High School Special Education Teachers’ Perspectives of Student-Led
Individualized Education Planning

by

Courtney A. Sievert

A Field Report Submitted
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of

Master of Science in Education

Special Education

at

The University of Wisconsin Oshkosh
Oshkosh WI 54901-8621

May, 2022

COMMITTEE APPROVAL

Advisor

Date Approved

5/27/2022

Date Approved

5/26/2022
Teachers’ Perceptions of Student-led IEPs

Abstract

For educators, the least dangerous assumption is to believe all students are capable of developing self-determination skills and will utilize those skills to gain a better quality of life through choice-making that directly impacts life outcomes (Mason et al., 2002). Many special education teachers, as part of their teacher preparation courses, are taught that best practice is to encourage and guide each student to gain the self-determination skills (self-management, self-awareness, self-advocacy) to lead a portion or all of their Individual Education Plan (IEP) meeting. There is minimal research that has been done regarding the relationship of high school teachers’ perceptions and student involvement in the IEP process.

The purpose of this study was to analyze electronic survey data from approximately 7 high school special education teachers and service providers in a suburban Midwestern school district to gather perceptions of student-led IEPs. This study gathered perceptions in the areas of administrator support, professional development, and availability of resources to assist teachers prepare students to lead their IEPs. Findings provide insight into the perceptions of teachers in the areas of student involvement, self-determination skills involved in the IEP process, administrative support, and student participation in the IEP process. Based on the findings, this researcher recommends that teachers work with students to improve the skills necessary for increasing their involvement and leadership in their IEP meetings. There does appear to be a relationship between administrator support, access to professional development, and availability of resources regarding the level of student participation in their IEP meetings.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

The state of Wisconsin statute 115.787(2)(g)1 states that transition requirements begin no later than in the first IEP that will be in effect when the child is 14 and updated annually. Additionally, a post-secondary transition plan (PTP) must include measurable postsecondary goals for students based on age-appropriate transition assessments related to training/education, employment, and independent living skills (if appropriate), along with a description of transition services to include courses of study needed to assist students in reaching their goals.

Historically, teachers led IEP meetings, due to limited time for meetings and legal compliance. By law in Wisconsin, students must be administered an appropriate transition survey and the local education agency must ensure that the student is involved in their transition planning. Students generally participate in the transition portion of the IEP meeting, but do not generally lead the other sections of the IEP, such as goal setting and summary of current academic and functional levels. In fact, upon transitioning to teaching special education, Nolan-Spohn (2016), “quickly noticed the gap between what students knew about themselves and what was written about them in their IEP” (p. 300).

Background

There is minimal research regarding the relationship of teachers’ perceptions and student involvement in the IEP process. However, there is research about student-led IEPs and the benefits and barriers to implementation. Using a mixed method qualitative approach, Woods et al. (2013) conducted a case study that followed a student for two years to measure the effectiveness of the “Self-Directed IEP” program to increase her leadership and participation during the IEP. The study indicates that the student that had been instructed how to lead her IEP
meeting gained clearer postschool goals and dreams, increased confidence, and increased self-advocacy.

Barnard-Brak and Lechtenberger (2010) found a positive correlation between student involvement in the IEP process and academic achievement. Their study consisted of 3,912 students aged 6 to 12 years that were eligible to receive special education. The researchers examined the association of student IEP participation with academic achievement in three separate data collections over a 5-year time frame. A revised, research edition of the Woodcock Johnson III (WJ-III-R) was used to measure academic achievement in reading and math, in the areas of passage comprehension, letter-word recognition, and applied problems and calculation. The researchers used a survey item from SEELS, in which an administrator answered questions regarding student involvement in their IEP. While the study is mainly quantitative with correlations, the qualitative side of the study is lacking in specific information regarding participation. Between the ages of 6 to 12, it is not mandated by IDEA to include the student in the IEP meeting, and it would be uncommon for students to have a significant participation role as a leader in their IEP.

Further research regarding the participation of students aged 14 to 21 in their IEPs would be beneficial and important to the discussion of IEP participation and academic achievement. It appears involving students in the IEP process while also offering instruction and scaffolding for goal setting increases student awareness of their strengths and challenges. Chapter two will discuss the prior research related to student-led IEPs in more detail.

Definitions

Self-advocacy: A component element of self-determination is applied in this context as standing up for oneself and speaking up on their own behalf (Wehmeyer et al., 2007).
Student-led IEP: students talk about one or more parts of the IEP meeting, according to the 14 steps:

1. Welcoming people at the IEP meeting
2. Introducing people at the IEP meeting
3. Telling about or reporting findings from age-appropriate transition assessments
4. Telling about their likes and dislikes
5. Telling about their skills and challenges
6. Reporting or listing accommodation needs
7. Stating disability or telling about their disability
8. Stating post-secondary goal for education
9. Stating post-secondary goal for employment
10. Stating post-secondary goal for Independent Living, if appropriate
11. Identifying action plans for each post-secondary goal
12. Reviewing past goals and performance on those goals
13. Identifying course of study for next year
14. Summarizing new IEP goals (Martin et al., 2006)

The Research Problem

There is little research on high school teachers’ perceptions of student-led IEP meetings, specifically special education teachers and service providers. Special education teachers and service providers are the special education case managers for students with IEPs and oversee their IEP management. The degree to which special educators perceive student-led IEPs as important could have significant importance on the level of student involvement. As a result, further research into the perceptions of the special education teachers and service providers
would provide valuable insight into ways to increase student involvement and leadership in the IEP meeting.

