” when they did not know the answer to questions or have access to needed information themselves. A few participants acknowledged that “unfortunately, not many steps have been taken,” or that they could only offer minimal support as they were “not comfortable enough with the steps of the process to be able to help parents gain that knowledge”.

Open-Ended Post-Intervention Survey Question.

The following table summarizes the responses received from the following open-ended questions asked on the post-intervention survey: What steps, if any, will you take to help parents gain knowledge of the special education process within the upcoming year?

Table 6

Results for the Steps Taken to Help Parents Gain Knowledge of the Special Education Process Question on the Post-Intervention Survey

| Themes from the Post-Intervention Survey | Example Quotes |
|--|--|
| Communicate with families | “Giving space for parents/families to voice concerns” “Ask and answer questions” “Ask if they need more information” “Send home informative information” |
| Explain the process | “Explaining the SPED process in a family-friendly manner” “Explain the roles before the meeting” “Ensure our teams understand the processes and can communicate these effectively with families” |

Following the training intervention on special education policies, procedures, and laws, participants indicated they felt better equipped to provide families with information about the special education process. Participants shared they felt they could communicate

with families by asking if they needed more information, sending “home informative information,” and by providing families opportunities to share their concerns throughout the special education process. Participants also stated an increased perception of their ability to explain the process to families. One participant shared they would “ensure our teams understand the processes and can communicate these effectively with families.” Another participant acknowledged the importance of “explaining the SPED process in a family-friendly manner without all the jargon.”

Semi-Structured Interview Questions.

The table below outlines the themes that emerged from the semi-structured interviews in describing the changes participants’ experienced in their knowledge of legal rights and responsibilities.

Table 7

Results for Changes in Knowledge of Legal Rights and Responsibilities from the Semi-Structured Interviews

| Themes from the Semi-structured Interviews | Example Quotes |
|---|--|
| General understanding of rights, laws, and procedures | “Really, it was just a really good overview” “Reminded of what is expected of myself as a teacher” “Confidentiality piece” |
| Current implementation or understanding of rights, laws, and procedures | “I think sometimes I get complacent” “Send home a draft” “We’re never going to be too prepared for our sped meetings” |
| Changes that occurred after the intervention in understanding of rights, laws, and procedures | “I am much more aware now of when to schedule meetings” “Making sure that the parents totally understood” “How important it is to clearly identify ourselves, and also the services that we provide” |

During the semi-structured interviews a few participants shared the training served as a good reminder. One participant expressed that the training provided “a really good overview” of the special education rights, laws, and procedures. Another participant was reminded of the importance of maintaining confidentiality for students throughout the special education process. A few participants stated they currently support families by sending home a draft, with one participant stating that by doing so it can “alleviate any really specific concerns that might come up.” This participant also shared “We’re never going to be too prepared for our sped meetings...the more kind of prepared we can be the

better.” The same participant continued, “I think that all my teams could improve on, myself included...just showing up to those meetings ready.” Following the training, participants implemented new strategies learned into their practice. One participant shared they focused on “making sure that the parents totally understood” what occurred during meetings. Another participant stated they “were much more aware now of when to schedule meetings.” Finally, clearly identifying each team member and the services that each person provides during meetings was a strategy implemented by several participants following the training.

Summary of Practitioner’s Knowledge of Legal Rights and Responsibilities

Results from the pre-post intervention survey found that participants demonstrated statistically significant increases on three items: understanding team member responsibilities during evaluation meetings, timelines for the special education process, and Behavior Manifestation meeting parameters. For the two questions regarding understanding team member responsibilities and Behavior Manifestation meeting procedures, special education teachers were significantly less likely to initially understand team member responsibilities and Behavior Manifestation meeting procedures than non-special education teachers. Non-special ed professionals did not change in their knowledge following the training intervention, whereas teachers grew significantly in the areas of understanding team member responsibilities and meeting procedures for Behavior Manifestation meetings. The pre-post intervention open-ended survey questions regarding steps to help parents gain knowledge of the special education process indicated that participants initially felt uncomfortable with their ability to help parents but could

refer families to other available resources. Following the intervention training, participants felt an increased ability to explain the special education process to families themselves. Semi-structured interview responses suggested participants appreciated the overview of special education rights, laws, and procedures, and were reminded of the importance of making sure families understand their rights and the special education process.

Research Question 1b: Practitioners' Actions to Prepare for Special Education Meetings

This section addresses the quantitative and qualitative results in reference to part “b” of the first research question. This question pertains to the changes school practitioners made in regard to actions taken to prepare for special education meetings following the training intervention.

Quantitative Results

Participants answered several closed-ended questions on a 6-point Likert scale on specific actions taken prior to special education meetings. Actions included contacting families, soliciting input, and sending home a draft. Table 8 below provides the results from the closed-ended Likert-scale questions pertaining to current knowledge of special education laws and policies. The 6 Likert scale response choices were as follows: 1 = *never*, 2 = *very rarely*, 3 = *rarely*, 4 = *occasionally*, 5 = *very frequently*, and 6 = *always*. The closer the mean score is to 6, the more often participants completed these actions.

Table 8

Difference in Participants' Actions Taken to Prepare for Special Education Meetings on the Pre-Post Intervention Survey

| Actions Taken to Prepare for Special Education Meetings | Pre-Survey <i>M (SD)</i> | Post- Survey <i>M (SD)</i> | <i>p</i> |
|---|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|----------|
| How often do you/will you contact families regarding any questions they might have prior to the meeting? | 5.00 (0.82) | 5.60 (0.70) | .06 |
| How often do you/will you solicit family input prior to the meeting? | 5.40 (0.84) | 5.70 (0.48) | .17 |
| How often do you/will you send families a draft of the evaluation report or the IEP prior to the meeting? | 4.90 (1.20) | 5.60 (0.70) | .08 |
| How often do you/will you provide resources to the families prior to the meeting? | 3.80 (1.32) | 4.50 (0.85)* | .03 |
| How often do you/will you provide a meeting agenda prior to or during the meeting? | 3.10 (1.37) | 5.10 (1.00)** | .002 |

Note. $n = 10$. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

For each item of this section of the pre-post intervention survey, participants demonstrated increased mean scores when asked about the steps they took or would take to prepare for special education meetings. Participants indicated on the pre-intervention

survey that they very frequently engaged in steps such as contacting families to see if they had questions and to solicit input before meetings. Sending a draft home to families of proposed documents was carried out occasionally, while rarely did participants provide resources or a meeting agenda to families prior to meetings. Results on the post-intervention survey showed participants stated they would continue to contact families prior to meetings and solicit their input very frequently. However, participants suggested after the training intervention they would occasionally provide resources to families and very frequently provide a meeting agenda prior to special education meetings. Participants indicated a statistically significant increase in how often they would provide resources to families before meetings, $t(9) = -2.09, p = .03$. Two, an increase in how often a meeting agenda would be provided prior to meetings was indicated by participants, $t(9) = -3.87, p = .002$.

Independent *t*-tests were conducted as a post-hoc measure to determine if special education teachers and non-special education teachers exhibited a statistically significant difference in mean pre-post intervention survey scores as a group. Results are delineated in Table 9 below.

Table 9*Difference in Changed Scores of Special Education Teachers vs. Non-Special Education**Teachers' Actions Taken to Prepare for Special Education Meetings*

| Actions Taken to Prepare for Special Education Meetings | Non-Sped Teacher <i>M (SD)</i> | Sped Teacher <i>M (SD)</i> | <i>p</i> |
|---|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|----------|
| How often do you/will you contact families regarding any questions they might have prior to the meeting? | 0.50 (1.29) | 0.67 (1.03) | .41 |
| How often do you/will you solicit family input prior to the meeting? | 0.25 (0.50) | 0.33 (1.21) | .45 |
| How often do you/will you send families a draft of the evaluation report or the IEP prior to the meeting? | 0.75 (0.96) | 0.67 (1.75) | .47 |
| How often do you/will you provide resources to the families prior to the meeting? | 0.50 (1.00) | 0.83 (1.17) | .33 |
| How often do you/will you provide a meeting agenda prior to or during the meeting? | 1.50 (1.73) | 2.33 (1.63) | .23 |

Note. n = 10

Results from the post-hoc independent *t*-tests show there were no statistically significant differences between responses from special education and non-special education teacher participants on the pre-post intervention survey scores.

Qualitative Results

Responses were gathered through an open-ended question asked on the pre-post intervention survey. Further information was gathered from answers to questions from the semi-structured interviews conducted following the survey.

Open-Ended Post-Intervention Survey Question.

Although no open-ended question was directly asked on the survey regarding actions taken to prepare for special education meetings, responses provided on an open-ended question revealed participants wanted to gain knowledge and resources that would allow them to take additional actions to prepare for special education meetings.

Participants outlined what they wanted to learn through answering the following question: What do you hope to gain from these two professional development trainings?

Responses are outlined in Table 10 below.

Table 10

Results for What Participants Hoped to Learn from the Training Intervention Question on the Pre-Intervention Survey

| Themes from the Pre-Intervention Survey | Example Quotes |
|--|--|
| Information Needed to Be Better Positioned to Support Families | “More knowledge to know, be better prepared to assist families with information and the process” “Further knowledge on special education processes” “To gain further insight and understanding into best practices...before, during, and after special education meetings occur” |
| Actively Seeking Information of Resources to Provide Families | “Further information on resources for our families prior to and post IEP meetings” “Where I can find resources in the community to help parents” |

Participants shared they wanted more information regarding the special education process and best practices so they could be better prepared prior to special education meetings. One participant stated they wanted “more knowledge to know [sic], be better prepared to assist families with information and the process.” Other participants expressed similar thoughts, with one participant sharing they wanted to gain “further knowledge on special education processes.” Another participant wanted to “gain further insight and understanding into best practices when supporting both our families and our district partners before, during and after special education meetings occur.” Participants were also actively seeking information on resources to provide families before meetings

or at other times. One participant shared they wanted “further information on resources for our families prior to and post IEP meetings,” while another participant asked where to find community resources to assist families.

Open-Ended Post-Intervention Survey Question.

The table below encapsulates responses received from the following open-ended question asked on the post-intervention survey as it pertains to actions taken to prepare for special education meetings: What did you gain from these two professional development trainings?

Table 11

Results for What Participants Hoped to Learn from the Training Intervention Question on the Post-Intervention Survey

| Themes from the Post-Intervention Survey | Example Quotes |
|--|---|
| Learned Practices to Be Positioned to Manage Meetings | “I learned how to manage a difficult meeting” “Best practices for planning, conducting, and follow up of IEP meetings” |
| Obtained Resources and Information to Provide Families | “Resources on how to collaborate for IEP meetings” “Tips on making parents feel welcome” “Findings...shared regarding lack of parental involvement” |

Participants shared that following the trainings, they gained strategies to manage difficult meetings and facilitate special education meetings before, during, and after they occur. Multiple participants shared they gained knowledge of best practices for IEP meetings, as one participant shared, “I learned how to manage a difficult meeting.” Another participant stated they learned “best practices for planning, conducting, and follow up of IEP meetings.” In addition, participants obtained resources and information they could then provide families prior to, during, and after special education meetings. One participant appreciated the “tips on making parents feel welcome,” while another participant stated they benefited from “resources on how to collaborate for IEP meetings.”

Semi-Structured Interview Questions.

The themes that emerged describing the participants’ changes in actions taken to prepare for special education meetings during the semi-structured interviews are summarized in Table 12 below.

Table 12

Results for Changes in Actions Taken to Prepare for Special Education Meetings from the Semi-Structured Interviews

| Themes from the Semi-structured Interviews | Example Quotes |
|---|--|
| Continuous communication to build relationships | “Then you have those positive times that you do talk and have that relationship” “Keep persisting...continue talking to parents, and not feel shy about it” “It makes my job so much easier if we’re talking regularly” |
| Clear communication with families | “Has the draft been completed and sent home?” “Have we clearly communicated with the families...and the other stakeholders.” “Do they know this meetings’ happening? Really, it sounds basic...” |
| Communication prior to special education meetings | “I follow up with a phone call before the meeting...to ask them if they have any questions” “The main thing I took was just how we need to be more organized before the actual meeting day” “Trying to send home a draft and communicate with parent prior to the meeting” |

The semi-structured interviews provided information regarding the actions that participants have taken or will take to prepare for special education meetings. Participants shared that continuous communication throughout the school year supported the building of positive relationships prior to special education meetings. As one participant shared, “It makes my job so much easier if we’re talking regularly.” Participants also expressed the importance of clear communication with families before the meeting about the

upcoming meeting. “Do they know this meeting’s happening? Really, it sounds basic and I’m laughing...” one participant shared.

