

Parent Involvement in 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Special Education

Christine Batt

Genoa Elementary

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### Abstract

The focus of this study was to investigate how parent involvement impacts student motivation in third grade special education. The study was conducted at Allen Elementary in Genoa, Ohio during the spring of 2011. After reviewing recent literature, it acknowledges the importance of parent participation on student academic education, the effects of parental involvement, teacher/parent communication, and how it motivates a special education third grader. The data collection instruments consisted of parent and teacher surveys, journals, questionnaires, and pre/post tests. The data collected indicates that students felt more motivated when their parents took an active role in their child's education. Also, parents are willing to participate in school activities if they feel welcomed and valued from the classroom teacher.

## Introduction

I started teaching special education four years ago. During my short time teaching I have tried to bridge the divide of home life and school life for my students. In my study to create an action plan, I have researched many websites that support my ideas on parent involvement in the schools. Also, I have gained information by using parent and teacher surveys, journals, questionnaires, and pre/post tests. After reviewing my data, I have come up with an action plan to help parents and teachers connect the student's home lives and school lives. This includes ideas for parents to actively participate in their child's schooling, help for teachers to become better communicators with parents, and how to make parents feel comfortable and valuable in meetings.

Currently, I teach in a district call Genoa Area Local Schools. The district has about two thousand students from kindergarten through 12th grade. I work with special needs students at Allen Elementary which houses third through fifth grade students in the district. Unlike larger districts, ours has many city schools. Since there are many cities and townships that contribute to our school, we get a varying amount of socioeconomic status. Unfortunately, many of my students come from the lower socioeconomic range.

This year I teach third grade reading and fourth grade reading and math for students with special needs. When teaching special education I have a lot of meetings that involve parents. It is disheartening to have parents not attend meetings. I thought of how I can improve my Individualize Education Plan meetings and help parents be more involved in the school system. I thought how this would improve my students academics and motivation in the classroom. Parent

participation is something, “I feel passionate about, involve teaching and learning, and something I would like to change” (Mills 2011 pg. 41). I try my best to make contact with my student's parents by writing notes, making phone calls, and being flexible with meetings I set up. Many of them are unresponsive. If the note requested homework help, I will notice their homework is incomplete or not corrected. Often, the phone calls go unreturned. In the past, I have tried writing notes, making positive phone calls, and having the parents initial their student's homework. The communication between school and home would help the students become more successful. Hopefully, it will create more motivated learners if they knew that their parent's would be taking a part in their education.

After reviewing my action research plan, I have biases to be aware of while conducting my research. First, parents are willing and have the time to come in and help out in the school or come to meetings. As stated above, many of my student's parents struggle financially and may not have the time or are not able to come in and participate in the school.

Another bias is that parents do not understand what the individualize education plan entails. Parents may not know how necessary and valuable their input is during the meeting. Some parents may not provide input because the meetings can be intimidating to them. There are many staff members at the meeting talking about what they think is best for the student. Often, we forget to ask the parent their thoughts on the student's education.

Also, I assume students will be more motivated and want to improve their academics when their parents have constant contact and communication with the school. Parents may not want to come into the school because they are not comfortable helping in the classroom. If they were comfortable and felt like a valuable assets to the school they would be more willing to

communicate and assist in their child's education. Lastly, I am making an assumption about parents not being educated on the Individualize Education Plan (IEP).

### Area-of-focus

The purpose of this study is to describe the effects of parent participation on academic performance and motivation to be active learners of students enrolled in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade special education.

### Research Questions

1. How does parent participation affect a student's performance in the classroom?.
2. In what ways does parent education about special education improve the Individualized Education Plan and Evaluation Team Report writing process?
3. How does parent volunteering and contact with the school effect their student's academic growth?

### Definition of Variables

“A variable is a characteristic of your study that is subject to change” (Mills, 2011 pg. 61). One variable that will change for my research project is involving the parents more in their child's IEP meeting. I will send home a preview of the suggested goals for the upcoming year. With the potential goals, I will also send home a checklist for the parents to fill out. On this form, it will ask what goal they would like to see on the Individualized Education Plan, their child's strengths and weaknesses, and the interests of the child.

Another variable that will change is the language I use while talking to the parents. I am going to use more parent friendly language to help them understand what is being said in the

meeting. Lastly, I will invite the parents to come into the school to help out, observe, or read a book to the class. If they can not come in, I will ask parents to provide a treat, supplies, or even a note to the class so each parent can participate in the classroom. An idea that a colleague uses is mystery reader. All week long the teacher gives clues about who the mystery reader will be. On Friday, the mystery reader comes into the classroom and reads a book to the whole class. It does not take long, but the children really enjoy it. I think this is a great way to get parents involved in the school.