The intent of this author’s study is to determine high school teachers’ perceptions of student-led IEPs to inform practice for additional professional development and planning to support teachers to improve student involvement in the IEP process. The study occurred in a midwestern suburban school district with a diverse student population. This study captured teacher perceptions in the areas of student involvement in areas of the IEP including helping to invite team members; introducing themselves at the meeting; stating the purpose of the meeting; sharing information at the IEP meeting to include individual strengths, current grades, review of previous goals, asking for feedback; asking questions; appropriately handling feedback from others; indicating support needs; expressing opinions; and discussing accommodations. The scope of this study was to gather special education teachers’ perceptions of student-led IEPs through a Qualtrics survey. Survey questions addressing teachers’ perceptions of student-led IEP meetings were answered on a 4-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree). More information regarding the survey development, research methods, and data analysis can be found in chapter three.

This study found that teachers agree or strongly agree that students that possess self-determination skills are better able to lead their IEP meetings. Teachers agreed that students need guidance and preparation to lead a portion (or all) of their IEP meeting. This study also found that all teachers work on self-determination skills with their students. The full results and analysis can be found in chapter four.

The barriers discovered through previous research, such as lack of administrator support, inadequate professional development, and lack of resources available were surveyed in this
study. The findings indicate that the barriers may have a relationship to the level of student involvement with their IEP. The discussion and implications for future research can be found in chapter five.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

History of Student Involvement in the IEP Process

The state of Wisconsin statute 115.787(2)(g)1 states that transition requirements begin no later than in the first IEP that will be in effect when the child is 14 and updated annually. Additionally, a post-secondary transition plan (PTP) must include measurable postsecondary goals for students based on age-appropriate transition assessments related to training/education, employment, and independent living skills (if appropriate), along with a description of transition services to include courses of study needed to assist students in reaching their goals.

Typically, teachers have led IEP meetings, due to limited time for meetings and legal compliance. By law, students must be administered an appropriate transition survey and the local education agency must ensure that the student is involved in their transition planning. Students generally participate in the transition portion of the IEP meeting, but do not generally lead the other sections of the IEP, such as goal setting and summary of current academic and functional levels. In fact, upon transitioning to teaching special education, Nolan-Spohn (2016), “quickly noticed the gap between what students knew about themselves and what was written about them in their IEP” (p. 300).

Given the requirements by state laws surrounding IEP and post-secondary transition planning, it is imperative that students have a say in the IEP process. Furthermore, it would be beneficial to develop the individual’s understanding of their disability and what accommodations they may need to successfully participate and lead their IEP meeting. Teachers’ perceptions of student participation within the IEP process can inhibit or empower students to lead portions of the IEP.
Advantages to Student-Led IEPs

An advantage of student-led IEPs is that the student’s postsecondary plans are discussed at the forefront of the meeting and the student has an important voice in the IEP decisions made during the meeting to help ensure that the goals and accommodations are appropriate. Furthermore, when the student perceives the goals and accommodations to be appropriate and helpful, the student will be more motivated because the student will be able to relate their needs and accommodations to helping them attain their postsecondary goals.

Barnard-Brak & Lechtenberger (2010) found a positive correlation between student involvement in the IEP process and academic achievement. The study consisted of 3,912 students aged 6 to 12 years that were eligible to receive special education. The researchers examined the association of student IEP participation with academic achievement in three separate data collections over a 5-year time frame. A revised, research edition of the Woodcock Johnson III (WJ-III-R) was used to measure academic achievement in reading and math, in the areas of passage comprehension, letter-word recognition, applied problems and calculation. The researchers used a survey item from SEELS, in which an administrator answered questions regarding student involvement in their IEP. While the study is mainly quantitative with correlations, the qualitative side of the study is lacking in specific information regarding participation. Between the ages of 6 to 12, it is not mandated by IDEA to include the student in the meeting and it would be uncommon for students to have a significant participation role in their IEP. Further research regarding the participation of students 14 to 21 in their IEPs would be beneficial and imperative to the discussion of IEP participation and academic achievement. It appears that involving students in the IEP process while also offering instruction and scaffolding for goal setting makes the student more aware of his or her strengths and challenges. A student-
led IEP is defined as student participation in, and/or leading, the IEP meeting. When students prepare for the meeting, they can discuss one or more parts of the meeting, to include:

1. Welcoming people at the IEP meeting
2. Introducing people at the IEP meeting
3. Telling about or reporting findings from transition assessment
4. Telling about their likes and dislikes
5. Telling about their strengths and challenges
6. Reporting or listing accommodation needs
7. Stating disability or telling about their disability
8. Stating post-secondary goal for education
9. Stating post-secondary goal for employment
10. Stating post-secondary goal for Independent Living, if appropriate
11. Identifying action plans for each post-secondary goal
12. Reviewing past goals and performance on those goals
13. Identifying course of study for next year
14. Summarizing new IEP goals (Martin et al., 2006)

Teachers’ Perspectives of Student Participation in IEP Meetings

Hawbaker (2007), reported teacher perceptions of obstacles to the student-led IEP process to include: lack of time due to more participation, having to make considerations for high stakes assessments/state standards, lack of student motivation, the disability level of the student, loss of control, resources, lack of support from colleagues, and lack of administrative support. In response to the obstacles, Hawbaker (2007) offers some answers including keeping in mind the positive outcomes students can experience as a result of participation in their IEP meeting.
Special Education Teachers or the Local Educational Agency (LEA) representative may feel that they should lead the IEP meeting, since it is a legal document. When others (both parents and teachers) assume that they know what is best for the student, it can influence or discourage the student from certain postsecondary goals because of what the teacher or parent perceive to be the best fit for the student. Wehmeyer (2005) indicates that an individual’s preferences must be considered at all times and whenever possible, the individual should be able to make choices that impact the individual’s life. Special educators facilitate students’ development of self-determination skills to gain a better quality of life through choice-making that directly impacts life outcomes (Wehmeyer & Palmer, 2003).