Participants shared communication is vital not only with families, but also with the rest of the special education team. Specific actions taken prior to the special education meeting were also outlined. One participant stated they “follow up with a phone call before the meeting...to ask them if they have any questions, or they’re confused about anything that I can answer before the meeting.” Multiple participants expressed they sent a draft of the document home prior to the meeting. As one participant summarized,

“So that some specific things, is [sic] talking with my teachers about the importance of trying to send home a draft and communicate with parents prior to the meeting, to alleviate any really specific concerns that might come up. That’s some - a really simple strategy that can prevent a meeting from possibly being derailed, or also simply give the parent time to vent about something, and then find a solution in the interim between.”

Summary of Practitioners’ Actions to Prepare for Special Education Meetings

The closed-ended pre-post-intervention survey questions resulted in two items demonstrating a statistically significant increase: how often participants would provide resources to families before meetings, and how often a meeting agenda would be provided prior to meetings. No statistically significant differences were found between responses from special education and non-special education teacher participants. The open-ended survey responses revealed participants stated they actively sought out information to provide families before meetings on the pre-intervention survey, but that

they benefited from learning about best practices before, during, and after special education meetings on the post-intervention survey. During the semi-structured interviews, participants shared that because of the intervention, they took or planned to take additional steps to communicate with families and build relationships prior to special education meetings through phone calls and sending document drafts home.

Research Question 1c: Practitioners' Collaboration Skills

The following section outlines the quantitative and qualitative results to answer part “c” of the first research question. This section refers to the changes in practitioners' collaboration skills with families following the training intervention.

Quantitative Results

Several closed-ended questions were asked on a 6-point Likert scale regarding methods of collaborating with families during and after special education meetings. Methods included explaining meeting norms, asking families questions, soliciting family input, corresponding with families after the meeting, and sending families resources. The response choices followed this format: 1 = *never*, 2 = *very rarely*, 3 = *rarely*, 4 = *occasionally*, 5 = *very frequently*, and 6 = *always*. Participants completed the actions more frequently the closer the mean score is to 6.

The table below outlines the results:

Table 13*Differences in Participants' Collaboration Skills on the Pre-Post Intervention Survey*

| Collaboration Skills | Pre-Survey <i>M (SD)</i> | Post- Survey <i>M (SD)</i> | <i>p</i> |
|---|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|----------|
| How often do you/will you explain the roles of the team members prior to or during the meeting? | 4.40 (1.35) | 5.10 (1.0) | .14 |
| How often do you explain meeting norms during the meeting? | 4.10 (1.37) | 4.90 (0.88) | .13 |
| How often do you/will you ask families questions during the meeting? | 5.40 (0.84) | 5.90 (0.32)* | .05 |
| How often do you/will you ask families if they have questions during the meeting? | 5.60 (0.70) | 5.90 (0.32) | .10 |
| How often do you/will you solicit family input during the meeting? | 5.50 (0.71) | 6.00 (0.00)** | .03 |
| How often do you/will you correspond with families to see if they have questions after the meeting? | 5.10 (0.57) | 5.60 (0.52)** | .03 |
| How often do you/will you send families resources after the meeting? | 4.30 (0.68) | 5.10 (0.57)*** | .005 |

*Note: n = 10. *p = .05, ** p < .05, *** p < .01*

For each item of this section on the pre-post intervention survey regarding strategies used to collaborate with families, participants indicated higher mean scores after receiving the training intervention. Prior to the training, participants stated they occasionally explained roles of the team members and explained meeting norms during the meeting, and occasionally sent families resources following the meeting. However, participants very frequently asked families questions, asked families if they had questions, and solicited family input during meetings. They also very frequently corresponded with families after the meeting.

After the training, participants indicated they would occasionally explain meeting norms, but would very frequently engage in almost all other suggested methods to collaborate during and after meetings. Participants expressed they would always engage in the suggested strategy of soliciting family input during future meetings. For four questions, statistically significant differences were found when comparing the pre-post intervention survey scores. The first item demonstrated an increase in how often families would be asked questions during special education meetings, $t(9) = -1.86, p = .05$. The second item indicated an increase in how often participants would solicit family input during the meeting, $t(9) = -2.24, p = .03$. The third item noted an increase in how often participants would correspond with families to see if they have questions after meetings, $t(9) = -2.24, p = .03$. Finally, the fourth item showed an increase in how often families will be sent resources after the meeting, $t(9) = -3.21, p = .005$. The results from post hoc independent t -tests conducted on mean pre-post intervention survey scores between

special education teachers and non-special education teachers to determine if there was a statistically significant difference are reported in Table 14 below.

Table 14*Differences in Changed Scores of Special Education Teachers vs. Non-Special Education**Teachers' Collaboration Skills*

| Collaboration Skills | Non-Sped Teachers <i>M (SD)</i> | Sped Teachers <i>M (SD)</i> | <i>p</i> |
|---|------------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------|
| How often do you/will you explain the roles of the team members prior to or during the meeting? | 0.25 (2.36) | 1.00 (1.79) | .29 |
| How often do you explain meeting norms during the meeting? | 0.50 (2.38) | 1.00 (2.10) | .37 |
| How often do you/will you ask families questions during the meeting? | 0.00 (0.00) | 0.83 (0.98) | .07 |
| How often do you/will you ask families if they have questions during the meeting? | 0.00 (0.00) | 0.50 (0.84) | .14 |
| How often do you/will you solicit family input during the meeting? | 0.25 (0.50) | 0.67 (0.82) | .20 |
| How often do you/will you correspond with families to see if they have questions after the meeting? | 0.25 (0.96) | 0.67 (0.52) | .20 |
| How often do you/will you send families resources after the meeting? | 0.75 (0.96) | 0.83 (0.75) | .44 |

Note: n = 10

No statistically significant differences were found between special education teachers and non-special education teachers pre-post intervention survey responses for the questions examining participants' collaboration skills.

Qualitative Results

Qualitative results outlined below include responses from the open-ended pre-post intervention survey questions, and from the semi-structured interview question answers.

Open-Ended Pre-Intervention Survey Question.

The responses outlined in Table 15 below answer the following open-ended question posed on the pre-intervention survey: What steps, if any, have you taken to build relationships with the families you work with within the last year?

Table 15

Results for the Steps Taken to Build Relationships with Families Question on the Pre-Intervention Survey

| Themes from the Pre-Intervention Survey | Example Quotes |
|---|---|
| Establish Connections | “In -person meetings and conversations” “Invite to special school events” “Take time to seek information about their whole family” |
| Offer to Find Resources | “Clarify or problem solve any concerns” “Refer to other professionals” “Help guide or connect families with outside services and supports” “Offer monthly family workshop opportunities” |
| Positive Communication | “There is a positive open line of communication” “Frequent daily communication and progress notes” “Strong and consistent parent contact, build on the positive” |

Responses to the open-ended question on the pre-intervention survey demonstrated that participants sought to establish connections with families throughout the year. To achieve this, participants invited families to meet in person for meetings, conversations, and special school events. Building connections with the entire family was noted by one participant who shared that they “take time to seek information about their whole family (not just the child we serve).” Participants felt they could offer to find resources for families, as they noted they could “refer [families] to other professionals,” “offer monthly family workshop opportunities,” and “help guide or connect families with

outsider services and supports.” Cultivating positive communication with families remained a common theme among participants as a way to build relationships. Participants mentioned they provided “frequent daily communication and progress notes,” made “positive parent contacts, reaching out via phone, text, or in person contact,” and maintained a “positive open line of communication between myself and parents.”

Open-Ended Post-Intervention Survey Question.

This section summarizes results gathered from the following open-ended question asked on the post-intervention survey in the table below: What steps, if any, will you take to build relationships with the families you work with within the upcoming year?

Table 16

Results for the Steps Taken to Build Relationships with Families Question on the Post-Intervention Survey

| Themes from the Post-Intervention Survey | Example Quotes |
|---|---|
| Collaborate Through Understanding and Inclusion | “Collaborate with families; include them in the process...try to make the parent feel a true part of the educational team” ” The importance of giving parents and families space in meetings to share their input and thoughts” “I have learned thus far is to always beware on how we, as a team, can understand the student and their families” |
| Positive Communication | “Checking in with parents when students are struggling at school” “Giving space for parents to voice concerns/questions outside of formal SPED meetings” “There is never a good reason to NOT communicate in advance, frequently, and effectively” |

Participants were reminded of the importance of collaborating with families and building relationships throughout the intervention. One participant stated a useful aspect was a reminder of “the importance of giving parents and families space in meetings to share their input and thoughts.” Another important step that emerged was the benefits of taking steps “to always beware of how we, as a team, can understand the student and their families,” as one participant surmised. Although families are a part of the educational team, they may not always see themselves that way. “Collaborate with families; include

them in the process even if they don't seem interested in being an active participant; try to make the parent feel a true part of the educational team," one participant summarized.

Participants also expressed the essential need to engage in positive communication with families. One participant shared they would be "checking in with parents when students are struggling at school," and they would also be "giving space for parents to voice concerns/questions outside of formal SPED meetings." Other participants stated they would engage in positive communication through making "positive calls, emails, and texts frequently," and that "there is never a good reason to NOT communicate in advance, frequently, and effectively (for all things special education related) with the parents/guardians of the students we serve."

Semi-Structured Interview Questions.

Several themes discovered from the semi-structured interview questions pertaining to participants' collaboration with families are outlined in Table 17 below.

Table 17

Results for Changes in Collaboration Skills from the Semi-Structured Interviews

| Themes from the Semi-structured Interviews | Example Quotes |
|--|---|
| Overcoming Barriers to Collaboration | “To make sure everybody was heard, and even the parent was heard” “I feel like I’m more confident addressing these parents and able to have them still feel safe” “Parents...have had sometimes not such great experiences...and so you’re undoing potentially years of just negative interactions” |
| Emphasis on Collaboration as a Team | “I think the collaboration with other team members, especially with the parents, it’s been a little bit, I want to say stronger” “I want to look at the student as a whole, and in order to do that, you have to have families collaborating” |
| Dedication to Collaboration | “I feel like I’m more confident, and I want to collaborate with families more than I did before” “I do think that we need to collaborate. It [the training] brought it more to the forefront” |

Following the intervention training, participants shared they felt better equipped to collaborate with parents by creating a safe environment. One participant shared, “I feel like I’m more confident addressing these parents and able to have them still feel safe.” Participants also discussed the importance of making sure that everyone feels heard during special education meetings, including parents. Families may have encountered previous adverse experiences as one participant stated,

“Parents, you know, especially by high school, have had sometimes not such great experiences...with school, and just recognizing that you’re already probably a trigger. Just the fact that you’re calling as a teacher. And so you’re undoing potentially years of negative interactions. So, just, the more positive the better.”

Creating a greater emphasis on collaboration as a team was another change that participants experienced following the intervention training. Multiple participants shared that the training created a greater awareness of the need to emphasize collaboration. One participant articulated the importance of looking at the whole student but, “in order to do that, you have to have families collaborating.” Another participant shared that since the training, “I think the collaboration with other team members, especially with the parents, it’s been a little bit, I want to say, stronger.”

Finally, a theme that emerged was dedication to collaboration with families. While participants expressed they valued collaboration and took steps to do so prior to the training, they experienced a renewed commitment following the training. One participant shared, “I do think that we need to collaborate. It [the training] brought it more to the forefront.” The training also allowed for some participants to feel confident in collaborating with families, as one participant affirmed, “I feel like I’m more confident, and I want to collaborate with families more than I did before, and I’m more willing to look at it as an entire team...”

Summary of Practitioners' Collaboration Skills

The closed-ended survey responses revealed four statistically significant differences when comparing the pre-post intervention survey scores. Participants

indicated they would increase how often they would ask families questions during special education meetings, solicit family input during the meeting, correspond with families after meetings to see if they have questions, and send resources to families after meetings. No statistically significant differences were discovered between the responses from special education teachers and non-special education teacher participants. Pre-intervention survey open-ended responses noted that participants built relationships with families through frequent communication and offers to find resources. Post-intervention survey open-ended responses revealed participants were reminded of the importance of allowing families to share their input and attempting to understand the student and their family. Participants also stated that engaging in positive communication was essential when collaborating with families. Semi-structured interview responses showed participants gained an awareness of the value of focusing on collaborating with families and felt more confident in their ability and willingness to take steps to collaborate.

Research Question 2: Useful Aspects of the Training Intervention

The following section reports results to answer the second research question which asks what participants perceived as the most useful aspects of the “Collaboration between Schools and Families” intervention.