### Review of Literature

Ellis, A. & Hartlep, N. (2010). *Are Household Income, Gender, and Race Important in Shaping Parental Involvement in Children's Education?* Retrived from [www.eric.ed.gov](http://www.eric.ed.gov)

*Are household income, gender, and race important in shaping parental involvement in children's education?*

I have chosen this article because it supports my initial ideas about my project. It explains why parents from low economic statuses are not as involved in their children's schooling. Also, it talks about how families are different from how they used to be. It states the number of single parent homes and "how parents are expected to do more with less" (pg. 4). In the article it states "increased parental involvement will promote the social, emotional, and academic growth of a child" (pg. 6). It is supporting the thoughts that I have on parental involvement in the school system. The article has been written for the Annual Northeastern Education Research

Association and is suitable for my project. The article talks about special education in relation to the No Child Left Behind Act.

Hill, N.E & Tyson, D.F (2009). Parental Involvement in Middle School:

A Meta-Analytic Assessment of the Strategies That Promote Achievement.

*Developmental Psychology*, Vol. 45, No. 3, 740–763. DOI: 10.1037/a0015362

Currently, I teach students in 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> grade. In most districts, 5<sup>th</sup> grade is considered middle school. This article is reliable and relevant to the topic I am researching. It explains how important it is for parents to be involved in the schools especially in middle school. It is current and fits in with what I am going to be researching (Video, Strategies in Action: Conducting a Literature Review). One idea is, “parental involvement is positively associated with achievement” (pg. 1). I believe this article will be very helpful to me when I start writing my paper.

Henderson, A.T & Mapp, K.L (2002). *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School,*

*Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement*. Retrieved from:

<http://www.nationalpirc.org/resources/research-resources.html>

In the first paragraph of reading this source I learned it was going to support my initial thoughts about parental involvement and student success. It states, “the evidence is consistent, positive, and convincing: families have a major influence on their children’s achievement in school and through life” (pg.7). It “has passed a very important initial screening-it is related to my research topic” (Mills 2011, pg. 53). The resource provides strategies to teachers on how to

involve parents in the classroom. It focuses on low income families. I think this source would be great to use with my students and their families.

Ferlazzo, L. (2007). Parent Engagement or Parent Involvement? Retrieved from:

Parentinvolvementmatters.org

This article comes from a website designed to start parent involvement committees in schools. They provide information and resources to parents and educators about why it is so important for parents to be involved in the school system. The article is written by a teacher and shows the view point of an educator. He is the author of numerous books about education and parent involvement. This is a great source to help me find solutions to my problem. It gives parents and teachers options and advice on how to get parents involved.

Long, C. *Parents in the Picture: Building Partnerships that Last Beyond 'Back to School Night'*.

Retrieved from [www.nea.org](http://www.nea.org)

I found this article by using Google. After searching through numerous websites and using the key questions to make sure the source is credible, I came across the National Education Association website. It has great resources that cover many topics. This article is directed towards parents and gives information on why it is beneficial to be a part of your child's education. Also, the article talks to teachers about how to get parents comfortable enough to participate in the classroom. It touches on different ethnicities and how to involve everyone in



the learning process. I like how it shares how to meet parents half-way and how to help them at home. It makes a point to say parental involvement is a two way street.

Reiman, John W. "Parent's Experiences with the IEP Process: Considerations for Improving Practice" CADRE (2010) ERIC. 19 February 2011.

<http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED512611.pdf>

This piece of literature will be helpful to my project area. The article has interviewed parents about the IEP process and how to be more informative. The information gained from reading this article has given me a look at the IEP process "through someone else's lens" (Mills, 2011 pg. 45). Many of the parents interviewed had negative experiences at IEP meetings. In the research they asked parents directly what they can do to improve the meetings. The parents gave some great ideas on how to make the meetings more meaningful and beneficial. This article will work well with for my project. It helps me answer one of my research questions about the IEP process and parents being more involved.

Fried, Robert L. *The Passionate Learner: How Teachers and Parents Can Help Reclaim the Joy of Discovery*. Boston Beacon Press (2002). NetLibrary

<http://www.netlibrary.com.library.marygrove.edu:2048/Reader/>

This online book found in the Marygrove library gives information about teachers and parents helping students to become motivated. It takes a look back at the younger grades to see where teachers and parents might lose the joy and motivation for school. The book has researched the motivation or lack of motivation from all socioeconomic groups. "For so many children, urban, suburban, rural, the light of learning that burns so brightly in them as little kids

begins to dim once they start school, replaced by a deep ambivalence about learning” (pg. 5). It gives an insight into students and how they feel about their own learning. Throughout the rest of the book, we learn how parents and teachers can bring back the joy of learning. I have learned some promising practices to share with parents at meetings and in my action research plan.