Research by Eisenman et al. (2005) indicates the importance of starting small. Eisenman et al. (2005) conducted a qualitative study focused on the factors that may limit teachers from implementing student-led IEPs. The researchers acted as participant-observers (facilitate meetings, potential for ongoing conversations) of teachers attending a summer workshop and monthly meetings during one school year. A total of 22 of the original 45 teachers that attended the summer workshop participated in the monthly meetings. In response to lower attendance during the last half of the school year, the authors adapted the structure of the monthly meetings to a more informal support group format. Teachers brought students to two of these meetings and the authors were able to collect feedback from the students. Following the summer workshop, the authors began looking broadly for the tools (counseling skills, curriculum) that the teachers used or wanted, and the outcomes expected (better transition planning, student ownership).

During teacher inquiry groups, the researchers were able to adapt and alter the framework to include problems, solutions, and processes of the inquiry group that assisted teacher action. After recording field notes and artifacts from the teachers, the authors coded the information
using a qualitative software program. As a result, the authors were able to conclude that teacher inquiry groups are beneficial to jumpstarting new practices for individual teachers. Even with making small changes, teachers that participate in the inquiry group can become ambassadors for change because others observe and adopt the changes as well. As a result of facilitating a summer workshop and monthly meetings, the authors were able to engage in conversations and assist the participants with materials and strategies for implementing student-led IEPs.

The researchers were able to ask questions and adapt the focus of subsequent monthly meetings based on feedback from the participants. The researchers received positive teacher feedback indicating that the teachers found the “start small” approach to be manageable and flexible enough to allow teachers to implement student-led IEPs as they felt ready to do so. Some teachers jumped right in and began to instruct students on student-led IEPs while others waited and gathered more information.

According to Eisenman et al. (2005), for some teachers starting small meant selecting one portion of the student-led process to implement while at other times starting small meant a smaller focus, perhaps on a small selection of students. When given the flexibility and support to decide for oneself how and where to begin, teacher perceptions of implementing student-led IEPs were positive. Eisenman et al. (2005) also reported on what they described as the “ripple effect”; teachers observing or hearing positive feedback from other teachers and students involved in the student-led IEP implementation process and from there supporting one another as professionals to begin or expand their own implementation within their caseload. Eisenman et al. (2005) conclude that providing a supportive, non-invasive professional learning environment serves as an important way to measure teacher perceptions and implementation of student-led IEP components.
Cavendish and Connor (2017) conducted a mixed-methods study to explore perspectives of IEP participation among students, their parents, and teachers. The quantitative portion of the study consisted of a student version and teacher version of the Student Involvement Survey (SIS) regarding perceptions of school effects to facilitate student involvement. The research design for the quantitative portion of the study included 17 teacher participants (8 general education teachers, 9 special education teachers - which also included 1 school psychologist and a counselor). The teacher participants were selected because they were the professionals involved with the urban high school students with Learning Disabilities (LD) that were selected as part of the study. In addition, the parents of the student participants were also included in the study.

Overall, the quantitative data from the SIS indicated that special education teachers reported a mean score of 71.13 (borderline agreement with school efforts), General education teachers reported a mean score of 61.25 (general disagreement with school efforts). The student data from 10th and 11th graders both reported a mean score of 72.40 (general agreement with school efforts) and data from 12th graders reported a mean score of 52.33 (general disagreement). For the data, a mean score of less than 72 indicated disagreement. The survey included a Likert scale in which participants selected a response choice to statements such as: “My school asked me which type of diploma I want to receive.” and “My teachers offer alternative homework assignments to meet my needs.” The study indicated that the highest agreement between students and teachers was in the area of the school giving parents a copy of the IEP and testing accommodations are discussed in IEP meetings. The lowest level of agreement among students and teachers indicated that students’ perceptions surrounding the school consistently carrying out the recommendations of the IEP and teachers adjusting for students based on supports that were agreed upon in the IEP meeting.
Although the study included a small sample size, it was appropriate to the study since the researchers sought triangulation through qualitative interviews of students, their parents, and their teachers. In addition, it seems that because the study was centered around a specific portion of the population of students with disabilities (LD for this study), it cannot be assumed that the results would be generalized to other populations of LD students or students with other disability areas (such as Intellectual Disability, Other Health Impairment, or Emotional Behavioral Disability).

Conclusion

Based on the research, student-led IEP planning continues to be a challenge due to many factors, however the positive outcomes far outweigh the barriers, such as increased parent involvement when students lead their IEP (Hawbaker, 2007). When students lead their IEPs, they gain valuable life skills and the whole IEP team comes away from the meeting with a more positive outlook (Mason, 2004). Of the limited research that was available regarding teachers’ perceptions of student-led IEPs, most involved students in elementary settings. Additional research is needed to determine teacher perceptions of student-led IEPs to increase facilitation of students’ involvement in the IEP process, preferably with students aged 14 to 21. When teachers have been included in the process collaboratively and properly trained on how to instruct students to lead their IEP meetings and the positive outcomes that result from student-led IEPs, the practice will increase, and students will benefit (Cavendish & Connor, 2017).
Chapter 3: Methods

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) 2004 [Section 300.43 (a)] states that transition planning must begin no later than in the first IEP that will be in effect when the child is 16 and updated annually. The research question for this study was: What are high school special education teachers’ perceptions of student-led IEPs? Consent was obtained through the Qualtrics online survey system. Participants were sent the survey via email, read the consent and either clicked “I agree” to consent to participate, or closed the survey to opt out.