Qualitative Results

Participants provided responses through an open-ended question on the post-intervention survey. Further clarification and expansion upon answers were gleaned from the semi-structured interviews conducted with a willing subset of participants.

Open-Ended Post Intervention Survey Question.

The table below summarizes responses given by participants to answer the following question asked on the post-intervention survey: What, if anything, are the most useful aspects that you learned from these two professional development trainings?

Table 18

Results for What Participants Found to Be the Most Useful Aspects of the Training Intervention Question on the Post-Intervention Survey

| Themes from the Post-Intervention Survey Question | Example Quotes |
|--|--|
| Reminders & Examples of Ways to Be a Resource for Families | “Sending home resources that pair well with our school-related behavior supports” “Offering monthly parent workshop/teaming opportunities with families” “I’m available to answer questions” |
| Examples of How and When to Conduct Special Education Meetings | “A model of how an IEP should be run” “Teams should go more in-depth when introducing ourselves in SPED meetings” “Timelines and strategies for IEPs” “Knowledge of how to run a smooth, positive meeting with engagement from staff and parents” |

Following the intervention training, participants stated they found the reminders and examples of ways to be a resource for families useful. One participant shared they

would be “sending home resources that pair well with our school-related behavior supports,” while another participant stated they would ensure families knew “I’m available to answer questions.” To further provide support, one participant indicated they would be “offering monthly parent workshop/teaming opportunities with families.”

Additional responses from the open-ended question on the post-intervention survey indicated that participants also found the examples of how and when to conduct special education meetings useful. Participants appreciated the video examples of mock IEP meetings, as one participant stated the most useful aspect was being presented with “a model of how an IEP should be run.” Another participant also stated they found the “timelines and strategies for IEPs” the most useful part of the training intervention. Other participants found specific recommendations helpful, such as the recommendation that “teams should go more in-depth when introducing ourselves in SPED meetings.” General information was also useful for participants, as one participant benefitted from receiving “knowledge of how to run a smooth, positive meeting with engagement from staff and parents.”

Semi-Structured Interview Questions.

The following section details responses from the semi-structured interview questions about the most useful aspects of the “Collaboration between Schools and Families” training. The table below outlines key themes from participants’ responses.

Table 19

Results for the Most Useful Aspects of the Training Intervention from the Semi-Structured Interviews

| Themes from the Semi-structured Interview | Example Quotes |
|---|--|
| Overview and Reminder of Previously Learned Information | “Really good overview” “Reminded us of what is expected as a teacher” “It was a great reminder and refresher of things I have been taught” |
| Examples of how to Conduct Special Education Meetings | “The mock IEP meetings were really helpful” “Introducing roles to highlight for parents” “I’m much more aware now of when to schedule meetings, and how much time I have for the meetings” |

Participants shared that overall, the training intervention helped remind them of information they had previously learned. Multiple participants stated these thoughts, concluding that the intervention was a “really good overview,” “reminded us what is expected as a teacher,” and “It was a great reminder and refresher of things I have been taught.” Participants also found the examples of how to conduct special education meetings helpful, providing some new strategies or reminders of methods to implement. As one participant shared, “the mock IEP meetings were really helpful.” Another participant found the strategy of “introducing roles to highlight for parents” useful. The overview of the timelines and procedures was also beneficial for participants, as one

participant expressed, “I’m much more aware now of when to schedule meetings, and how much time I have for the meetings.”

Summary of Useful Aspects of the Training Intervention

Participants indicated they found the training useful for the reminders and examples of how to be a resource for families on the open-ended post-intervention survey. Resources listed by participants included sending home information related to school-based behavior supports, providing monthly parent workshop opportunities, and being available to answer questions. The examples of how and when to conduct special education meetings were also useful according to the participants. Semi-structured interview responses showed participants found the training intervention helpful as an overview and reminder of previously learned information and felt the examples of how to run special education meetings were also useful.

Summary of Results

To summarize, two research questions were posed during this study:

RQ1: As a result of the “Collaboration between Schools and Families” intervention, did special education practitioners change their a) knowledge of legal rights and responsibilities, b) actions taken to prepare for special education meetings, and c) collaboration skills?

RQ2: What did participants perceive as the most useful aspects of the “Collaboration between Schools and Families” intervention?

The following sections below provide a recap of the results for each research question.

Summary of Results for Knowledge of Legal Rights and Responsibilities

In summary, the quantitative and qualitative results indicate that participants increased their knowledge and understanding of their legal rights and responsibilities and their implementation of strategies to support families to gain a better understanding of the process. Participants significantly increased their understanding of responsibilities of team members, timelines for documents, and the parameters of when to have a Behavior Manifestation meeting. The results for two items, understanding timelines for documents and who must have a Behavior Manifestation meeting, both yielded statistically significant differences when comparing responses from special education teachers and non-special education teachers.

Prior to the training intervention, participants initially acknowledged on the pre-intervention survey that they did not feel comfortable enough in understanding the process themselves, and therefore did not take many steps to support families to gain understanding or directed families to other resources. Following the training, participants stated they had gained enough knowledge to explain the process to families. Semi-structured interview results concluded that the training was a good overview, and that participants implemented new procedures after the training to ensure families understood the process.

Summary of Results for Actions Taken to Prepare for Special Education Meetings

Taken together, the quantitative and qualitative results demonstrated increased actions taken to prepare for special education meetings following the training intervention. Results from three items showed statistically significant outcomes,

including contacting families, providing resources, and providing a meeting agenda more frequently prior to meetings in the future. No statistically significant differences were found on post-hoc tests for these measures when comparing special education teachers and non-special education teachers.

Pre-intervention open-ended question results indicated participants wanted to gain information to support families and were actively seeking out resources and information to provide families before and after special education meetings. Post-intervention survey results showed participants gained practices to effectively manage meetings and information on resources to provide to families following the training. Semi-structured interview results indicated that participants gained specific strategies to implement prior to special education meetings to increase collaboration. Examples include engaging in continuous communication prior to the first meeting to build relationships, sending a draft of documents home prior to special education meetings, and communicating with families before and after meetings to see if they have further questions.

Summary of Results for Collaboration Skills

The quantitative and qualitative results together demonstrated increased understanding of strategies to use to collaborate further with families following the training intervention. Statistically significant results were found for four items indicating a significant increase in how often participants would ask families questions and solicit family input during meetings, while also corresponding with families to see if they have questions and sending resources home after the meeting. Post-hoc independent *t*-tests

revealed no statistically significant differences between special education teachers and non-special education teachers relating to collaboration skills.

Prior to the training intervention, participants stated they built relationships with families through establishing connections throughout the year, offering to find resources for families, and engaging in frequent, positive communication. Following the training intervention, participants indicated they perceived they could collaborate with families by making them feel they are a true part of the educational team, providing families time to provide input, and working to understand the students and their families. Participants also stated they would continue positive communication with families by checking in with them, giving space for concerns and questions outside of formal meetings, and by frequently engaging in positive contact. The semi-structured interview results showed that participants felt they were better equipped to overcome barriers to collaboration, could emphasize collaboration as a team, and experienced renewed dedication to collaborating with families.

Summary of Results for Useful Aspects of the Intervention Training

Participants answered an open-ended survey question on the post-intervention survey and questions posed during the semi-structured interviews regarding what they found useful in the intervention training. Responses from the post-intervention survey revealed that participants appreciated the reminders and examples of how they could be a resource for families by sending home resources, teaming with families, and being available to answer questions. Participants particularly found the examples of how and when to conduct special education meetings helpful, by being provided examples of how

to facilitate IEP meetings through video examples, information on the timelines throughout the special education process, and specific strategies such as clearly identifying team members and providing meeting agendas.

The semi-structured interview results indicated that the training intervention was a great overview and reminder of ways to collaborate with families. Although participants understood the importance of collaborating with families, and had previously heard much of the information presented, participants were not currently using many of the strategies. The training intervention provided not only a reminder, but also specific best practices to implement and models of how they could be embedded before, during, and after special education meetings.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Valle (2011) asserted that current research regarding school and family collaboration during special education meetings has both acknowledged the division between families and professionals, and that current steps are aimed at improving communication and parental involvement. Therefore, the purpose of this research study was to provide special education practitioners knowledge of legal rights and responsibilities to be able to further collaborate with families, and general strategies to increase collaboration with families before, during, and after special education meetings. Participants' experiences within the intervention were also explored to see what strategies they found most useful in helping them learn and change their practice around special education meetings. This chapter discusses the complementarity of the quantitative and qualitative data results, the results compared to the theoretical frameworks and to the relevant literature, overall themes from the data to further support continued collaboration, implications from a personal context, larger context, and a future research context, limitations of this study, and a reflection on the researcher's personal experiences through the process.

Key Aspects of Research Innovation

Action research in education is used by practitioners to identify a specific problem within their environment, conduct a research inquiry, collect and analyze data, and finally implement a plan of action (Creswell & Gutterman, 2019). In a mixed-method research design, the use of both quantitative and qualitative data provides alternative views

playing on the strengths of each type of data (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). In this section, the qualitative and quantitative results are first discussed. The theoretical frameworks and relevant literature guiding the study in relation to the results are outlined next, and a new model guided by the themes uncovered by the research are summarized last.

Complementarity of the Quantitative and Qualitative Data

The integration of quantitative and qualitative data allows for meaningful and credible conclusions (Ivankova, 2015). In this research study, the results complement each other in several ways. When examining results for participants' knowledge of legal rights and responsibilities, the quantitative data showed most participants agreed they understood many special education policies, but only slightly agreed they understood timelines and parameters around who must have a Behavior Manifestation meeting. Following the intervention training, participants increased their scores for all items. The qualitative survey and semi-structured interview data provided a richer picture, demonstrating that participants initially felt uncomfortable with the steps of the special education process but could refer families to knowledgeable people. Following the intervention training, participants indicated an increased ability to explain the process to families themselves, matching the increased survey scores.

Quantitative and qualitative results for participants' actions taken to prepare for special education meetings also complemented one another. Quantitative data demonstrated that participants engaged in some steps such as reaching out and soliciting input from families prior to the meetings, but rarely engaged in other steps. Participants

increased their scores for every question following the training. Qualitative data complemented the survey results, with participants hoping to gain insight in how to best provide information to families prior to and after meetings before the training intervention. Afterwards, participants shared they learned best practices for planning, conducting, and following up after meetings, which complements the increased survey scores.

The data results examining the participants' collaboration skills indicated that participants occasionally engaged in some strategies to increase collaboration with families, but very frequently conducted other strategies prior to the training. After the intervention, participants planned to very frequently engage in almost all strategies presented during the training intervention. Qualitative data from the open-ended pre-post intervention survey and from the semi-structured interviews matched the quantitative data, as participants revealed they offered to find resources prior to the training intervention, but felt they could be a source of information for families after the training intervention. Participants stated a perceived increased ability and knowledge of specific strategies to overcome barriers to collaboration in the semi-structured interviews.

Results Compared to the Theoretical Frameworks

This research study used two theoretical frameworks, the Theory of Cultural Capital, and Empowerment Theory, which were reflected in the study results.

Theory of Cultural Capital

Cultural capital refers to one's understanding, access, and knowledge of the dominant culture to obtain and maintain power within their social surroundings

(Bourdieu & Nice, 1987). Related to parent advocacy for their children with special needs, Trainor (2010) found that families who could obtain knowledge and connections were better informed and able to advocate on behalf of their children. Cycles of research prior to this study revealed that families felt overwhelmed throughout their children's evaluations, and wished they had connections to resources or people who could guide them throughout the process. Special education practitioners felt confident regarding their knowledge of special education laws, but wished they knew more specific information and believed families did not understand the laws themselves. Results from this study revealed that participants gained knowledge of special education laws, policies, and procedures, increasing their own cultural capital as special education professionals. In turn, participants felt they could use this knowledge to elevate families' cultural capital creating more equitable partnerships during special education meetings.

Empowerment Theory

This theory encompasses one's own ability to direct their own life and participate within their surroundings (Rappaport, 1987). Parents of children with special needs generally perceive that they are better able to collaborate with school professionals when the professionals have completed classes on creating partnerships (Murray et al., 2013). Previous cycles of research demonstrated that families who had access to community resources increased their involvement in the special education process, and that school personnel took time to build relationships with families to create equal partnerships. Data from this current study demonstrated that participants increased their knowledge of legal rights and responsibilities, and strategies to increase collaboration. By gaining additional

reminders and tools, participants were empowered with more knowledge to clearly explain special education procedures and laws, and the ability to embed family collaboration more effectively into the special education meeting process.