Siegel, Lawrence M. *The Complete IEP Guide: How to Advocate for Your Special Ed Child*.

Berkeley, CA Nolo (1999). NetLibrary

<http://www.netlibrary.com.library.marygrove.edu:2048/Reader/>

I decided to review this piece of literature because it would be a good resource to help parents understand the IEP process and. It will help me see what parents need to know about their child being in special education. It walks parents through the process and helps them be an advocate for their child. This online book gives me a look through the parent’s lens. Not only did I learn through this, but it would be beneficial to tell parents about this book.

Phillips, Ronnie “Why is Parental Involvement Important in Children’s Education?” 16

February 2009. Education Articles. 18 February 2011

<http://www.edarticle.com/parent-involvement/why-is-parental-involvement->

[important-in-childrens-education.html](http://www.edarticle.com/parent-involvement/why-is-parental-involvement-important-in-childrens-education.html)

It is obvious from the title this article is about parental involvement. The information from this literature compliments my views on this subject. After reading the first few sentences, I realized this is an informative article. It states “numerous research has been done to conclude that parents who are involved with their children's education are building the foundations for a better educated child. These children will be better adjusted to school which can lead to more

education. In addition, parents are sending a message to their children that education is important” (pg. 1). Using other educators’ data will help me stay valid and make my material reliable. As Dorothy Korzým states, “You need to make sure that your Action Research Project has validity, that it’s valid, that it’s accurate, that it’s real”(Expert Commentary: How can I make sure my research is valid?).

Simmons, Lisa “10 Things You Should do Before Your Child’s IEP” 9 December 2006.

Education Articles. 19 February 2011. <http://www.edarticle.com/special-education/10-things-you-should-do-before-your-childs-iep-meeting.html>

This article is great to see through someone else’s lens. It teaches parents what to do before the IEP meeting. I liked this article because it kept it parent friendly and there was not a lot of education jargon that parent’s would have to decipher. It teaches parents how to actively participate in their child’s IEP and know what is going on. This will be helpful when answering my research question about how to get parents more involved in special education meetings.

#### Intervention or Innovation

I will incorporate parent participation in meetings and in the classroom to help students be more successful in their academics. I plan on increasing my communication with parents by making more phone calls home and sending positive notes to them about their student. The parents will be asked to contribute to the IEP by adding their own goal to the profile page. When creating the goals, I will ask the student’s input and share it with the parents. This way everyone can be more involved and, hopefully, it will create dialogue between the parent and the student about academics.

## Research Process

### Data Collection Matrix

Research Questions	Data Source 1	Data Source 2	Data Source 3
parent participation effect student motivation?	Student Journals	Student Survey	Teacher checklist
effect of parents volunteering on their children's studies?	Pre test	Post test	Teacher Journal
parent education improve IEP and ETR?	Parent Questionnaire	Parent survey	Colleague survey

In my data collection (appendix A), I have used qualitative and quantitative data. Qualitative research uses "descriptive approaches that help us understand the way things are." Quantitative research "collects numerical data to describe, explain, predict, or control phenomena of interest." (Mills, 2011, pg. 4). It is important to have a balance between qualitative and quantitative data because it will help me build strength in my research findings.

### **How does parent participation effect student motivation?**

I will use a student journal to collect data to show how parent participation effects my students motivation.. "Students' journal can provide teachers with a valuable window into the

students' world" (Mills, 2011 pg. 86). Throughout the learning process, I will have the students write down how they feel about the work, concept, and lessons. This will give me some insight into how my students are motivated about the current work. I would also analyze the data to see how student reflections will help them academically. It could provide information on how confident the students feel about the material. The journal entries could go with the pre and post test by telling me how motivated they are when learning the concept.

Another data collection tool I will use a student survey to get more information on how motivated the students are. The survey will ask them questions about what helps them be motivated. This data collection tool will give me additional insight to how much their parents are involved in the school from the student's point of view. It will ask them questions on how helpful their parents and teachers are when they are struggling in school. Analyzing this data collection tool will give me information about the student's home lives and how to improve their learning.

The teachers I work with will get a checklist of parent involvement. The checklist will have ways parents can be involved in their students schooling. If the parent is involved in the school then the teacher can check it. For example: signing the student planner, initialing the homework, making communication contacts, coming to meetings and conferences. This will be a great tool to see how involved parents currently are and where we can improve in the future.