Participants and Setting

The study took place in a midwestern, suburban high school with just under 1,000 students. As reported on the 2020-2021 district report card, the total number of enrolled students is approximately 3,200 with 21.6% Hispanic, 59.7% White, 5.9% Black or African American, 5.1% Asian, 0.4% American Indian or Alaskan Native, and 7.2% two or more races. Nearly 62% of the student population were identified as economically disadvantaged.

The survey was sent to 11 high school special education case managers. 7 of the 11 special education case managers participated, with a response rate of 63.6%. The 7 participants included male and female special education teachers of varying ethnicities and age ranges. These participants were chosen because they fit the target participant; a licensed professional, case manager for students with IEPs, and employed by the school district for which the student researcher had permission to conduct the study. Although the student researcher was employed at the same district as the participants, there was no authority relationship between the participants and the researcher.
Methodology

To determine the perceptions of student-led IEPs of each teacher, they were asked to complete a survey. The survey was designed with several types of questions, including questions answered with a yes or no and questions answered on a Likert scale. The survey was designed using statements that allow the participant to indicate a level of agreement. The statements were created with a positive connotation to eliminate confusion with negative statements and indicating level of agreement (Boudah, 2011). Each question was constructed to gather teachers’ perceptions for factors that directly or indirectly affect student-led IEPs, according to the literature.

Questions 1 & 2 were placed at the beginning to gather basic information about the participants (see survey in Appendix A). All participants were invited with an email and a link directing them to the Qualtrics survey.

Questions 3 and 4 asked for teacher perceptions regarding information about student involvement in IEPs and specifically the transition portion of the IEP, because the research suggests that teacher perceptions of an “all or nothing” approach may limit the number of students that are encouraged and supported to lead their IEP meetings (Eisenman et al., 2005).

Questions 5 and 6 asked about teacher perceptions of self-determination skills because the research indicates that “Teaching students to take control of their life is important to providing complete special education services” (Karvonen et al., 2004, p. 23).

Questions 7, 8, 9, and 10 gathered teacher perceptions regarding support of administrators, knowledge of resources, and time to prepare students to lead their IEP meetings. Mason et al. (2002) identified several challenges to student-led IEPs, however time for student preparation was the largest barrier to student involvement in the IEP planning process. “Chief
among these is finding the time necessary for adequate student preparation. With the trend away from pull-out resource rooms toward inclusion in the general classrooms, teachers are finding it difficult to schedule time to prepare students for IEP meetings” (p.188).

Questions 11 and 12 collected data regarding teacher perceptions of student awareness of IEP goals and self-awareness of strengths, needs, access to and use of accommodations. There is value in having the student prepare for conversation around transition, self-assess their progress toward IEP goals and review accommodations (what’s working, what may need to be added). Involving students in their meetings and helping them develop the skills to set and meet goals is critical for success in post-school outcomes (Barnard-Brak & Lechtenberger, 2010).

Question 13 collected a numeric response to a question asking for the number of students on the teacher caseload that currently lead a portion (or all) of their IEP meeting. This was important because participants selected a percentage range of their caseload for previous questions, however, it was also necessary to know the number of students that caseload managers recognize as leading portions of their IEP meetings. Survey questions with a few unstructured responses can result in valid responses. It is important to be deliberate when choosing this response type (Boudah, 2011).

Question 14 collected information regarding the areas of importance from the IEP: invite IEP team, introduce self, state purpose of meeting, state strengths, share current grades, review goal progress, ask for feedback, ask questions, appropriately handle feedback from others, state needed support, express opinions, discuss accommodations. The areas of importance for question 14 were adapted from The Self-Directed IEP Leadership Steps by Martin et al. (2006). An exploratory mixed methods case study by Woods et al. (2013) analyzed a student with a learning disability and her involvement in her sophomore and junior year IEP meeting by measuring word
count, momentary time sample data, and speaking rate. The researchers tracked changes in the
development of postschool goals, confidence, maturity, and self-advocacy. “Results indicate a
marked increase from year one to year two in the students’ word count and speaking rate, a more
focused postschool employment vision, and an increase in meeting leadership” (Woods et al.,
2013).

The survey used in the current study was completely anonymous. No personally
identifiable data was tracked or saved by the survey. No questions can be linked back to
participants, because of the way they were designed. There were no direct questions asking
identifying demographic information to protect participant identity.