Results Compared to the Relevant Literature

Overall, the current literature focuses on families' perspectives (Fish, 2008; Murray et al., 2013, Trainor, 2010), while this study sought to remedy this gap in literature by exploring perspectives from special education personnel. However, data results from this current study provide connections to the relevant literature discussed in the second chapter. Valle (2011) asserts that recent research has shifted focus to improving home-school communication and family involvement. Results from this study indicated that participants, as special education professionals, do want to increase collaboration with families and make sure families understand the special education process. Following the training intervention, participants reported feeling they were better positioned to provide families with knowledge of the special education process and resources pertinent to their child. This ability converges with A.P. Turnbull et al.'s (2000) collective empowerment model, where schools provide families with needed information as equal participants.

Participants discussed their increased willingness to provide drafts of documents before meetings, which aligns with supporting families to gain knowledge and an opportunity to understand in advance what the school proposes, as suggested by Fish (2008). Blue-Banning et al., (2004), and Fish (2008) both suggested refraining from using jargon or technical terminology during meetings. Participants in this study also suggested

this as a strategy to help parents gain knowledge of the special education process by “explaining the SPED process in a family-friendly manner without all the jargon,” as one participant suggested.

In this current study, participants expressed the importance of taking time to build relationships with families before, during, and after meetings. This finding corresponds with the study by Murray et al. (2013), which found that families’ perceptions of school personnel may change after spending time communicating together. Participants also expressed the importance of listening to team members and providing time for them to express their thoughts throughout the process, as one participant suggested “we make parents feel validated and as a part of our team,” and another participant stated they wanted “to make sure everyone was heard.” Similarly, Blue-Banning et al. (2004) suggested validating team members to bolster an equal partnership during special education meetings. Blue-Banning et al. (2004) also found that families preferred frequent, open, and honest communication without hiding information. In this study, while participants agreed that frequent communication helped build relationships, emphasizing positive communication was mentioned by multiple participants. As one participant suggested,

“The parents, especially by high school, have had sometimes maybe not great experiences with school, and just recognizing that you’re already probably a trigger, just the fact that you’re calling as a teacher and so you’re undoing potentially years of just negative interactions. So just the more positive, the better.”

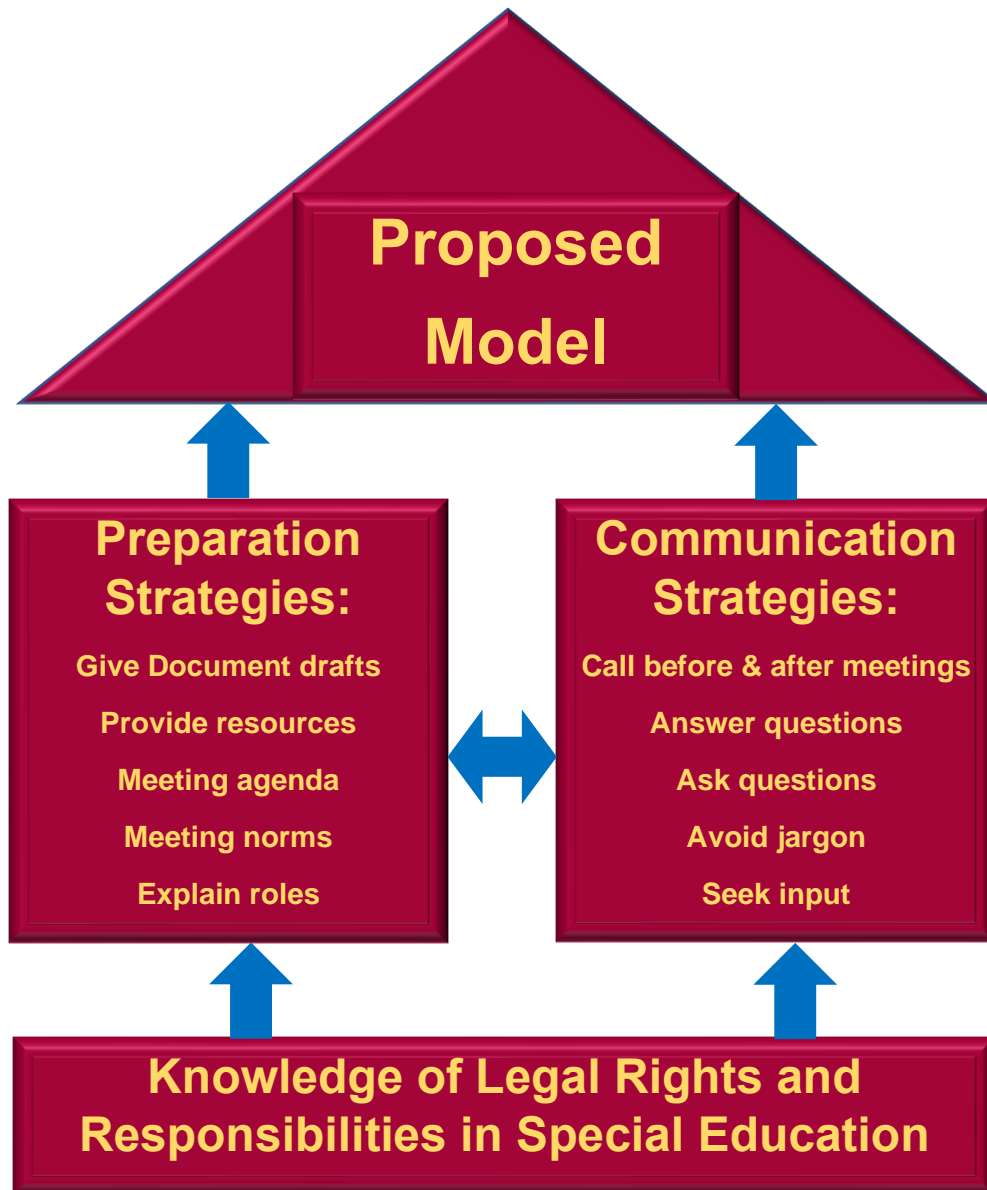
Throughout this study, participants extolled the value of continually communicating with families and developing a relationship prior to special education meetings. As one participant suggested, “I think it’s the more we communicate with [families], the more they’ll be willing to share.” Another participant surmised, “it makes my job so much easier if we’re talking regularly.” This finding coincides with the study by Murray et al. (2013), which found parents developed increased trust in school personnel after engaging in personal exchanges with pre-service teachers.

Model to Support Continued Collaboration

From the research literature, data from previous cycles of research, and the results from this study, a model has been created to show the critical pieces of the current intervention to support continued collaboration between schools and families. Due to the short duration of this study, the model offered here provides a foundation for what participants reported was useful to them to help connect with families during special education meetings. However, future studies should explore how this model impacts families’ perceptions of their ability to further collaborate with school personnel during such meetings.

Figure 1

Proposed Model to Support Collaboration



Implications

Although this action research study began from a noticed problem within this local context, the results could lead to impact on a larger scale. The implications for the local context, larger context, and continued research are discussed in this section.

Implications for Local Context

The basis of this study began from personal experiences as a parent and a long-time special educator as a classroom teacher, inclusion coach, and coordinator. In the researcher's current setting, it was observed that collaboration during special education meetings occurred at varying levels, depending on multiple factors from both the school personnel and the families. Following a literature review and from the previous cycles of research, it was determined that school personnel could benefit from increased knowledge of special education policies, procedures, and laws, and from strategies to increase collaboration during special education meetings. The professional development training topics originated from this demonstrated need, and the results indicated that participants benefited from the training. Participants perceived they increased their knowledge of legal rights and responsibilities and of methods to further collaborate with families. When families feel informed of their rights and believe they can act as advocates for their children, they may feel more of an equal partner throughout the process (Trainor, 2010).

Results from this study indicate participants who can provide information and resources to families, as well as implement methods to build relationships may experience smoother, more collaborative meetings. Without an emphasis on collaboration

or an understanding of the importance of collaboration, families and school personnel may resort to adversarial rather than cooperative experiences. Lake & Billingsley (2000) suggested providing school personnel problem-solving and communication strategies to use during conflicts. Fish (2008) also suggests training in problem-solving skills and conflict resolution for school personnel. Therefore, professional development sessions focusing on how to navigate challenging meetings when families and schools disagree would be beneficial for school personnel to continue focusing on building collaborative, equitable partnerships as this study did not specifically address such strategies.

Another recommendation for future professional development training within the local context focuses on providing special education practitioners training around working with undocumented families. A high number of undocumented immigrants reside in Arizona, with over a quarter-million U.S. citizens in Arizona living with at least one family member who is undocumented (American Immigration Council, 2020). Undocumented family members may be reluctant to participate during special education meetings due to their status, creating an additional barrier to effective family-school collaboration. School personnel may benefit from learning strategies to further partner with undocumented families.

Although participants demonstrated growth in their knowledge of special education policies and collaboration strategies, observations of special education meetings and subsequent conversations or further professional development sessions could be a next step to determine how often and how effectively they implement the knowledge and strategies learned during this study. Future professional development

sessions could continue to include active participation strategies such as videos or interactive activities to support further engagement, as participants stated they appreciated the mock IEP videos. Presenting these sessions as a campus team could provide a supportive, comfortable learning environment, but holding the sessions organization-wide could also benefit participants by allowing for extended or alternative views from other schools. Either way, discussions with peers could be beneficial, as one participant surmised, “It was great interacting with my peers about this important topic.” Holding professional development sessions on these topics may help remind school personnel to implement collaborative strategies regularly within their professional practice.

Implications for Larger Context

Murray et al. (2013) described the benefits of a pre-service class provided to students during their teacher education programs and offered to community families in a shared environment. Families experienced increased feelings of confidence in their ability to advocate for their children’s needs, and preservice teachers encountered the opportunity to develop a family-oriented lens as they continued through their professional journey. While one class on family relationships was offered during this researcher’s own teaching degree program, the course did not include occasions to talk with families with children who have special needs, let alone opportunities to learn alongside them. A suggestion then would be to provide such a course as a pertinent aspect to gain an understanding of the everyday realities on the part of the school and the families firsthand. If implemented, preservice teachers could potentially feel more confident in

their ability to guide families through the special education process and engage in collaborative strategies to further build relationships from the beginning of their teaching career. Families who remain at a disadvantage due to a lack of understanding of aspects of the special education process (Valle, 2011), but are expected to be actively involved in the educational decision-making process (H. R. Turnbull, 2005), may also benefit from such a course.

As suggested for professional development training, the results from this study indicate that a preservice class could also benefit from implementing active participation strategies. As described in Murray et al.'s (2013) study, the preservice class could include preservice teachers and community parents who have children with special needs learning alongside each other. The community members could share their experiences navigating the special education process and provide insights for preservice teachers about how best to partner with families. Both preservice teachers and community parents could learn together how a special education meeting is conducted, which would be beneficial as participants of this study found the modeling of a special education meeting to be one of the most useful aspects of the intervention. Class sessions could require a commitment from families (as the preservice teachers would already be required to take the course) to build a comfortable, safe environment. However, members from the greater community could be invited to provide additional insights into specific topics as either spectators or as guest speakers. Holding regular sessions over time would reinforce the commitment to building collaborative partnerships.

Implications for Research

As Figure 1 demonstrates, school personnel would need to have knowledge of legal rights and responsibilities in special education as a foundation that would prepare them to then engage in collaborative preparations before, during, and after special education meetings and use communication strategies. For example, school personnel should understand meeting timelines, required members for each type of special education meeting, and required documentation for each step of the special education process. From there, school personnel could use preparation and communication strategies to collaborate with families. Further research into the impact of knowing and implementing these components would need to be conducted, since during the course of this study the participants did not all have opportunities to implement all strategies during a special education meeting prior to the semi-structured interviews. An additional, unexplored avenue would be a study into the families' perceptions of current levels of collaboration with school personnel. In addition, a study of a pre-service class with students paired with community families would also provide insight into each respective groups' opinions on the most beneficial aspects to collaboration between schools and families. Finally, studies are needed on the longitudinal impacts of efforts to increase collaboration. For example, a study into professional development training for school personnel and families within an organization and the implementation of strategies in the subsequent years could provide incredible insights into the long-term benefits of efforts to increase family-school collaboration.

Limitations

As expected, there are several limitations that may have impacted the validity and reliability of this study. Potential threats to validity were mitigated as much as possible but will be described below to contextualize findings. The limitations addressed in this section include the setting and sample size, the study timeframe, and the positionality of the researcher as an insider within the organization.