### **What is the effect of parents volunteering on their children's studies?**

My first data collect tool is the pretest. I will give my student's a pretest based on the concept we have covered. This will give me information on what the students know currently and what I need to work on. After they take the pretest, I will call the parents and explain to

them what I would like them to work on at home. Then I will give the students to post test. I will be able to see how effective parent involvement was on the student's scores. Hopefully, this will give me some insight on whether their parents being involved in the school will help the student succeed. I decided to use this quantitative data tool to coincide with my parent questionnaire. Christy Munafo says qualitative tools were helpful but quantitative data is the most useful (Strategies in Action: Data Collection Tools).

Not only will students keep journals, but I will keep one as well. In my journal I will take anecdotal notes about the student's success and motivation. I am hoping by taking these notes I will notice a pattern in the student's home lives and the affect it can have at school. Also, I will be looking for any parent participation and how the student responded to the increased participation. A list will be made in my journal to keep track of how the parent has participated. Each time a parent is involved in something at school such as (a play, musical, volunteering or attending meetings, etc.) it will be recorded so I compare it to the student journal used previously.

### **How can parent education improve IEPs and ETRs?**

IEP stands for Individualized Education Plans. Each year the teachers and parents get together to review the students progress from the year before. They also come up with goals for the student to try to reach for the next year. An ETR is the Evaluation Team Report. The ETR tests the students in the areas of academic, cognitive skills, and speech. The data the report gives helps determine if the student qualifies for special education services.

I will use a parent questionnaire before their child's meeting to get their thoughts and feelings about their student's academics. After the meeting, I will send home a survey to see how

they think the meeting went and how we can improve the process so it is more beneficial to them. This information will allow me to modify my meetings to be more parent friendly. It will help me inform my parents better and hopefully encourage them to come to more positive meetings in the future.

Lastly, I will ask my colleagues to help me better my IEP meetings. Many general education teachers come to meetings because it is required by law. It will be beneficial to get some ideas from them on how to improve meetings. In this survey I will ask general education teachers, principals, school psychologist, speech pathologist, and principals to participate.

### **Data Analysis**

Now that I have collected my data, I “review what I have learned and draw conclusions about what I think my data means” (Mills, 2011, pg. 120). I can summarize what I have learned from the data and use it to help me form my action plan to help the students become more motivated at school.

### **Question 1- How does parent participation effect student motivation?**

#### **First data source: Student Journals**

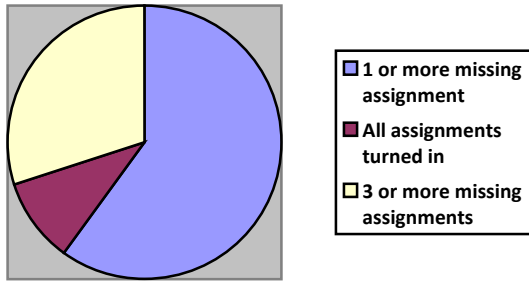
Over the course of six weeks, I had ten students journal each day. In the beginning of journal writing I explained this was something they would not be graded on. I told them I wanted to have them journal about our class lessons, homework, and how they felt about the course work that day. When reading the journals I was surprised by how honest they were. Six students

consistently wrote about how they did not do their homework because they had too much going on at home. One student in particular said her mom made her babysit her little sister after school and she did not have time to do her homework. When specifically looking for how parent participation effects student motivation, it occurred to me the students related home and school with homework. Only one person in the six weeks wrote about their parent coming in to be a mystery reader for the class. She was very excited for her mom to come to school and seemed to write more positively in her journal that week. This data contributed to my resource by providing a view from the student's perspective. It allows me to see how motivated they are and how much of the motivation comes from home and school.

Missing Assignments of ten third grade special education students in two weeks

Figure 1.





### **Second Data Source- Student Survey**

After a science animal lesson, I gave a student survey (Appendix B). We choose to do this lesson at the end of the year because it is interesting to most students. I wanted to see how motivated my students were during this lesson. The questions were designed to find out what they thought about the lesson and how much help they had at home. Each of my ten students took a survey that had four questions asking about the lesson. They were to circle one through five (one being strongly disagree and five being strongly agree). Of ten students, nine thought this lesson was very interesting and wanted to learn more. Five said the homework was difficult, but only three said they asked for help completing it. This data helped me see their motivation. Most students were motivated by the animal unit, however, only three had help at home from their parents. It could be the lesson was interesting and they understood the information. The data helped my research because it gave some insight to the student's motivation through their eyes. They were able to look back and reflect on how they did during the animal lesson.