Data Collection Procedures and Analysis

The participants most likely completed the survey in a familiar setting at a convenient
time and most likely completed the survey alone. A 4-point scale allowed for each participant to
indicate level of agreement with the provided statements (strongly agree, agree, disagree,
strongly disagree). One 5-point matrix question that measured frequency of each given statement
about areas of student participation (always, often, sometimes, seldom, never) to allow the
participants to consider all areas of student participation in the IEP. This approach fit the survey
design to measure opinion/attitude toward each statement (Boudah, 2011). This design also
allowed the data to be organized and compared across questions (Boudah, 2011). The survey
included one open response question to allow participants to include additional thoughts or
information. Data was presented as tables to summarize the results of each statement and
responses. The results are further discussed in Chapter 4.
Chapter 4: Results

There is little research on high school teachers’ perceptions of student-led IEP meetings, specifically the perceptions of special education teachers and service providers. Special education teachers and service providers are the special education case managers for students with IEPs. To determine the perceptions of student-led IEPs, high school special education teachers were invited to complete a survey. The survey was designed with several types of questions, including questions answered with a yes or no and questions answered on a Likert scale. Each question was constructed to gather teachers’ perceptions for factors that directly or indirectly affect student-led IEPs, according to the literature. The data were analyzed and compiled into tables based on the topic of the survey question, allowing comparisons and further analysis by topic. The first two questions were designed to gather qualifying information for this study (licensed special education teacher, age of caseload students). The answers to both questions had to be answered and ensured that the participants invited to participate in the survey met the criteria for this study: a licensed special education professional with a caseload of high school students.

Preparation for IEPs

All teacher participants indicated that they agreed or strongly agreed with three of the survey questions. All teachers indicated that they worked on self-determination skills with their students. All teachers also believed that students need guidance and preparation to lead a portion of their IEP (5 participants selected strongly agree). Teachers also indicated that they met to discuss strengths, needs, and access to/use of accommodations with their students in the weeks leading up to an annual IEP meeting. This data is summarized in Table 1.
Table 1
Agreement of preparation among teachers’ perceptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I work on self-determination skills with my students</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students need guidance and preparation to lead a portion (or all) of their IEP meeting</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the weeks leading up to an annual IEP meeting, I meet with the student to ask about their strengths, needs, access to/use of accommodations</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teacher Perceptions of Student Involvement in their IEP Meetings

Teachers answered with majority agreement that student-led IEPs may include student involvement in one area or multiple areas. Teachers perceived that they meet with students to ask about strengths, needs, and access to/use of accommodations. Finally, teachers agreed that most of their caseload students know their goals. This data is summarized in Table 2.

Table 2
Teacher perceptions of student involvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student-led IEPs include student involvement in one area or multiple areas</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I meet with the student to ask about their strengths, needs, access to/use of accommodations</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most of my caseload students know their goals</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Perceptions of Self-Determination Skills Involved in the IEP Process

An examination of the data from the survey indicates that teachers perceive themselves as working on self-determination skills with their students. The participants also agreed that students need guidance and preparation to lead their own IEP meetings. The perceptions in the data were split between agreement and disagreement when answering whether students with self-
determination skills are better able to lead their own IEP. Please refer to table 3 for more detailed information on teachers’ perceptions in this area.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher perceptions of self-determination involved in the IEP process</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I work on self-determination skills with students</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students need guidance/preparation to lead their IEP meeting</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with self-determination skills are better able to lead their IEP</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Perceptions of Administrative Support for Student-led IEPs

Teachers’ perceptions were split in the areas of administrative support, professional development opportunities, and knowledge of resources to help students lead their IEP meetings. Four teachers felt supported by administration to take time during the school day to prepare students to lead their IEP meetings, however, two teachers selected disagreement and one selected strong disagreement in this area. Similarly, three teachers indicated agreement that the school district offers professional development that promotes student-led IEP meetings, however, one teacher selected disagreement and three teachers selected strong disagreement in this area. This data is summarized in Table 4.
Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher perceptions of administrative support for student-led IEPs</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I feel supported by administration to take time during the school day to teach students how to lead their IEP meetings</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My district offers professional development that promotes student-led IEP meetings</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know where to find resources to help me teach my students how to lead their IEP meetings</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teachers’ Perception of Student Participation

The areas of importance for question 15 were adapted from The Self-Directed IEP Leadership Steps by Martin et al. (2006). Teacher perceptions of their caseload student’s involvement in the IEP process were collected. The areas with the highest agreement (always or often) include: Students introduce themselves, and students state strengths. The areas with a majority disagreement (seldom or never) include: students state purpose, share current grades, and ask for feedback. This data is summarized in Table 5.

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher perceptions of student participation in the IEP process</th>
<th>Always</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Seldom</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Invite IEP team</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduce self</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State purpose</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State strengths</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share current grades</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review past goals</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask for feedback</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask questions</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriately handle feedback</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State needed support</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Express opinions &amp; goals</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discuss accommodations</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Findings

Although teachers answered in agreement that students need guidance and preparation to lead their own IEP meetings, the responses indicate that some teachers do not know where to locate resources for helping students with the skills needed to lead their own IEP meetings. Additionally, teacher perceptions indicated that some feel supported by administration to take time during the school day to prepare students to lead their IEP meetings. The perception that the school district offers professional development to promote student-led IEP meetings had an equal number of teachers (three) indicating agreement and strong disagreement (one teacher indicated disagreement) with this statement.

Four of the seven teacher participants did not answer the survey question that asked them to select the percentage of their caseload students that lead the transition portion of their IEPs. Every participant answered the question that required them to indicate the number of students on their caseload that lead the transition portion of their IEP meeting. This information and implications are further discussed in Chapter 5.
Chapter 5: Discussion

This study examined high school special education teachers’ perceptions of student-led IEP meetings. Data were collected from an anonymous survey of high school special education teachers from a suburban, midwestern school district in the areas of student preparation, student involvement, self-determination skills, administrative support, and student participation in the IEP process. Overall, teacher perceptions indicate that there is room for improvement in the areas of administrator support, availability of resources that teachers can use to help prepare students to lead their IEP meetings, and professional development to promote student-led IEP meetings.