Setting and Sample Size

Action research is meant to be conducted within the researcher's own setting to address a local problem. The local context was seven school campuses spread across the state. Although all eligible participants (Clinical Specialists/Clinical Fellows, General Education Teachers/Interns, Special Education Teachers/Interns, and Site Administrators) were invited to participate (57 possible participants), only 10 participants completed the pre-post intervention survey and attended both trainings. Of the 10 participants, six volunteered to complete the semi-structured interviews. The sample size may be limited due to the lack of personal acquaintance with the researcher, personal time constraints, or a lack of interest in attending the training or the study topic. This means, however, that this smaller group of the potential sample population may have been more motivated than others to learn about this area, and more likely to benefit from the intervention than those who did not volunteer to complete study activities.

To bolster initial participation, every eligible participant attended the first training session as it served as a Beginning-of-the-Year (BOY) training for the organization. Of the participants present, 46 completed the optional pre-intervention survey. However,

only 10 participants attended the second training and completed the post-intervention survey. The extreme drop in participation could be attributed to the myriad other responsibilities of participants (meetings, planning, data analysis, other training). Participants could have also been disinterested in the study topic or in attending additional professional development sessions outside of their work day. The participants who did complete the study could have already been putting collaboration strategies in place, as demonstrated by the relatively high mean scores on the pre-intervention survey closed-ended questions for the 10 participants.

In order to recruit a participant pool as representative of the larger population of special education professionals in the organization as possible, the Site Administrators sent out participation flyers to their campuses to establish a personal connection. However, some eligible participants may not have received the flyer from their Site Administrator, or they may have declined to be involved or discontinued participation. In an attempt to ensure all potential participants received an equal opportunity to participate, reminder emails were sent to individual Site Administrators asking them to send out the flyer and confirm training dates.

In recognition of participants' limited time, the first training was offered to every eligible participant during their campuses' BOY training. The second training was offered at 11 different times, and the semi-structured interviews were scheduled during a time of each participant's choosing. Nonresponse bias may have occurred if participants chose not to participate. Communication with participants related to the study included having received information regarding the study provided by a familiar person, and being

invited to participate by the researcher who works in their same organization. Many participants became unengaged during the study, and declined to attend both training sessions, complete the post-intervention survey, or complete a semi-structured interview.

Engagement during the professional development training was increased through interactive activities, example videos, and time for reflection and questions. To increase interest in the study, participants received an incentive (\$25 Amazon gift card) for completing the pre-post-intervention surveys and attending the two trainings, and another incentive (\$15 Amazon gift card) for conducting the semi-structured interview. Future studies could expand the participant pool to pre-service teachers, campus family members, and community families who have children with special needs or an interest in learning more about collaboration during special education meetings.

Study Timeframe

The timeframe for this study spanned four months (July-October) allowing for only two professional development training sessions. The first session occurred in July and was included in the BOY training. The seven campuses within the organization were each paired with a partner district and followed their district's schedule, so school year start dates and fall breaks occurred at various times throughout the study. To lessen the amount of time between sessions so participants could still accurately recall the first training (while accommodating campus professional development, meetings, and starting schedules around the beginning of the school year), the second training sessions were held between August through mid-September. Finally, the semi-structured interviews were conducted in October to allow for sufficient time for reflection following the second

training, but not so far after that participants would experience difficulty recalling the content and perceptions around the first training. Future studies could consider embedding the second training within each campus' professional development times, or offering semi-structured interview times during each campus' planning times to increase participation. Preservice class sessions would be able to be offered at set times throughout the duration of the course.

Position as an Insider & Researcher

As described in Chapter 3, the researcher also maintained the position of a participant observer, delivered both training sessions, collected the pre-post intervention survey data, and conducted the semi-structured interviews. The participant observer role, as described by Clark & Creswell (2015), involves the researcher concurrently observing the environment and engaging in activities to achieve an "insider" status. As a colleague within the organization, this role allowed for a degree of trust and comfort due to an understanding of the participants' job duties and the population of students that the company serves. However, as a Site Administrator and the direct supervisor of some of the participants, the researcher may have solicited some responses that more reflected social desirability bias, with participants providing answers they may have believed would be most beneficial or expected, instead of honest. To mitigate these factors, the consent form clearly stated that participation was completely voluntary, had no bearing on their professional standing, and one could have declined to further participation at any time. The roles of researcher and participant were clearly defined on the consent form.

Survey responses were kept confidential with individual unique identifiers used, so the researcher did not know which responses belonged to each participant when analyzing the data. Bias may have arisen during the survey questions through nonresponse, or a lack of honesty in responses. To counteract these barriers, the survey questions were presented so that participants had to provide input or choose an answer for each question, and the responses remained confidential through the protection of a unique identifier. Although the semi-structured interview responses were not confidential, responses reported in the results reflect direct quotes to capture the participant's own words. Participants were also encouraged to give honest answers and informed that there were no "right or wrong" answers when posing questions. Since participants were invited to participate, they could also decline to do so for any reason.

The researcher, as a long-time special education teacher, coach, coordinator, and administrator, may have also demonstrated bias in their research. Throughout the study, the researcher remained aware of their position and always conducted themselves in an ethical manner. The outlined methods were extensively reviewed by the researcher's committee and received approval from both the researcher's organization and from Arizona State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to conducting any part of this study. The proposed intervention corresponded with the relevant literature regarding the study topic. Using a mixed-methods design increased the validity of this study through triangulation of both the quantitative and qualitative data to produce convincing and valid results (Ivankova, 2015). Mixed-methods studies draw on the advantages of both types of data (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019), allowing for

conclusions discovered from analysis from one type of data to be confirmed, complemented by, or further explained by the other type of data.

Personal Journey

Looking back throughout my career as an educator, I have always been interested in practical research. I entered my Master's program in Educational Policy due to my passion for understanding policies and using data to examine problems in education. After finishing, I knew I wanted to complete a doctoral degree to be able to continue to conduct research and analyze data on a larger scale, but I did not know which program to pursue. I was initially drawn to the Ph.D program in the same field as my Master's degree. However, the action research aspect where one examines a problem within their own context appealed most to me. I know that I am a practitioner at heart, and I always strive to find meaningful solutions when problems in my own practice are discovered. Specifically, I can recall numerous times when specialists came in to offer suggestions that wouldn't work within the confines of my classroom, or when new educational practices would be introduced but all but impossible to implement with fidelity with my students. In those moments, I remember feeling frustrated and thinking about when I attained such a position, I would take steps to ensure the strategies I offered would be applicable to their classroom. Now having been an inclusion coach, special education coordinator, and a site administrator, I hope the educators I have worked with would say I accomplished this goal. Still, having conducted this research study, I now recognize the confines and limitations that occur in action research.

During the first semester of the program, I recall that almost all of my cohort, me included, stated we entered into this program to be positioned to impact change on a larger or systemic level. One of the first papers we read was Rittel & Webber's (1973) paper discussing "wicked problems" that would be all but impossible to solve. Quite quickly I recognized the daunting task ahead with action research, where each study aims to impact one small aspect of the practitioner's context. In addition, the cyclical nature of action research assumes there will always be additional studies that could be conducted. However, as we read Weick's (1984) paper on "small wins," this gave me hope and a better mindset that even incremental steps in the right direction can create momentum that leads to greater outcomes.

During this research study I also needed to change my frame of reference from wanting to impact my setting on a large scale to aiming for small actions in the right direction. When I experienced difficulty recruiting participants, I felt deflated and disappointed in not making as large of an impact as I had initially hoped. I also unrealistically aspired to have all participants state that the training created a large impact on their future practices. However, my results did demonstrate increased skills and strategies to further collaborate with families during special education meetings. Overall, my experience conducting this study became the catalyst to my continued desire to conduct research in my local setting that creates a positive, lasting impact. Even if collaboration to create equitable partnerships during special education meetings remains a "wicked problem" that may never be completely "solved" everywhere, it is enough to know that I can create change within my own sphere of influence that benefits the school

personnel and families that I serve - and that I can encourage my fellow practitioners to do the same.

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APPENDIX A
FIRST CYCLE INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Interview Questions For Special Education Teacher/Specialist:

1. Please describe your role or roles that you have had when involved in the initial special education evaluation process.
2. For an initial special education evaluation, what information is given to families to inform them of the process?
3. What actions do schools take to support family engagement throughout the process?
4. In what ways have families participated during the process?
5. Can you tell me about a time when a family and the school were not in agreement regarding the evaluation process or the evaluation results?
 - a. How was this situation resolved?
6. What do you feel, if anything, could be done to improve the special education evaluation process?
7. Is there anything you wish parents knew before starting the process?
8. Do you have any questions for me?

Interview Questions For Parent With Child with Special Needs:

1. Please describe your overall experience during the initial special education evaluation.
2. What information was given to you to inform you of the process?
3. Was there an occasion when you felt unaware or uninformed of the steps of this process?
 - a. How was this situation resolved?
4. In what ways did you participate during the process?
5. Were you in agreement regarding the evaluation process or the evaluation results?
 - a. If yes, why? If not, what steps were taken to resolve the situation?
6. What do you feel, if anything, could have been done to improve the special education evaluation process?
7. Do you have any questions for me?

Interview Questions for Family Advocate:

1. Please describe what you perceive your role is in the initial special education evaluation process.
2. For an initial special education evaluation, what information have you found is usually given to families to inform them of the process?
3. What actions do schools take to support family engagement throughout the process?
4. What is the most common area or reason for disagreement that you have experienced during the initial special education evaluation process?
 - a. How have these disagreements been resolved?
5. What do you feel, if anything, could be done to improve collaboration during the special education evaluation process?
6. Is there anything you wish parents knew before starting the process?
7. Do you have any questions for me?

APPENDIX B
TRAINING OUTLINE

1st Training: Federal and Arizona State Special Education Laws and Regulations

| Time: | Activity: | Description: |
|----------|--|---|
| 30 min | *Complete Pre-Survey | Participants complete the pre-survey in Qualtrics prior to the training |
| Training | | |
| 5 min | Introductions | Introductions to each other |
| 5 min | Icebreaker | How do you keep current on changes in federal or AZ special education laws and regulations? |
| 10 min | Confidentiality | Review what is considered confidential |
| 10 min | FERPA laws – True/False | Review FERPA laws, how the school responds to information requests, etc., through a True/False game |
| 5 min | Child Find – AzEIP | Discuss the schools’ responsibilities regarding Child Find for children ages 2 yrs. 9 mos. – 5 years old |
| 5 min | Child Find – School Age | Discuss the schools’ responsibilities regarding Child Find for children ages Kindergarten – 12 th grade |
| 5 min | Break | |
| 10 min | Team Member/Timeline Jeopardy | Play a multiple-choice game to review required team members and timelines for evaluations and IEP meetings |
| 5 min | Overview of all Team Members/Timelines | Quick overview of all Team Members/Timelines to ensure these are understood |
| 10 min | Review Behavior Manifestation Procedures | Review procedures around Behavior Manifestations |
| 15 min | Connecting it All Together/Q & A | Discussion as to how this information can be used to further collaborate with families, especially during special education meetings. Answer questions from the participants. |

2nd Training: Collaborative Strategies During Special Education Meetings

| Time: | Activity: | Description: |
|--------|------------|---|
| 10 min | Icebreaker | Has there been a time when you collaborated well with a family? A time when you have not? |
| 15 min | Video | Video of non-collaborative IEP meeting Discussion – What did you see? |

| | | |
|--------------|----------------------------------|--|
| 15 min | Video | Video of collaborative IEP meeting Discussion – What did you see? |
| 5 min | Break | |
| 15 min | Collaborative Strategies | Present collaborative strategies to use before, during, and after special education meetings |
| 10 min | Discussion | What strategies will you try? |
| 15 min | Connecting it All Together/Q & A | Discuss how the information from both trainings can be used to further collaborate with families during special education meetings. Answer questions from the participants |
| End Training | | |
| 30 min | *Post-Survey | Participants complete the post-survey in Qualtrics following the training |

APPENDIX C
PRE-INTERVENTION SURVEY

Collaboration During Special Education Meetings Pre-Survey

Questionnaire: To protect your confidentiality, please create (and take note of) a unique identifier known only to you. To create this unique code, please record the first three letters of your mother's first name and the last four digits of your phone number. Thus, for example, if your mother's name was Sarah and your phone number was (602) 543-6789, your code would be Sar 6789. The unique identifier will allow us to match your post-intervention survey responses and your retrospective, pre-intervention responses when we analyze the data.