### **Third Data Source- Teacher Checklist of Parent Assistance**

The third data source was a teacher checklist of parent assistance (Appendix C). The checklist was given to five families. After reviewing the checklist, I found most of my student's parents attend the IEP/ ETR meetings and conferences. Two parents sign the student planner nightly and one attended field trips. This information helps contribute to my research by seeing how active parents are in their child's school life. I compared the information to the grades the student's earned on their report card. It showed the more the parents are involved in their child's schooling the better grades they received throughout the year.

Overall, the data states about a third of my students with special needs have parents who communicated with me throughout the research period. They attended meetings, helped their children with homework, and signed the planner nightly. These students had better grades on their report cards. Many students with lower overall grades had parents who did not communicate with the school or help their students with homework. This creates a direct correlation to their grades. The following information I have collected provides information about the parents volunteering with their student's studies.

## **Question 2- What is the effect of parents volunteering on their children's studies?**

### **First Data Source- Pretest**

The students were given a pretest and posttest that were the same to see easily how much they have grown academically. This test had the students counting money. In order to count the money they needed to know how much each coin was worth. Then they added the coins together to give the price of a given item. There were five questions on the test to help me see if the

students understand recognizing money, money value, and adding change. As seen in Figure 2, the students made growth in this content area and were motivated by parent participation.

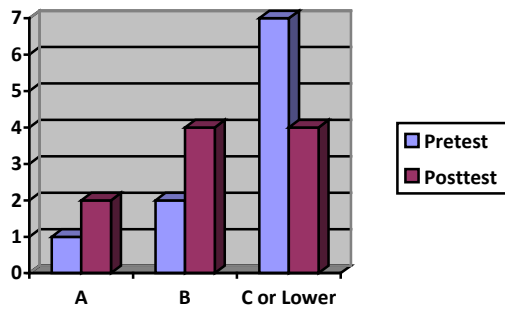
The pretest will give me a baseline to see what the student knows about counting coins. I gave the pretest without telling the students it was a test to reduce any anxiety. The data from the pretest showed that seven of ten students can identify coins, but cannot group or count them accurately. The other three of ten were able to identify, count, and group the coins. This concept has been taught before, but has not been reviewed in a few weeks. I used this data as a starting point to see how much parental support is given at home with this particular concept.

### **Second Data Source- Posttest**

Before I gave the posttest, I either called or met with the parents to talk about the importance of life skills. One area we discussed was handling, identifying, and counting money. I talked to each of the ten parents to provide ways they could help their student be more successful in helping their child succeed on the next money test. We discussed homework, allowing the students to pay when they are shopping, and skip counting by fives, tens, and twenty-five. I gave the posttest which provided information of which parents followed through with helping their child study. At the bottom of the test was a question asking if someone helped them study for the test. Four out of ten answered with yes, a parent/guardian helped them study. Each of those four students received a B or higher. The other six answered no one helped them study. Two of the six had A's and the other four had a C or lower. The scores were varied; therefore, it was hard to get clear evidence based on this data. The four who answered yes, did receive a B or higher.

This bar graph compares and contrasts the student’s grades from their pretest to their post test. The data shows overall the students did much better on the posttest after parent involvement was encouraged. The average grade increased and the amount of A’s and B’s doubled from the pretest.

Figure 2



**Third Data Source- Teacher Journal**

Along with the students, I also kept a journal. I recorded when parents participated at school and how it affected their child’s school performance. The journal gave observations of how motivated the student was when he/she knew that their parents were coming to the school. We had an award ceremony where parents could attend. Only three of my student's parents

participated. All three of the students were more focused and participated more in the classroom. The end of the year was a good time to keep this journal because there are a lot of field trips, award ceremonies, field day, and IEP/ETR meetings parents can attend. Of ten students, only three of their parents came to an event other than the IEP meetings. All ten parents came to the IEP meeting which showed some great results for motivation. Three students were very interested in the meeting days before it happened. Each of them asked what we would be talking about with their parents. They were more focused in class and willing to participate in class discussion. One of the students was done with their work earlier and helped a neighbor with their math assignment. One student got an A on their science test and asked if I was going to show his mom the test in the meeting. I took anecdotal notes showing all ten increased in their motivation by displaying focusing behavior, more willingness to do their work, and helping others in the classroom with their work. This information contributes to my research by showing students tend to be more motivated when their parents are involved in school.