Teacher Perceptions on Preparing Students for their IEP Meeting

All teacher participants responded that they agreed on three of the survey questions, all within the topic of preparing students to lead their IEP meetings. All teachers indicated agreement that students need guidance and preparation to lead their IEP meeting. The teachers answered that they meet with students before an IEP to discuss student strengths and accommodations. Additionally, teachers work on self-determination skills with their caseload students.

Although teachers answered in agreement that students need guidance and preparation to lead their own IEP meetings, the responses indicated that some teachers do not know where to locate resources for helping students with the skills needed to lead their own IEP meetings. Four of the seven teacher participants did not answer the survey question that asked them to select the percentage of their caseload students that lead the transition portion of their IEPs. Every participant answered the question that required them to indicate the number of students on their caseload that lead the transition portion of their IEP meeting. These results are consistent with the literature. For example, Hawbaker (2007) found that teachers need to feel that they have
The implication from this information is that teachers need consistent support from administrators to know that they have support to take time during the day to work with students on the skills needed to lead their IEP meetings. This study confirms that teachers need administrator support, availability of resources to help prepare students to lead their IEP meetings, and professional development to promote student-led IEP meetings.

**Teacher Perceptions of Student Involvement in their IEP Meetings**

Teachers answered with majority agreement that student-led IEPs may include student involvement in one area or multiple areas (strongly agree: 3, agree: 3, and strongly disagree: 1). This data helps to confirm that teachers will benefit from more professional development opportunities that promote student-led IEP meetings. Furthermore, teachers had mixed agreement/disagreement when answering the statement that they know where to locate resources to help them prepare their caseload students for their IEP meetings. The implication of this data indicates the need for future professional development on student-led IEP meetings with resources to assist teachers prepare their caseload students to lead parts (or all) of their IEP meeting.

Teachers know that their students need guidance and preparation to lead a portion (or all) of the IEP, and they meet with students to ask about strengths, needs, and access to/use of accommodations. Of the four participants that selected a percentage of students leading the transition portion of their IEP, one participant indicated that more than 75% of their caseload students lead the transition portion of their IEP meeting. Two participants indicated that between 25% to 50% of their caseload students lead the transition portion of their IEP meeting, and one
participant indicated that less than 25% of their caseload students lead the transition portion of their IEP meeting. Three participants did not complete the question, despite answering all other questions on the survey. It is possible that the participants did not feel comfortable selecting the percentage of students that lead a portion or all of their IEP meeting.

Additionally, the participants were asked to enter a numeric response to a question asking for the number of students on the teacher caseload that currently lead a portion (or all) of their IEP. This was important because participants were asked to select a percentage range of their caseload for a previous question, however, it was also necessary to know the number of students that caseload managers recognize as leading portions of their IEP meetings. All seven participants answered this question, with three participants indicating that none of their students lead a section (or all) of their IEP meetings. The four numeric responses received ranged from 0 to 18, with three participants indicating that zero of their caseload students lead a portion of their meeting. It would have been helpful for participants to enter a comment after the question that asked them to select a percentage of their caseload students that lead a portion (or all) of their IEP meetings. These findings contributed to research, as there was not previous research pertaining to teacher opinions of their caseload students’ leadership in the IEP process.

These findings contribute to the research while also confirming that some teachers take an “all or nothing” approach when identifying student-led IEPs (Eisenman et al. 2005). The implication from this information confirms that professional development to promote student-led IEPs as being a process that can start small and build upon student strengths would be important as a professional development opportunity. Professional development that includes resources that teachers can use to assist students in leading their IEP meetings is important to increasing the number of students leading a portion (or all) of their IEP meetings.
Perceptions of Self-Determination Skills Involved in the IEP Process

An examination of the data from the survey indicates that teachers perceive themselves as working on self-determination skills with their students. The participants also agreed that students need guidance and preparation to lead their own IEP meetings. The perceptions in the data were split between agreement and disagreement when answering whether students with self-determination skills are better able to lead their own IEP. Students with self-determination skills have the ability to express their individual preferences. Wehmeyer (2005) found that individual preferences should always be considered, and the individual should be empowered to make choices that impact the individual’s life. Professional development to support teachers with knowledge and resources to prepare their students with self-determination skills to lead their IEP meetings also ensures that the student’s desires and motivations are considered as the IEP is developed or reviewed. These findings indicate that connecting student interests and needs to future goals is critical to empowering the student to make choices that will help them in the future.

Teacher Perceptions of Administrator Support for Student-led IEPs

Teacher perceptions indicated that some felt supported by administration to take time during the school day to prepare students to lead their IEP meetings. Four teachers felt supported by administration to take time during the school day to prepare students to lead their IEP meetings, however, two teachers selected disagreement and one selected strong disagreement that they felt supported by administrators to take time during the school day to work with students on the skills needed to lead their IEP meetings. The findings from this study indicated that when teachers felt supported, there was also a higher level of student involvement in the IEP. Eisenman, Chamberlin, and McGahee-Kovac (2005) similarly found, through their mixed-
methods study regarding student-led IEPs, that teachers with strong administrative and colleague support were better able to implement student-led IEPs. This is important because it strongly supports the need for districts to ensure administrator support is clearly communicated to teachers and that teachers genuinely feel supported with student-led IEPs.