My unique identifier is: _____ (e.g., Sar 6789, see paragraph above)

To be able to contact you to send the gift card, and for future participation in the semi-structured interviews, please enter in an email address:

Directions: For the following section please indicate your level of agreement with statement regarding collaboration strategies used during special education meetings. Based on a six-point Likert Scale: *Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree.*

Items Regarding Your Current Knowledge of Special Education Laws

1. I understand what steps I can take to maintain student confidentiality.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Slightly Disagree Slightly Agree Agree Strongly Agree

2. I understand families' rights under FERPA.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Slightly Disagree Slightly Agree Agree Strongly Agree

3. I understand the school's responsibility regarding Child Find for children ages 2 yrs. 9 months to 5 years of age.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Slightly Disagree Slightly Agree Agree Strongly Agree

4. I understand the school's responsibility regarding Child Find for children in Kindergarten to 12th grade.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Slightly Disagree Slightly Agree Agree Strongly Agree

5. I currently know what responsibilities each team member has during evaluation meetings.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Slightly Disagree Slightly Agree Agree Strongly Agree

6. I currently know what responsibilities each team member has during IEP meetings.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Slightly Disagree Slightly Agree Agree Strongly Agree

7. I currently know all timelines of when documents are due within the special education process (ex. How many days to complete an evaluation, how many days to complete an IEP after the evaluation).

Strongly Disagree Disagree Slightly Disagree Slightly Agree Agree Strongly Agree

8. I currently know who must have a Behavior Manifestation meeting due to student conduct.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Slightly Disagree Slightly Agree Agree Strongly Agree

Directions: For the following section please indicate your level of agreement with each statement regarding your provision of each item for special education meetings within the last year. Based on a six-point Likert Scale: *Never, Very rarely, Rarely, Occasionally, Very Frequently, Always*

Items Regarding Collaboration Strategies During Special Education Meetings

Prior to Special Education Meetings:

1. How often do you contact families regarding any questions they might have prior to the meeting?

Never Very Rarely Rarely Occasionally Very Frequently
Always

2. How often do you solicit family input prior to the meeting?

Never Very Rarely Rarely Occasionally Very Frequently
Always

3. How often do you send families a draft of the evaluation report or the IEP prior to the meeting?

Never Very Rarely Rarely Occasionally Very Frequently
Always

4. How often do you provide resources to the family prior to the meeting?

Never Very Rarely Rarely Occasionally Very Frequently
Always

5. How often do you provide a meeting agenda prior to or during the meeting?

Never Very Rarely Rarely Occasionally Very Frequently
Always

During Special Education Meetings:

1. How often do you explain the roles of the team members prior to or during the meeting?

Never Very Rarely Rarely Occasionally Very Frequently
Always

2. How often do you explain meeting norms during the meeting?

Never Very Rarely Rarely Occasionally Very Frequently
Always

3. How often do you ask families questions during the meeting?

Never Very Rarely Rarely Occasionally Very Frequently
Always

4. How often do you ask families if they have questions during the meeting?

Never Very Rarely Rarely Occasionally Very Frequently
Always

5. How often do you solicit family input during the meeting?

Never Very Rarely Rarely Occasionally Very Frequently
Always

After Special Education Meetings:

1. How often do you correspond with families to see if they have questions after the meeting?

Never Very Rarely Rarely Occasionally Very Frequently
Always

2. How often do you send families resources after the meeting?

Never Very Rarely Rarely Occasionally Very Frequently
Always

Please answer the following questions:

1. What steps, if any, have you taken to build relationships with the families you work with within the last year?

2. What steps, if any, have you taken to help parents gain knowledge of the special education process within the last year? (ex. Initial special education process, or the re-evaluation process, etc.).

3. What do you hope to gain from these two professional development trainings?

Demographic Data

How many years have you worked in education? Choose an item.

How many years have you worked with the special education population? Choose an item.

What is your current position? Choose an item.

How many years of experience do you have at the same position title? (Either with Desert Choice or another school. Ex. How many years have you been a Special Education Teacher?) Choose an item.

What is your gender? Choose an item.

Thank you for your participation.

APPENDIX D
POST-INTERVENTION SURVEY

Collaboration During Special Education Meetings Post-Survey

Questionnaire: To protect your confidentiality, please enter in your unique identifier known only to you that you created during the pre-survey. To create this unique code, you recorded the first three letters of your mother's first name and the last four digits of your phone number. Thus, for example, if your mother's name was Sarah and your phone number was (602) 543-6789, your code would be Sar 6789. The unique identifier will allow us to match your post-intervention survey responses and your retrospective, pre-intervention responses when we analyze the data.

My unique identifier is: _____ (e.g., Sar 6789, see paragraph above)

Directions: For the following section please indicate your level of agreement with statement regarding collaboration strategies used during special education meetings. Based on a six-point Likert Scale: *Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree.*

Items Regarding Your Current Knowledge of Special Education Laws

9. I understand what steps I can take to maintain student confidentiality.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Slightly Disagree Slightly Agree Agree Strongly Agree

10. I understand families' rights under FERPA.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Slightly Disagree Slightly Agree Agree Strongly Agree

11. I understand the school's responsibility regarding Child Find for children ages 2 yrs 9 months to 5 years of age.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Slightly Disagree Slightly Agree Agree Strongly Agree

12. I understand the school's responsibility regarding Child Find for children in Kindergarten to 12th grade.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Slightly Disagree Slightly Agree Agree Strongly Agree

13. I currently know what responsibilities each team member has during evaluation meetings.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Slightly Disagree Slightly Agree Agree Strongly Agree

14. I currently know what responsibilities each team member has during IEP meetings.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Slightly Disagree Slightly Agree Agree Strongly Agree

15. I currently know all timelines of when documents are due within the special education process (ex. How many days to complete an evaluation, how many days to complete an IEP after the evaluation).

Strongly Disagree Disagree Slightly Disagree Slightly Agree Agree Strongly Agree

16. I currently know who must have a Behavior Manifestation meeting due to student conduct.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Slightly Disagree Slightly Agree Agree Strongly Agree

Directions: For the following section please indicate your level of agreement with each statement regarding your perceived provision of each item for special education meetings that you will implement within the upcoming year. Based on a six-point Likert Scale: *Never, Very rarely, Rarely, Occasionally, Very Frequently, Always*

Items Regarding Collaboration Strategies During Special Education Meetings

Prior to Special Education Meetings:

6. How often will you contact families regarding any questions they might have prior to the meeting?

Never Very Rarely Rarely Occasionally Very Frequently
Always

7. How often will you solicit family input prior to the meeting?

Never Very Rarely Rarely Occasionally Very Frequently
Always

8. How often will you send families a draft of the evaluation report or the IEP prior to the meeting?

Never Very Rarely Rarely Occasionally Very Frequently
Always

4. How often will you provide resources to the family prior to the meeting?

Never Very Rarely Rarely Occasionally Very Frequently
Always

5. How often will you provide a meeting agenda prior to or during the meeting?

Never Very Rarely Rarely Occasionally Very Frequently
Always

During Special Education Meetings:

1. How often will you explain the roles of the team members prior to or during the meeting?

Never Very Rarely Rarely Occasionally Very Frequently
Always

2. How often will you explain meeting norms during the meeting?

Never Very Rarely Rarely Occasionally Very Frequently
Always

3. How often will you ask families questions during the meeting?

Never Very Rarely Rarely Occasionally Very Frequently
Always

9. How often will you ask families if they have questions during the meeting?

Never Very Rarely Rarely Occasionally Very Frequently
Always

10. How often will you solicit family input during the meeting?

Never Very Rarely Rarely Occasionally Very Frequently
Always

After Special Education Meetings:

1. How often will you correspond with families to see if they have questions after the meeting?

Never Very Rarely Rarely Occasionally Very Frequently
Always

2. How often will you send families resources after the meeting?

Never Very Rarely Rarely Occasionally Very Frequently
Always

Please answer the following questions:

1. What steps, if any, will you take to build relationships with the families you work with within the upcoming year?

2. What steps, if any, will you take to help parents gain knowledge of the special education process within the upcoming year? (ex. Initial special education process, or the re-evaluation process, etc.).

3. What did you gain from these two professional development trainings?

4. What, if anything, are the most useful aspects that you learned from these two professional development trainings?

Thank you for your participation.

APPENDIX E
SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Protocol

Interviewer: Thank you for taking the time to interview me. Do I have your consent to audio record this interview? Thank you. The purpose of this interview is to gain further insight into your perspectives about the training intervention you participated in and will take about 30 minutes of your time.

1. What part of the training intervention did you find most helpful?
 - a. Why?
2. Have you used or implemented anything that you learned at the training intervention?
 - a. (If not) What do you anticipate you will put into practice that you learned?
3. How, if at all, have your views or knowledge changed regarding collaborating with families following the training?
4. What topics do you wish were covered or would like to have covered during future training?
5. What methods to increase collaboration with families will you put into practice in the future (from this training intervention or elsewhere)?
6. What strategies would you suggest to a person new to the field in your same position to increase collaboration between the school and families?
7. Is there anything you would like to share regarding collaboration between schools and families that we have not yet covered in this interview?
8. Do you have any questions for me?

APPENDIX F
DOCUMENTS SUBMITTED TO ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL
REVIEW BOARD

Recruitment Flyer

RESEARCH STUDY ON COLLABORATION DURING SPECIAL EDUCATION MEETINGS

Arizona State University

YOUR PARTICIPATION IS REQUESTED

We are requesting your input into the perceptions and ability of school staff to support collaboration during special education meetings (METs, IEPs). This research study conducted in the Ed.D Leadership and Innovation Program at Arizona State University is seeking school staff who are a part of the MET/IEP team (Special Education Teachers or Special Education Teachers-in-Residence, General Education Teachers or Teachers-in-Residence, Site Administrators, Clinical Specialists, or Clinical Fellows). Participants will be asked to participate by: 1) attending two (1 1/2) hour professional development sessions on strategies to increase family participation, 2) completing an online pre-survey and a post-survey directly before the 1st training and after the 2nd training. Participants may also be chosen to participate in a semi-structured interview approximately one month after the second training (30 minutes).

Participants who complete the online pre-and-post surveys and both professional development sessions will receive a \$25 Amazon gift card. Participants who also participate in a semi-structured interview will receive an additional \$15 Amazon gift card.

The benefits of participating in the research studies include:

- Helping us to find innovative ways to collaborate during MET/IEP meetings
- Sharing opportunities to learn more about collaboration strategies
- Sharing perceptions of ways to collaborate more closely with families in the future

Eligibility criteria:

- Be a part of the MET/IEP team (Special Education Teacher or Special Education Teachers-in-Residence, General Education Teacher or Teacher-in-Residence, Site Administrator, Clinical Specialist, or Clinical Fellow)
- Be currently employed with Desert Choice Schools
- Be at least 18 years of age

PARTICIPATION IS VOLUNTARY and ANONYMOUS

ASU IRB Number: STUDY00016102

To participate, please email Robyn Daliri at: rdaliri@asu.edu

Questions? Email: rdaliri@asu.edu or Dr. Jill Wendt at: Jill.Wendt@asu.edu

Email Script to Site Administrators

Dear (Desert Choice Site Administrator's Name),

I am a doctoral candidate in the Ed.D program for Leadership and Innovation at Arizona State University. I am conducting a research study for my dissertation that examines how professional development training affects school personnel's perceived ability to implement strategies to increase family engagement during MET and IEP meetings.

I am recruiting participants who are a part of the evaluation or IEP team to be a part of my study, which consists of two virtual trainings on strategies to increase family engagement. Participants will also be asked to complete a pre-survey directly prior to the 1st training, and a post-survey directly following the 2nd training. Several participants will be chosen to complete semi-structured interviews approximately one month after the 2nd training.

If you are willing to forward this flyer and consent form onto your Special Education Teachers or Special Education Teachers-in-Residence, Clinical Specialists, Clinical Fellows, and General Education Teachers or Teachers-in-Residence, I would be very appreciative. I would also be appreciative if you would consider participating in my study as well. Participants must be a part of the MET/IEP team.

Completing the survey will be strictly voluntary and choosing to participate or not has no bearing on any professional standing, salary, or career options.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please contact me at

rdaliri@asu.edu, or the Principal Investigator, Dr. Jill Wendt, at Jill.Wendt@asu.edu.

Thank you for your time,
Robyn Daliri

APPENDIX G
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

| | | |
|---|---|---------------------------------------|
| | Page: 1 of 7 | |
| | PREPARED BY: IRB Staff | APPROVED BY: Heather Clark |
| DOCUMENT TITLE: HRP 503 A Social Behavioral Protocol | DEPARTMENT: Office of Research Integrity and Assurance (ORIA) | EFFECTIVE DATE: [3/26/2020] |

INSTRUCTIONS

Complete each section of the application. Based on the nature of the research being proposed some sections may not apply. Those sections can be marked as N/A. Remember that the IRB is concerned with risks and benefits to the research participant and your responses should clearly reflect these issues. You (the PI) need to retain the most recent protocol document for future revisions. Questions can be addressed to research.integrity@asu.edu. **PIs are strongly encouraged to complete this application with words and terms used to describe the protocol is geared towards someone not specialized in the PI's area of expertise.**

IRB: 1. Protocol Title: Collaboration During Special Education Meetings

IRB: 2. Background and Objectives

- 2.1 List the specific aims or research questions in 300 words or less.
- 2.2 Refer to findings relevant to the risks and benefits to participants in the proposed research.
- 2.3 Identify any past studies by ID number that are related to this study. If the work was done elsewhere, indicate the location.