Through qualitative and quantitative data I have shown that students are more motivated when their parents are involved in their schooling. The pre and post test got the parents involved in the student's studies. Also, the IEP meeting was a personal invite to the parents to be more informed about their child's schooling. I see the IEP meeting as an important event that the parent must attend. However, I am not sure if the parents see it as beneficial as I do. To get the parents more comfortable and willing to participate in school functions I focused on the IEP meetings. In my next question, I asked how parent education can improve IEP/ETR meetings.

**Question 3- In what ways does parent education about special education improve the Individualized Education Plan and Evaluation Team Report writing process?**

**First Data Source- Parent questionnaire**

Before each of my ten IEP meetings I sent home a parent questionnaire (Appendix D). The questionnaire was sent out to help me get a better understanding of the student and to add parent input to the meeting. I mailed home ten questionnaires and five were returned with one being blank. The information was then written into the profile section of the IEP. This data source contributed to my research because parents felt more a part of the IEP process when they hear their ideas and thoughts written into the document. Using observation, I discovered the parents filled out the questionnaire were more willing to actively participate in the meeting. One parent told me usually they dislike meetings because they are always negative. She was very happy contributing to a positive meeting for once.

**Second Data Source- Parent Survey**

After the parents last IEP meeting, I sent home a quick parent survey (Appendix E). They were to answer the questions using a one to five scale. The questions consisted of topics of how to improve the meeting and how they felt after the meeting was over. I received seven of ten surveys back. I got consistent positive comments back but one that needed improvement was “you understood what is being said throughout the meeting”. Four parents returned the survey choosing a two on being about to understand the meeting. This information contributed to my research because I was able to see where to improve my meetings. If I improve my meetings by making the parents feel comfortable and knowledgeable, then they will be more involved in their child’s education.

**Third Data Source- Colleague Survey**

After hearing what the parents thought of my IEP meetings, I wanted to know what my colleagues thought about them. I had the same five teachers fill out the survey (Appendix F) that asked questions about how they feel the meetings go. All five teachers said that IEP meetings are productive and beneficial for the students. However, three of the five teachers said they do not feel a part of the meetings. During the meeting, there is not a specific time for the teacher to give their information about what happens in the classroom because the meeting is usually focused on the student's goals. This leaves the teachers wondering where their place is in the meeting. General education teachers need a time during the meeting to share their information and need better communication with the special education teacher. This information contributes to my research because if the teachers who work with the children the majority of the day do not feel a part of the meeting, then the parents are not getting vital information. The teachers can paint a larger picture for the parents and be able to share more information about their academics.

The data given provides great amount information about the students and parent participation. It gathers the data from many different sources such as teachers, parents, and the students. The information does reveal a need for improvement with parent participation, regular teacher participation and more guidance from the special education department. All three are integral parts of this education process. In the few instances when parents have been involved in the schools, I have observed the students more motivated and willing to participate in the classroom. They take more pride in their work and want to show it off to their parents during meetings. To get the parents more involved they need to feel like they are a valuable asset to their child's education. An action plan can be put into place to get the parents more involved and feeling like they are a partner in their child's education.

**Action Plan**

I have learned many things throughout my research. It takes parents, general education teachers, and special education teachers to help make a student successful. Each group has to learn to communicate to each other to give the child the best education they can possibly have. The communication is important during before, during, and after meetings. I have learned that parents and general education teachers would be more willing to participate in IEP meetings if they felt like their voice meant something to the group. We need to learn to talk to the parents, not at them.

During the research, I have learned that students are more motivated in school when they have supportive parents at home. Parents who help their children at home with homework, come to meetings, and participate in the classroom should their children that school is important. The students are more motivated and participate during class discussion. However, I have discovered that just because the parent is not visible in the school does not mean they do not want to be involved. Some parents do not have an option because they work or cannot find a babysitter for another child. These parents can show their support in different ways such as sending in a note, making treats, or donating items for the class.

This research project has taught me to be a better communicator to my peers and my student's parents. It will help me with my teaching practices by making sure everyone at an IEP/ETR meeting is comfortable and well-informed on the information we are discussing. I will give the data to the parents and teachers early so they have time to gather their thoughts that they



would like to express at a meeting. Also, I will make myself more available to parents who want to discuss what the information means in an informal environment. This will help them feel open to asking more questions or giving more suggestions. Parents know their children best, so I want parents to participate in the meeting the most. General education teachers are a good resource to have IEP/ETR meetings too. However, many feel they are not an important part of the process. To improve my practices, I need to get the teachers more involved in the meetings. I can ask them to bring the student's current grades, work samples, and explain what they see in the class. During the meeting, I can have a designated time for them to share their information so they are not skipped over.