**Perceptions of Professional Development for Student-led IEPs**

The perception that the school district offers professional development to promote student-led IEP meetings had three teachers indicate strong disagreement, one teacher indicated disagreement, and three teachers indicated agreement. The teachers’ responses to common barriers to student-led IEPs highlighted a relationship between the barriers and level of student involvement in their IEP. The most important barrier was teacher knowledge of resources to help students lead their IEPs. When teachers know where to locate resources to help students lead their IEP meetings, they also indicated that students were involved in their IEP meetings in the most areas (7 of 12 areas). When teachers indicated disagreement with availability of resources, they also indicated that students were never involved in multiple areas of the IEP. The highest level of student involvement was indicated by a teacher that indicated agreement with administrator support, professional development, and strong agreement with availability of resources. This teacher indicated that 10 of 12 areas always or often had student involvement in the IEP.

The implication of this data is teachers need professional development in student-led IEPs and teachers need access and training with resources to help them prepare their students to increase the areas of student involvement and leadership in student-led IEP meetings. The teacher perceptions indicate that there is a relationship between these areas and the level of student participation. This is similar to a research study by Hawbaker (2007). For example, the
study by Hawbaker found that some of the barriers to student-led IEPs included lack of administrator support, lack of resources, lack of time, lack of support from colleagues, lack of motivation from the student, disability level of the student, lack of control, and having to make considerations for high stakes assessments/state standards. The district should increase professional development (training and resources, such as supporting a teacher inquiry group) to provide both tools and ongoing support and reflection opportunities to support teachers and increase student involvement in the IEP (Eisenman, Chamberlin, and McGahee-Kovac, 2005). Increased involvement in the IEP process and student-led IEPs has a relationship with academic achievement, higher graduation rates, and positive postschool outcomes (Cavendish, 2013).

**Perceptions of Resources Available for Student-led IEPs**

Teachers were asked to indicate level of agreement that they know where to find resources to help them teach their students how to lead their IEPs. Two teachers selected strong agreement, two teachers selected agreement, two teachers indicated disagreement, and one teacher selected strong disagreement. These results indicate the need for professional development and colleague support to ensure teachers know where to locate resources to assist them as they teach their students how to lead their IEPs. The findings of this study are similar to other studies, including Eisenman et al., 2005, which found that teacher inquiry groups that start small with teacher interested in working together and problem-solving had a ripple effect, with those teacher becoming ambassadors for change and increasing student-led IEPs. This approach may be beneficial because a trusted colleague sharing their tried-and-true method may inspire a teacher to try some of the same resources with their students.
Teacher Perceptions of Student Participation

The areas of importance for question 15 were adapted from The Self-Directed IEP Leadership Steps by Martin et al. (2006). Teacher perceptions of student involvement in the IEP process were collected in the following areas: invite IEP team, introduce self, state purpose of meeting, state strengths, share current grades, review goal progress, ask for feedback, ask questions, appropriately handle feedback from others, state needed support, express opinions, and discuss accommodations. The level of student involvement is important because, as prior research indicates, when students are involved in more areas of their IEP, they also experience increased academic achievement. Barnard-Brak and Lechtenberger (2010) found a positive correlation between student involvement in the IEP process and academic achievement. The areas with answers indicating high participation (always or often) include students introduce themselves, students state strengths, and students appropriately handle feedback. The areas with answers indicating low participation (seldom or never) include students state purpose, students share current grades, and students ask for feedback. There was no prior research that specifically measured teachers’ perceptions of student involvement in their IEPs.

Strengths and Limitations

The study celebrates the ways that teachers are already working to engage their students in leading their IEP meetings. A strength of the study is the importance of the teacher perceptions that it gathered. This study highlights areas that the district may want to consider improving, such as access to professional development to promote student-led IEPs and broadening the access to research-based resources to increase student involvement in their IEP meetings. The survey, designed by this researcher, was constructed specifically to the areas for which the researcher wanted to gather teacher perceptions based on areas of importance and
barriers found in the literature. A survey design provides a quantitative description of the opinions of the participants (Creswell, 2018). In addition, this study may help the district meet the requirement in the transition years about student involvement. The survey was free to use and easy to distribute via anonymous email through Qualtrics. The data were easily analyzed and are securely stored with a password within Qualtrics website. The data indicate that teachers in the high school at this district need access and training with materials to use with their students to increase involvement and leadership within their IEP meetings. As a result of the survey, the researcher observed more conversations surrounding transition and teachers discussing ways to involve students in their IEPs. Teachers were openly sharing resources and ideas that they have used to work with students and preparing them to lead portions (or all) of their IEP meetings.

This study had a small sample size, and generalizations to a wider population and other school districts are cautioned. There cannot be a one-size fits all approach because needs will vary based on district initiatives and priorities. Due to the nature of self-reported data, it is possible that the responses do not accurately reflect teachers’ true perceptions, but the answers that the teachers may have perceived to be the better choice, even if it’s not an honest perception. Finally, because participants were asked to indicate their perceptions relating to student-led IEP meetings, this may have led teachers to seek out instructional materials to introduce student-led IEPs to their caseload students. The weaknesses of the study are inherent to a survey design within one school in one school district.

**Implications for Future Research**

The overarching implication of this study highlights the need for discussion regarding self-determination skills and helping students take a genuine leadership role in their IEP meetings. The main barriers that were evident through this study were lack of administrator
support, the need for professional development on student-led IEPs, and inadequate knowledge of or access to resources.