TIPS for streamlining the review time:

- ✓ Two paragraphs or less is recommended.
- ✓ Do not submit sections of funded grants or similar. The IRB will request additional information, if needed.

Response:

2.1 This study will be conducted to examine the effectiveness of an intervention (training) for school staff on their perceptions of collaboration and abilities to collaborate between families and the school during special education meetings. In it, the investigators will explore innovative ways to collaborate during special education meetings, and perceptions, experiences, and ways that school staff collaborate during special education meetings. This study builds on two previous studies, the first which interviewed three subjects who hold various positions within the special education evaluation process for their perceptions of the process. The second study surveyed special education school staff on their perceptions and knowledge of current collaboration between schools and parents during special education meetings.

2.2 This study is low risk and action research based and is intended to support the local context.

2.3 STUDY00012545, and STUDY00013320

IRB: 3. Data Use - What are the intended uses of the data generated from this project?

Examples include: Dissertation, thesis, undergraduate project, publication/journal article, conferences/presentations, results released to agency, organization, employer, or school. If other, then describe.

Response:

The data will be used in a dissertation, presentations, and publications. Results may be released to the institution and to participants.

IRB: 4. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

4.1 List criteria that define who will be included or excluded in your final sample.

Indicate if each of the following special (vulnerable/protected) populations is included or excluded:

- Minors (under 18)
- Adults who are unable to consent (impaired decision-making capacity)
- Prisoners
- Economically or educationally disadvantaged individuals

4.2 If not obvious, what is the rationale for the exclusion of special populations?

4.3 What procedures will be used to determine inclusion/exclusion of special populations?

TIPS for streamlining the review time.

- ✓ Research involving only data analyses should only describe variables included in the dataset that will be used.
- ✓ For any research which includes or may likely include children/minors or adults unable to consent, review content [\[here\]](#)
- ✓ For research targeting Native Americans or populations with a high Native American demographic, or on or near tribal lands, review content [\[here\]](#)
For research involving minors on campus, review content [\[here\]](#)

Response:

4.1 Participants will include teachers and staff (Clinical Specialists, Clinical Fellows, Site Administrators, Special Education Teachers, Special Education Teachers-in-Residence, and General Education Teachers or teachers-in-residence) who work with students with special needs. Minors, adults who cannot consent, undocumented individuals, non-English speakers and prisoners will not participate in the study. Native Americans may participate, but they are not being specifically recruited.

IRB: 5. Number of Participants

Indicate the total number of individuals you expect to recruit and enroll. For secondary data analyses, the response should reflect the number of cases in the dataset.

Response:

The total number of participants expected to be recruited and enrolled is 10 including Clinical Specialists, Clinical Fellows, Site Administrators, Special Education Teachers, Special Education Teachers-in-Residence, and General Education Teachers or teachers-in-residence. Participants will be identified by their role at one of the 8 Desert Choice School sites, which was determined through the email sent to me by the Executive Director providing permission for this study.

IRB: 6. Recruitment Methods

- 6.1 Identify who will be doing the recruitment and consenting of participants.
- 6.2 Identify when, where, and how potential participants will be identified, recruited, and consented.
- 6.3 Name materials that will be used (e.g., recruitment materials such as emails, flyers, advertisements, etc.) Please upload each recruitment material as a separate document, Name the document:
recruitment_methods_email/flyer/advertisement_dd-mm-yyyy
- 6.4 Describe the procedures relevant to using materials (e.g., consent form).

✓

Response:

- 6.1 The Co-PI conduct the recruitment process.
- 6.2 She will recruit participants online by using a flyer about the study and a Recruitment Consent letter, which is attached. Each of the Site Administrators will be sent an email asking them to forward on the study flyer and the recruitment consent letter. A copy of the email giving the Co-PI permission to conduct this study is included within the documents submitted to IRB.
- 6.3 The Recruitment/Consent Letters are attached.

IRB: 7. Study Procedures

- 7.1 List research procedure step by step (e.g., interventions, surveys, focus groups, observations, lab procedures, secondary data collection, accessing student or other records for research purposes, and follow-ups). Upload one attachment, dated, with all the materials relevant to this section. Name the document:
supporting documents dd-mm-yyyy
- 7.2 For each procedure listed, describe **who** will be conducting it, **where** it will be performed, **how long** is participation in each procedure, and **how/what data** will be collected in each procedure.
- 7.3 Report the total period and span of time for the procedures (if applicable the timeline for follow ups).
- 7.4 For secondary data analyses, identify if it is a public dataset (please include a weblink where the data will be accessed from, if applicable). If not, describe the contents of the dataset, how it will be accessed, and attach data use agreement(s) if relevant.

TIPS for streamlining the review time.

- ✓ Ensure that research materials and procedures are explicitly connected to the articulated aims or research questions (from section 2 above).
- ✓ In some cases, a table enumerating the name of the measures, corresponding citation (if any), number of items, sources of data, time/wave if a repeated measures design can help the IRB streamline the review time.

Response:

7.1 Pre-Intervention Survey. Participants will respond to a pre-intervention survey asking about prior knowledge of special education laws, timelines, and ways to collaborate with families during special education meetings. The pre-intervention survey is attached.

Training Intervention. Participants will attend two trainings: one on special education laws, information, and timelines, and one on ways to collaborate with families before, during, and after special education meetings.

Post-Intervention Survey. Participants will respond to a post-intervention survey asking about knowledge gained of special education laws, timelines, and ways to collaborate with families during special education meetings. The post-intervention survey is attached.

Semi-Structured Interviews. Participants will engage in semi-structured interviews aimed at gaining a deeper understanding of the data discovered from the pre-post-intervention surveys. Proposed or anticipated interview questions are attached. The final interview questions will be created after analyzing pre-post intervention survey data, and a modification for this study will be submitted once the interview protocol is ready.

7.2 Pre-Post Intervention Surveys. The Co-PI will administer the pre-post intervention surveys online via Qualtrics. It is anticipated that the survey will take about 30 minutes to complete. Each survey has 23 questions, and the pre-survey has an additional 5 questions to gather demographic information. Each demographic question has a drop-down menu that allows participants to choose an answer (number of years, position title, or gender, depending on the specific question).

Training Intervention. The Co-PI will administer the two trainings virtually via Teams. There may also be an asynchronous option to watch the trainings. Each training will last about 1 ½ hour.

Semi-Structured Interviews. The Co-PI will administer the semi-structured interviews virtually via Zoom. It is anticipated that each interview will take about 30 minutes to complete. The interviews will be recorded with audio only.

7.3 The research will be conducted between July 15, 2022 – January 31, 2023.

IRB: 8. Compensation

8.1 Report the amount and timing of any compensation or credit to participants.

8.2 Identify the source of the funds to compensate participants.

8.3 Justify that the compensation to participants to indicate it is reasonable and/or how the compensation amount was determined.

8.4 Describe the procedures for distributing the compensation or assigning the credit to participants.

TIPS for streamlining the review time.

- ✓ If partial compensation or credit will be given or if completion of all elements is required, explain the rationale or a plan to avoid coercion
- ✓ For extra or course credit guidance, see “Research on educational programs or in classrooms” on the following page:
<https://researchintegrity.asu.edu/human-subjects/special-considerations>.
- ✓ For compensation over \$100.00, review “Research Subject Compensation” at: <https://researchintegrity.asu.edu/human-subjects/special-considerations> for more information.

Response:

8.1 Each participant will receive a \$25 Amazon gift card after completing both the pre-post intervention surveys and attending both trainings. Each participant will receive a \$15 Amazon gift card after completing a semi-structured interview.

8.2 \$300 of funds will be provided through the 2022 Leadership and Innovation Research Impact Scholarship that I received. Additional funds will be provided through personal funds.

8.3 The \$25 compensation will be provided because participants are asked to volunteer 4 hours of their time to complete the pre-post-intervention surveys and attend the two trainings. The \$15 compensation will be provided because participants are asked to volunteer an additional 30 minutes of their time to complete the semi-structured interview.

8.4 Once participation is verified, the Amazon gift card(s) will be sent electronically to the email address that the participant provided.

IRB: 9. Risk to Participants

List the reasonably foreseeable risks, discomforts, or inconveniences related to participation in the research.

TIPS for streamlining the review time.

- ✓ Consider the broad definition of “minimal risk” as the probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in the research that are not greater in and of themselves than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests.
- ✓ Consider physical, psychological, social, legal, and economic risks.
- ✓ If there are risks, clearly describe the plan for mitigating the identified risks.

Response:

There are no risks for participating in the research.

IRB: 10. Potential Direct Benefits to Participants

List the potential direct benefits to research participants. If there are risks noted in 9 (above), articulated benefits should outweigh such risks. These benefits are not to society or others not considered participants in the proposed research. Indicate if there is no direct benefit. A direct benefit comes as a direct result of the subject's participation in the research. An indirect benefit may be incidental to the subject's participation. Do not include compensation as a benefit.

Response:

Benefits include learning about special education laws and timelines, and collaboration strategies that can be used during special education meetings. Participants will also provide their knowledge and experience of ways to collaborate more closely with families in the future. In turn, this knowledge and strategies learned can be used to promote further collaboration between schools and families during future special education meetings. Additionally, participants who engage in the semi-structured interviews will have opportunities to reflect on their use of this knowledge and strategies in their own professional practice.

IRB: 11. Privacy and Confidentiality

Indicate the steps that will be taken to protect the participant's privacy.

- 11.1 Identify who will have **access to the data**.
- 11.2 Identify where, how, and how long data will be **stored** (e.g. ASU secure server, ASU cloud storage, filing cabinets).
- 11.3 Describe the procedures for **sharing, managing and destroying data**.
- 11.4 Describe any special measures to **protect** any extremely sensitive data (e.g. password protection, encryption, certificates of confidentiality, separation of identifiers and data, secured storage, etc.).
- 11.5 Describe how any **audio or video recordings** will be managed, secured, and/or de-identified.
- 11.6 Describe how will any signed consent, assent, and/or parental permission forms be secured and how long they will be maintained. These forms should separate from the rest of the study data.
- 11.7 Describe how any data will be **de-identified**, linked or tracked (e.g. master-list, contact list, reproducible participant ID, randomized ID, etc.). Outline the specific procedures and processes that will be followed.
- 11.8 Describe any and all identifying or contact information that will be collected for any reason during the course of the study and how it will be secured or protected. This includes contact information collected for follow-up, compensation, linking data, or recruitment.
- 11.9 For studies accessing existing data sets, clearly describe whether or not the data requires a Data Use Agreement or any other contracts/agreements to access it for research purposes.
- 11.10 For any data that may be covered under FERPA (student grades, etc.) additional information and requirements is available at <https://researchintegrity.asu.edu/human-subjects/special-considerations>.

Response:

11.1 Only the PI and the Co-PI will have access to the data.

11.2 Data will be stored on a password protected computer for a period of four years

11.3 Data will be deleted or destroyed from the computer once the study is complete.

11.4 All data will be password protected, and each participant will have a unique identifier for comparison of pre-post intervention survey data. The list of participants' identifiers will be kept separately from the data.

11.5 All audio recordings will be deleted or destroyed from the computer or cloud storage once the study is complete.

11.6 Completion of the pre-post intervention surveys will indicate consent. Verbal consent will be obtained at the beginning of each semi-structured interview.

11.7 The pre-post intervention surveys will be completed confidentially through the online survey site Qualtrics. Each participant will have a unique identifier, and the list of participants' unique identifiers will be kept separately from the data under password protection.

11.8 Participants' contact information will be kept on a separate list and will be deleted or destroyed once the study is complete. Contact information will be stored securely for recruitment purposes only.

11.9 n/a

11.10 n/a

IRB: 12. Consent

Describe the procedures that will be used to obtain consent or assent (and/or parental permission).

12.1 Who will be responsible for consenting participants?

12.2 Where will the consent process take place?

12.3 How will the consent be obtained (e.g., verbal, digital signature)?

TIPS for streamlining the review time.

- ✓ If participants who do not speak English will be enrolled, describe the process to ensure that the oral and/or written information provided to those participants will be in their preferred language. Indicate the language that will be used by those obtaining consent. For translation requirements, see Translating documents and materials under <https://researchintegrity.asu.edu/human-subjects/protocol-submission>
- ✓ Translated consent forms should be submitted after the English is version of all relevant materials are approved. Alternatively, submit translation certification letter.
- ✓ **If a waiver for the informed consent process is requested, justify the waiver in terms of each of the following: (a) The research involves no more than minimal risk to the subjects; (b) The waiver or alteration will not adversely affect the rights and welfare of the subjects; (c) The research could not practicably be carried out without the waiver or alteration; and (d) Whenever appropriate, the subjects will be provided with additional pertinent information after participation.** Studies involving confidential, one time, or anonymous data need not justify a waiver. A verbal consent or implied consent after reading a cover letter is sufficient.
- ✓ ASU consent templates are [here](#).
- ✓ Consents and related materials need to be congruent with the content of the application.

Response:

12.1 The Co-PI will conduct the consent process.

12.2 Completion of the pre-post intervention surveys on the Qualtrics platform will indicate consent. Verbal consent will be obtained right before each virtual semi-structured interview.

12.3 Consent will be obtained through completion of the pre-post intervention surveys in the Qualtrics platform. Verbal consent will be obtained right before each virtual semi-structured interview.

IRB: 13. Site(s) or locations where research will be conducted.

List the sites or locations where interactions with participants will occur-

- Identify where research procedures will be performed.
- For research conducted outside of the ASU describe:
 - Site-specific regulations or customs affecting the research.
 - Local scientific and ethical review structures in place.
- For research conducted outside of the United States/United States Territories describe:
 - Safeguards to ensure participants are protected.
- For information on international research, review the content [\[here\]](#).

For research conducted with secondary data (archived data):

- List what data will be collected and from where.
- Describe whether or not the data requires a Data Use Agreement or any other contracts/agreements to access it for research purposes.
- For any data that may be covered under FERPA (student grades, etc.) additional information and requirements is available [\[here\]](#).
- For any data that may be covered under FERPA (student grades, homework assignments, student ID numbers etc.), additional information and requirements is available [\[here\]](#).

Response:

The research will be performed at various schools throughout Arizona. The pre-post intervention surveys will be performed through the online Qualtrics platform. The intervention trainings will be conducted virtually through Teams, with a potential asynchronous option through video-recordings. The semi-structured interviews will be conducted virtually through Zoom.

IRB: 14. Human Subjects Certification from Training.

Provide the names of the members of the research team.

ASU affiliated individuals do not need attach Certificates. Non-ASU investigators and research team members anticipated to manage data and/or interact with participants, need to provide the most recent CITI training for human participants available at www.citiprogram.org. Certificates are valid for 4 years.

TIPS for streamlining the review time.

- ✓ If any of the study team members have not completed training through ASU's CITI training (i.e. they completed training at another university), copies of their completion reports will need to be uploaded when you submit.
- ✓ For any team members who are affiliated with another institution, please see "Collaborating with other institutions" [\[here\]](#)

- ✓ The IRB will verify that team members have completed IRB training. Details on how to complete IRB CITI training through ASU are [here](#)

Response:

Robyn Daliri, CITI Training completed on 06/07/2020, & on 12/20/2020
Jill Wendt, PI, CITI Training Certificate on file; training completed

General Tips:

- Have all members of the research team complete IRB training before submitting.
- Ensure that all your instruments, recruitment materials, study instruments, and consent forms are submitted via ERA when you submit your protocol document. Templates are [here](#)
- Submit a complete protocol. Don't ask questions in the protocol – submit with your best option and, if not appropriate, revisions will be requested.
- If your study has undeveloped phases, clearly indicate in the protocol document that the details and materials for those phases will be submitted via a modification when ready.
- Review all materials for consistency. Ensure that the procedures, lengths of participation, dates, etc., are consistent across all the materials you submit for review.
- Only ASU faculty, full time staff may serve as the PI. Students may prepare the submission by listing the faculty member as the PI. The submit button will only be visible to the PI.
- Information on how and what to submit with your study in ERA is [here](#). Note that if you are a student, you will need to have your Principal Investigator submit.
- For details on how to submit this document as part of a study for review and approval by the ASU IRB, visit <https://researchintegrity.asu.edu/human-subjects/protocol-submission>.

APPENDIX H
COVER LETTER

Dear Colleague:

My name is Robyn Daliri and I am a doctoral candidate in the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College (MLFTC) at Arizona State University (ASU). I am working under the direction of my committee chairs, Dr. Jill Wendt and Dr. Erin Rotheram-Fuller, who are both faculty members in MLFTC. We are conducting a research study on collaboration between schools and families during special education meetings.

FORM PURPOSE

The purpose of this form is to provide you (as a prospective study participant) with information to inform your decision as to whether or not to participate in this study.

RESEARCHERS

You are invited to participate by Robyn Daliri, Site Administrator in the West Valley Corridor at Desert Choice Schools. Dr. Jill Wendt, a faculty member at Arizona State University, is the Principal Investigator for this study: jill.wendt@asu.edu.

STUDY PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to explore how special education personnel currently collaborate with families during special education meetings and explore if professional development training in parent engagement strategies increases special education personnel's perceived ability to use these strategies during special education meetings.

RESEARCH STUDY DESCRIPTION

If you decide to participate, you will join a research study where you will be asked to participate in 2 (1 1/2 hour) virtual professional development sessions focused on gaining strategies to increase collaboration during special education meetings and an overview of Arizona special education laws. The trainings will include a pre-survey (30 minutes) at the beginning of the first session and a post-survey (30 minutes) at the end of the second session to assess participants' current knowledge of strategies to increase family participation during special education meetings.

Finally, you may be chosen to participate in a virtual semi-structured interview (30 minutes) to explore further perceptions, attitudes, experiences, and beliefs regarding perceived effectiveness of the strategies learned during the professional development sessions.

RISKS

While there are no known risks from taking part in this study, as with any research, there is some possibility that you may be subject to risks that have not yet been identified.

BENEFITS

A possible benefit is that you will gain an opportunity to reflect upon the strategies and practices that you use related to collaboration during special education meetings. You will also gain an opportunity to participate in professional development to learn additional strategies to increase parent participation. You will also have the opportunity to interact with your colleagues who also participate in special education meetings.

CONFIDENTIALITY

All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential. While the results of this research study may be used in reports, presentations, and publications, you will not be identified by the researchers. You will be asked to create a unique identifier when completing to survey to

maintain confidentiality. In addition, to maintain confidentiality of your records, a document containing the list of participant names and corresponding identifying numbers, along with all information collected, will be stored in Robyn Daliri's Arizona State University cloud storage, and password protected. No private information will be disclosed at any time. You will also be asked to provide an email address as a way to send the gift card(s) and contact you for consideration of completing the semi-structured interview.

WITHDRAWAL PRIVILEGE

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty. Your participation in the Choosing not to participate in the study does not affect your standing at Desert Choice Schools. You must be 18 or older to participate in the study.

COSTS AND PAYMENTS

Participants will receive a \$25 dollar gift Amazon gift card after completing the two professional development trainings and the pre-and-post intervention surveys. Participants who are chosen to complete a semi-structured interview will receive an additional \$15 Amazon gift card following the interview.

VOLUNTARY CONSENT

Participation in this research study is strictly voluntary. Any questions regarding the research study or your study participation before or following providing your consent will be answered by Robyn Daliri. She can be reached at: rdaliri@asu.edu.

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact Dr. Jill Wendt at Jill.Wendt@asu.edu or the Chair of Human Subjects Institutional Review Board through the ASU Office of Research Integrity and Assurance at (480) 965-6788.

This form explains the nature, demands, benefits, and any risk of the research study. By signing this form you agree knowingly to assume any risks involved. Your participation is completely voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefit. In signing this consent form, you are not waiving any legal claims, rights, or remedies. A copy of this consent form will be given to you.

Data collected as a part of this current study will not be shared with others (e.g. investigators or industry partners) for future research purposes or other uses.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Robyn Daliri, M.A. Ed.
Doctoral Candidate
Ed.D Leadership and Innovation Program
Mary Lou Fulton School of Education
Arizona State University

APPENDIX I
LIST OF RECRUITMENT ATTEMPTS

| Date | Person Contacted | Description |
|---|---|--|
| Scheduling 1st Training | | |
| 7/13/22 | All Site Administrators (SA) | Initial email to schedule 1st training |
| 7/13/22 | SA Buckeye | Reached out to schedule 1 st training |
| 7/14/22 | SA Casa Grande | Confirmed training date |
| 7/18/22 | SA Dysart | Confirmed training date |
| | | |
| Scheduling 2nd Training | | |
| 8/16/22 | All Site Administrators (SA) | Email to schedule campus-based 2 nd trainings |
| 8/16/22 | SA Buckeye | Confirmed training date |
| 8/21/22 | All 1 st training participants | Invitation for 2 nd training |
| 8/21/22 | All 1 st training participants | Email with 5 dates to attend the 2 nd training |
| 8/29/22 | All 1 st training participants | 2 nd training held (open to all participants) |
| 8/31/22 | All 1 st training participants | 2 nd training held (open to all participants) |
| 9/3/22 | All 1 st training participants | 2 nd training held (open to all participants) |
| 9/7/22 | All 1 st training participants | 2 ND training held (open to all participants) |
| 9/8/22 | All 1 st training participants | 2 nd training held (open to all participants) |
| 9/8/22 | All Site Administrators | Email to schedule 2 nd training |
| 9/10/22 | All 1st training participants who did not yet attend a training | Email with 6 additional training dates |
| 9/10/22 | Potential participant | Confirmed training date |
| 9/12/22 | Potential participant | Confirmed training date |
| 9/12/22 | SA Buckeye | Confirmed training date |
| 9/13/22 | Potential participant | Confirmed training date |
| | | |
| Scheduling Interviews | | |
| 10/16/22 | All participants (who completed the pre& post intervention surveys) | Initial email to schedule interviews using the “when is good” software |
| 10/23/22 | All participants (who completed the pre& post intervention surveys) | Final email to schedule interviews using the “when is good” software |
| 10/23/22 | Potential interview participant | Email to discuss interview date |
| 10/24/22 | Potential interview participant | Email to discuss interview date |
| 10/24/22 | Potential interview participant | Email to confirm interview date |
| 10/25/22 | Potential interview participant | Email to discuss interview date |

| | | |
|----------|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 10/25/22 | Potential interview participant | Email to confirm interview date |
| 10/25/22 | Potential interview participant | Email to confirm interview date |
| 10/30/22 | Potential interview participant | Email to confirm interview date |
| 10/31/22 | Potential interview participant | Email to discuss interview date |
| 11/1/22 | Potential interview participant | Email to confirm interview date |
| 11/2/22 | Potential interview participant | Email to confirm interview date |
| 11/2/22 | Potential interview participant | Email to discuss interview date |
| 11/2/22 | Potential interview participant | Email to confirm interview date |
| 11/3/22 | Potential interview participant | Email to reschedule interview date |
| 11/4/22 | Potential interview participant | Email to discuss interview date |
| 11/7/22 | Potential interview participant | Email to reschedule interview date |
| 11/8/22 | Potential interview participant | Email to discuss interview date |
| 11/9/22 | Potential interview participant | Email to reschedule interview date |
| 11/10/22 | Potential interview participant | Email to confirm interview date |
| 11/13/22 | Potential interview participant | Email to discuss interview date |
| 11/14/22 | Potential interview participant | Email to confirm interview date |
| 11/15/22 | Potential interview participant | Email to confirm interview date |

| Date | Intervention/Interviews | Audience |
|-------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 07/18/22 | Sped Training | Casa Grande |
| 07/22/22 | Sped Training | West Valley, JO Combs, Queen Creek |
| 07/29/22 | Sped Training | Dysart, Buckeye, Yuma, Tempe |
| | | |
| 08/29/22 | Collaboration Training | Tempe |
| 08/31/22 | Collaboration Training | West Valley |
| 09/07/22 | Collaboration Training | Buckeye |
| 09/14/22 | Collaboration Training | JO Combs |
| 09/19/22 | Collaboration Training | West Valley |
| 09/26/22 | Collaboration Training | Buckeye |
| | | |
| 10/18/22 | Interview | Individual participant |
| 10/18/22 | Interview | Individual participant |
| 10/24/22 | Interview | Individual participant |
| 10/24/22 | Interview | Individual participant |
| 11/3/22 | Interview | Individual participant |
| 11/16/22 | Interview | Individual participant |