Also, the research project taught me to reflect on my own biases. In the beginning of this project, I thought parents who are not visible in the school are not supportive at home. This is not always the case. Some parents cannot make it to meetings or volunteer in school because they have to work or do not feel comfortable. I have changed my practices and biases by allowing parents to participate in school activities in other ways such as donating items, writing notes, sending a treat, etc. The students will see that they are involved even if they cannot show up in person. There are some parents who do not feel comfortable in the school. Maybe they struggled in school, had prior meetings that went poorly with teachers, or simply do not feel welcomed. I want all parents to feel welcomed in our school and will reach out to parents and let them sign up for special days we have coming up throughout the year. We have book fair, field trips, ice cream treat days, and many more events parents can volunteer at. I will send a calendar home and allow parents to choose days they can volunteer. If they cannot, they will have an opportunity to send something in to share.

Based on the information I have learned from this study, I want to make the following changes to my teaching practices:

- Parents IEP/ETR -I will provide an information class to parents to review the terminology and their role in the IEP/ETR process. In the meeting I will go over what the acronyms IEP and ETR stand for along with other common terms that are mentioned throughout the meeting. I will explain to the parents the different data collection that is done to determine if their child qualifies for services in an ETR meeting. Lastly, I will give them ideas of what they should be asking and looking for during a meeting. This will help them realize the important role they play. After the meeting they will know what is going on during a meeting and hopefully it will not be so uncomfortable for them to attend. If a parent cannot attend my information class, I will have the top points typed up for the parents to review at home. After the IEP/ETR meeting as occurred, I will ask the parents how they felt the meeting went and what they think can be changed about it. More feedback from parents will help me make positive changes to the meeting and IEP/ETR writing process.
- Parent participation- Parent participation in their child's education helps the children become more motivated and be successful in school. Parents can participate in many ways. First, I will send home a calendar of different dates the parents can come in and volunteer at the school. They can choose a date that works for them and is far enough in advance that they can schedule around it. If they cannot come into the school at all, I will have a section with ideas of other ways parents can participate. Some of the extra ways to participate is to donate items to the classroom, send in a treat, or write a letter to the class.

Parents cannot always make it into the school so this gives them another way to show their support and be more active in their child's education.

- Teacher participation- Teachers are valuable team members to all special education meetings. Although, they did not feel like their information was important during the meeting. To change that I plan to give teachers more information about the upcoming meeting so they can prepare what they want to discuss. Also, I will have a designated time for them to express their thoughts and concerns to the parents. The teachers will bring their grade book and work samples to the meeting to show the parents how they are doing in the general education teacher's classroom.

### **Final Thoughts**

This research project has taught me many new things. I have learned how to communicate with others better, help students be more successful, and that it takes many team member to make a student successful. It has helped me see where my biases may be and how to overcome them through research. I will be sharing my research findings by providing my data at team meetings and special education teacher meetings. Other professionals can use this information to get parents to be more involved in their child's academic life. It will help them find ways to make teachers and parents more comfortable during formal meetings. Lastly, it will help other teachers realize how important student motivation is to instruction.

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## Appendix

### Appendix A

#### Data Collection Matrix

Research Questions	Data Source 1	Data Source 2	Data Source 3

parent participation effect student motivation?	Student Journals	Student Survey	Teacher checklist
effect of parents volunteering on their children's studies?	Pre test	Post test	Teacher Journal
parent education improve IEP and ETR?	Parent Questionnaire	Parent survey	Colleague survey

In my data collection (appendix A), I have used qualitative and quantitative data. Qualitative research uses "descriptive approaches that help us understand the way things are." Quantitative research "collects numerical data to describe, explain, predict, or control phenomena of interest." (Mills, 2011, pg. 4). It is important to have a balance between qualitative and quantitative data because it will help me build strength in my research findings.

**How does parent participation effect student motivation?**

I will use a student journal to collect data to show how parent participation effects my students motivation.. "Students' journal can provide teachers with a valuable window into the students' world" (Mills, 2011 pg. 86). Throughout the learning process, I will have the students write down how they feel about the work, concept, and lessons. This will give me some insight into how my students are motivated about the current work. I would also analyze the data to see how student reflections will help them academically. It could provide information on how

confident the students feel about the material. The journal entries could go with the pre and post test by telling me how motivated they are when learning the concept.

Another data collection tool I will use a student survey to get more information on how motivated the students are. The survey will ask them questions about what helps them be motivated. This data collection tool will give me additional insight to how much their parents are involved in the school from the student's point of view. It will ask them questions on how helpful their parents and teachers are when they are struggling in school. Analyzing this data collection tool will give me information about the student's home lives and how to improve their learning.

The teachers I work with will get a checklist of parent involvement. The checklist will have ways parents can be involved in their students schooling. If the parent is involved in the school then the teacher can check it. For example: signing the student planner, initialing the homework, making communication contacts, coming to meetings and conferences. This will be a great tool to see how involved parents currently are and where we can improve in the future.

### **What is the effect of parents volunteering on their children's studies?**

My first data collect tool is the pretest. I will give my student's a pretest based on the concept we have covered. This will give me information on what the students know currently and what I need to work on. After they take the pretest, I will call the parents and explain to them what I would like them to work on at home. Then I will give the students to post test. I will be able to see how effective parent involvement was on the student's scores. Hopefully, this will give me some insight on whether their parents being involved in the school will help the student succeed. I decided to use this quantitative data tool to coincide with my parent questionnaire.



Christy Munafo says qualitative tools were helpful but quantitative data is the most useful (Strategies in Action: Data Collection Tools).

Not only will students keep journals, but I will keep one as well. In my journal I will take anecdotal notes about the student's success and motivation. I am hoping by taking these notes I will notice a pattern in the student's home lives and the affect it can have at school. Also, I will be looking for any parent participation and how the student responded to the increased participation. A list will be made in my journal to keep track of how the parent has participated. Each time a parent is involved in something at school such as (a play, musical, volunteering or attending meetings, etc.) it will be recorded so I compare it to the student journal used previously.

### **How can parent education improve IEPs and ETRs?**

IEP stands for Individualized Education Plans. Each year the teachers and parents get together to review the students progress from the year before. They also come up with goals for the student to try to reach for the next year. An ETR is the Evaluation Team Report. The ETR tests the students in the areas of academic, cognitive skills, and speech. The data the report gives helps determine if the student qualifies for special education services.

I will use a parent questionnaire before their child's meeting to get their thoughts and feelings about their student's academics. After the meeting, I will send home a survey to see how they think the meeting went and how we can improve the process so it is more beneficial to them. This information will allow me to modify my meetings to be more parent friendly. It will help me inform my parents better and hopefully encourage them to come to more positive meetings in the future.

Lastly, I will ask my colleagues to help me better my IEP meetings. Many general education teachers come to meetings because it is required by law. It will be beneficial to get some ideas from them on how to improve meetings. In this survey I will ask general education teachers, principals, school psychologist, speech pathologist, and principals to participate.

Appendix B

Student Survey – Animal Unit

Circle numbers 1-4.

1- Disagree Strongly      2- Disagree      3- undecided      4- agree      5-strongly agree **This**

**1. lesson was interesting.**

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

**2. I want to learn more about this subject.**

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

**3. I found my homework interesting.**

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

**4. I had to ask a parent for help with my homework and studying.**

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

Appendix C

Teacher Checklist

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Place a check next to the item if the parent completes the task.

- Signs student planner every night
- Initials student homework to show they checked the paper
- Emails or contacts teacher when there is an issue.
- Attends conferences
- Attends IEP/ETR meetings
- Volunteers at school functions or field trips

#### Appendix D

No Names Please

#### Parent Questionnaire

1. Does your child enjoy school? Why or why not?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. How often does your child have homework? Do they complete assignments alone or do you assist them? In what ways?

3. What is one goal you would like your child to improve upon in the next year?
4. Currently, what are your child's strengths and weaknesses?
5. What are your child's interests and/or future plans?
6. When is the best day to set up meetings in the future?
7. What do you want your child's teachers to know about working with your child?
8. What could the school do to help you make your child's education successful?
9. What suggestions do you have to make the IEP(Individual Education Plan) meetings more beneficial and informative for you?

## Appendix E

### Parent Survey

Please answer the following questions on a scale of one to five.

	1= completely disagree	2=disagree somewhat	3= undecided	4=agree	5= completely agree
IEP meeting are very productive.	1	2	3	4	5
You understood what is being said throughout the meeting.	1	2	3	4	5
You feel a part of the IEP team.	1	2	3	4	5
IEP meetings are beneficial for your student.	1	2	3	4	5
IEP meetings are positive and encouraging to parents and students.	1	2	3	4	5
You were able to ask questions freely about the IEP process.	1	2	3	4	5

Any concerns/questions/ ideas?

Appendix F

Colleague Survey

Please answer the following questions on a scale of one to five.

	1= completely disagree	2=disagree somewhat	3= undecided	4=agree	5= completely agree
IEP meetings are very productive.	1	2	3	4	5
Parents understand what is being said to them throughout the meeting.	1	2	3	4	5
You feel a part of the IEP team.	1	2	3	4	5
IEP meetings are beneficial for the students.	1	2	3	4	5