Future studies that focus on a mixed-methods approach in determining the barriers to student-led IEP meetings, as perceived by teachers, will be helpful in determining ways to support teachers to increase student involvement. The barriers to student-led IEP meetings may determine the professional development and administrative support that is important to determining the approach needed to increase student-led IEPs. This approach may include a pre-survey of perceptions/barriers, professional development with resources tailored to expanding the preparation for student-led IEPs, and a post-survey to collect feedback.

The results of this study were shared back with the participants and the school district to increase student involvement in their IEP meeting. Perhaps the results sparked conversations about opportunities to increase instruction and support for student instruction in self-determination skills and additional ways to increase involvement as students learn transition skills. Those courageous conversations will help guide the journey to increasing student involvement in their IEP meetings.
References


http://www.jstor.org/stable/23879591


Wisconsin statute 115.787(2)(g)1

https://doi.org/10.1080/09362835.2013.802233
Appendix A

Informed Consent

Welcome to the research study!

University of Wisconsin Oshkosh
Title of Research Study: Teachers’ Perceptions of Student-led Individualized Education Plans

Principal Investigator: Dr. Stacey Skoning, Special and Early Childhood Education Faculty
Co-Principal Investigator: Mr. Joe Cook, Special and Early Childhood Education Academic Staff
Student Researcher: Courtney Sievert, MSE Candidate

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?

We are asking you to take part in this research study because there is little published research identifying special education teachers' perceptions of student-led individualized education plans.

What should I know about a research study?

- Whether or not you take part is up to you.
- You can choose not to take part.
- Your decision will not be held against you.
Why is this research being done?
The purpose of this research is to find out what teachers need to assist students to be more comfortable taking a leadership role in their IEP.

How long will the research last?
Your participation in this study will last approximately 15 minutes or less.

What happens if I say “Yes, I want to be in this research”?
If you agree to participate, you will be asked to complete an online survey regarding your perceptions of student-led individualized education plans.

What happens if I do not want to be in this research?
You can decide not to participate in this research and it will not be held against you. What happens if I say “Yes”, but I change my mind after entering the survey? You can leave the research at any time and it will not be held against you. To do so, simply exit the survey. Any data already collected will not be saved.

Are there any risks for participating in the survey?
There are only minimal risks that participants might encounter during this study. You will spend some amount of time answering survey questions. You can skip any question you do not wish to answer, or exit the survey at any point.

What happens to the information collected for the research?
During the data collection process, access to the survey will be limited to only the student researcher. The survey will not collect email addresses or
names. While results are being analyzed, access to the data will be limited to only the student researcher, the faculty principal investigator, and the academic staff co-principal investigator. No identifying information will be attached to the data. Data will be kept confidential and the school district will not be identified in the reporting of results. Pseudonyms will be used in place of any identifying information. All data and analysis will be kept in a locked cabinet in the student researcher’s office or her password protected computer after research is complete and results are reported.

This survey is being hosted by Qualtrics and involves a secure connection. Terms of service, addressing confidentiality, may be viewed at http://www.qualtrics.com/research-suite/. The anonymous feature will be used. You will be identified only by a unique subject number. All information will be kept on a password protected computer only accessible by the student researcher. The results of the research study may be published, but your name will not be used.

**Who can I talk to if I have questions or concerns?**

If you have any concerns about the study or questions about your rights as a research participant and would like to talk to someone other than the researchers, you may contact:

Chair, Institutional Review Board
Teachers’ Perceptions of Student-led IEPs

c/o Sponsored Programs and Faculty Development
University of Wisconsin Oshkosh
Oshkosh, WI 54901
(920) 424-1415

What else do I need to know?
Participation in this research is voluntary.

Consent
If you want a copy of this consent for your records, you can print it from the screen.
If you wish to participate, please click the "I Agree" button and you will be taken to the survey.
If you do not wish to participate in this study, please select "I Disagree" or select X in the corner of your browser to exit.

- I Agree
- I Disagree, I do not wish to participate

I am currently licensed as a special education teacher or service provider:

- Yes
- No
My caseload students are age 14+

- Yes
- No

Student-led IEPs can include student involvement in just one area or multiple areas of the IEP process:

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

The percentage of my caseload students leading the TRANSITION portion of their IEPs:

- No students on my caseload have led the TRANSITION portion of their IEP
- Less than 25%
- Between 25–50%
- Between 50–75%
- More than 75%
I work on self-determination skills with my caseload students:

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Students that have self-determination skills are better able to lead their own IEP meeting:

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Students need guidance and preparation to lead their IEP meetings:

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree
I feel supported by administration to take time during the school day to teach students how to lead their IEP meetings:

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

My school district offers professional development opportunities to promote student-led IEP meetings:

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

I know where to find resources to use with my caseload students to help me teach my students how to lead their IEP meetings:
In the weeks leading up to an annual IEP meeting, I meet with the student to ask about their strengths, needs, access to/use of accommodations:

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Most of my caseload students know their IEP goals.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree
The number of students on my caseload that lead a portion (or all) of their IEP meeting:

My caseload students are involved in their IEPs in the following ways:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Always</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Seldom</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>invite IEP team</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>introduce self</td>
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<tr>
<td>State purpose of meeting</td>
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<tr>
<td>State strengths</td>
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<tr>
<td>Share current grades</td>
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<tr>
<td>Review past goals</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ask for feedback</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ask questions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Appropriately handle feedback from others</td>
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<tr>
<td>State needed support</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Express opinions and goals</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discuss accommodations</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
Please add any additional comments below: