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DEPARTMENT OF

*Children,
Families &
Learning*

Information and Training Needs Survey

Report on the Statewide Information and Training Needs
of Parents With Children With Disabilities

September, 1998

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Report on the Statewide Information and Training of Parents
With Children With Disabilities

Division of Special Education
Minnesota Department of Children, Families, & Learning

The opinions and perspectives expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the position or policies of the Minnesota Department of Children, Families & Learning or its employees, nor should any official endorsement be inferred. Preparation of this report was supported in part through funds provided by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). For further information, contact the Division of Special Education, Minnesota Department of Children, Families & Learning, 550 Cedar Street, St. Paul, Minnesota 55101.

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Information and Training Needs Survey

Report on the Statewide Information and Training Needs
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Executive Summary

The purpose of this executive summary is to provide a synopsis of the results of a survey developed by Division of Special Education staff in cooperation with various parent organizations in the state. The survey was designed to address the federal parent information and training requirements outlined in the 1997 reauthorization of IDEA. To accomplish this task, survey data was gathered from approximately 3,000 parents throughout Minnesota to obtain information in the following areas:

- Disabilities and Special Education Services
- Special Education Laws and Rules
- Resources to Help Families of Children With Disabilities
- Advocacy and Collaboration Skills
- Delivery of Information

In addition to obtaining information from the entire sample of parents who participated in this effort, survey data was also analyzed by examining the responses of specific groups of parents based on such demographic characteristics as geographic region and community size, ethnicity, age and disability of child. The purpose of this aspect of the analysis was to provide a more in-depth understanding about the special training needs of various groups of parents within the state, particularly those who have been traditionally "underserved." A descriptive approach was employed to analyze the data obtained from this survey, where percentages were used to describe the results of the general sample group and by grouping based on demographic characteristics.

Key Findings

- ▶ The five highest ranked topics where parents indicated they either *Need Some* or *Need Lots More* information were found in areas that include:
 - (1) the recent changes in the IDEA,
 - (2) rights of the child with regard to the Minnesota graduation standards,
 - (3) influencing decision-making at the local, regional, or state level,
 - (4) transition planning for their child, and
 - (5) options which may be available to their child in different educational settings.

- ▶ The five highest ranked topics where parents indicated they *Have Enough* information were found in areas that involve:
 - (1) knowing who to contact to discuss their child's educational program,
 - (2) transportation issues between home and school,
 - (3) how to communicate and collaborate with school staff,
 - (4) rights of the child with regard to physical access to school buildings and programs, and
 - (5) child's rights with regard to school conduct, discipline, suspension, and expulsion.

- ▶ The five highest ranked methods of information delivery where parents indicated either *Acceptable* or *Best Way* included:
 - (1) workshops at school,
 - (2) direct consultation with school staff,
 - (3) community-school newsletters,
 - (4) individual help from a parent organization, and
 - (5) dissemination of printed materials.

- ▶ The five highest ranked methods of information delivery in which parents indicated were either *Unacceptable* or *Difficult to Access* included:
 - (1) statewide conferences,
 - (2) information transmitted via computer
 - (3) regional conferences,
 - (4) public library materials, and
 - (5) audiotapes.

- ▶ Most respondents indicated a preference to have information and training materials disseminated in the English language. Of the respondents who indicated "minority" status on their surveys, 84% selected the "English", 11% selected the "Spanish", 2% selected "Asian," and 2% selected "Other."

- ▶ Approximately 65% of respondents indicated they had "access" to the Internet within the home or the community. To some extent, access seemed to be more prevalent in larger, rather than smaller communities and somewhat less accessible for respondents who indicated minority status. Although the majority of the sample indicated access to the Internet, most indicated that receiving information "via computer" as a mode of information delivery was highly rated as either *Unacceptable* or *Difficult to Access*.

- ▶ With regard to the demographic characteristic of age, parents of young children with disabilities were generally more likely to indicate stronger information needs in such areas as parent rights, types of services that are available to children, and basic special education laws and rules. Parents of younger children were also more likely to express a higher level of need about assistive devices and technologies available to help their children at home and within the school. Survey results showed that parents of older children were somewhat less inclined to indicate a need for information in these areas, focusing instead on the transition needs of their children and the role of community agencies to support student IEP objectives.

- ▶ Survey results occasionally showed that respondents living in large, sparsely populated geographical areas were more likely to indicate stronger levels of need

than those living in more highly populated areas. Typically, discrepancies were found in the assessment of needs related to services whose availability and accessibility can vary as a function of geographic location. For example, information needs in the areas of advocacy group support, programs to help families (e.g., respite care), and learning more about assistive technologies were all areas rated more highly by both those living in large, less populated areas and smaller sized communities.

- ▶ When studied from the demographic perspective of ethnicity, survey results consistently revealed high rates of information needs in all content areas. Whereas the results of the general sample generally indicated that many parents were informed about such issues as their basic rights and the types of services available to their children, those who indicated membership within a minority group were much more likely to indicate they either *Need Some* or *Need Lots More* information. While this general response pattern was observed at various rates among various minority respondents and within each content area (e.g., special education services, special education laws, resources to help families, and advocacy skills), it was particularly the case with African American and American Indian respondents.
- ▶ Relative to respondents representing various disability groups, parents of children with Emotional/Behavioral Disorders were typically found to indicate higher information need levels than the general sample group in such areas as how parents could help their child at home, types of services available from advocacy groups, and issues concerning conduct, discipline, and suspension. Similarly, variation in the information needs could sometimes be observed among parents of children with learning disabilities, physical impairments and those identified as multiply impaired.

For additional information or to receive a copy of the complete report, contact Elizabeth Watkins at the Division of Special Education of the Minnesota Department of Children, Families & Learning (elizabeth.watkins@state.mn.us). Also, you may call Drucilla Smith at (651) 582-8657 (drucilla.smith@state.mn.us).

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Introduction

One of the most important aspects of special education services is the role played by parents in the education of their child with a disability. Whether their status is one of a “new” parent just beginning to learn the complex rules and procedures, or someone who has attended numerous IEP meetings as an active member of the planning team, the involved parent is pivotal to ensuring the long-term success of their child. While just the willingness to participate in the planning process can do much to help meet the educational needs of the student, many parents find their experiences as a planning team member are greatly enhanced as a result of having acquired knowledge and skills through various forms of information and training activities.

Having long recognized the importance of their participation in this process, advocacy groups and other parent organizations have worked diligently not only to secure the rights, but have also invested heavily in the implementation of training activities to actively engage parents in the education process. Although support for these activities has come from many sectors, it is clearly visible at the federal level, particularly in the array of parent information dissemination and training initiatives outlined in the 1997 reauthorization of IDEA. As part of a continuing effort to increase awareness of parents of their rights and those of their children in the educational process, IDEA contains provisions for information and training activities that are aimed at helping parents to:

- Better understand the nature of their child's disabilities and their educational needs
- Communicate effectively with school personnel regarding their child's education
- Participate in the decision-making and IEP process
- Become informed about their rights under IDEA and to participate in school reform activities.

In addition to these training objectives, another aim of these regulations is to provide information and training activities, particularly those designated as “underserved parents” and “parents of children who may inappropriately identified.” This aspect of the regulation clearly addresses the needs of those who traditionally have had few opportunities to participate in the educational system as a result of environmental and socioeconomic challenges.

DESCRIPTION OF METHOD, PROCEDURE & SAMPLE

In a continuing effort to meet these information and training objectives, the Special Education Division of the Minnesota Department of Children, Families, & Learning (CFL) has actively supported this process, working alongside various organizations within the state in the planning, development, and implementation of information dissemination and training activities in a wide range of topical areas for parents of children with disabilities. Prior to establishing information dissemination and training priorities that will be implemented in the future, it is essential to obtain data that will identify the current informational needs of parents. To accomplish this task, the Division of Special Education, along with various parent organizations, engaged in a joint effort to develop a survey to collect data which will be used to address the needs of parents in a manner that maximizes available information and training resources.

Method

DESCRIPTION OF SURVEY

Staff of the Division of Education and representatives of parent organizations in Minnesota collaborated in the development of a survey to obtain information and training needs of parents of children with disabilities. Designed to address the requirements of IDEA, the group generated and identified five major components of the survey which consisted of the following content areas (refer to Appendix A for a reproduction of the survey):

- A. Disabilities and Special Education Services**—How the child can be helped at home; what types of services are needed; how much services are needed; types of modifications needed by child; and types of options which exist for child in school.
- B. Special Education Laws and Rules**—Parental rights and responsibilities; responsibilities of the school, child's rights with regard to the least restrictive alternative, involvement in regular education, transportation, transition, and involvement in extra-curricular activities; child's rights with regard to school conduct, discipline, suspension and expulsion; child's rights with regard to graduation standards assessment; and recent changes as a result of the reauthorization of IDEA.
- C. Resources to Help Families of Children with Disabilities**—Service options available from other agencies; services available from advocacy groups; programs to help families (e.g., parent support groups, respite care, home-health care); and technology and adaptive equipment options for children with disabilities.
- D. Advocacy and Collaboration Skills**—Knowing who to contact for IEP questions; how to communicate with school staff; what to do if there are communication problems with school; ways of resolving conflicts with school; how to be an effective advocate for child; how to work with other parents to provide support; and how to influence policy at the local, regional, and state level.
- E. Delivery of Information**—Preferred methods and approaches to receiving information; language preferences of printed materials; and Internet access.

DESCRIPTION OF METHOD, PROCEDURE & SAMPLE

A Likert-type scale consisting of various response options was used to measure information needs in the above content areas based on the type of data that needed to be collected. For Parts A through D, a five-point scale was used, consisting of the following response options to indicate the level of their information and training needs: *Have Enough (and Don't Need More)*, *Need Some*, and *Need Lots More*. The response options for Part E, designed to obtain data about information delivery systems and formats, consisted of a four-point scale that included: *Not Acceptable (This Option Not Acceptable to Me)*, *Difficult to Access (Difficult for Me to Access Information This Way)*, *Acceptable (This is an Acceptable Way for Me to Get Information)*, and *Best Way (This is the Best Way for Me to Get Information Related to Special Education)*. In addition to the scales included for each of the major topical areas, the survey also contained items to measure Internet access within the school and community and sought recommendations about strategies to facilitate future information and training efforts.

PROCEDURE

Once completed, surveys were mailed to parents based on mailing lists obtained from PACER Center, ARC of Minnesota, ARC of Hennepin County, and MACMH. To ensure privacy, the services of a bonded mailing agency were used to distribute the surveys. Each survey was accompanied by an introductory letter explaining its purpose and how that data would be used for information and training activities. To increase the return rate of the surveys, cover letters were printed on the letterhead of the participating organizations from which parent participants were obtained. In all cases, confidentiality of respondents was guaranteed. In addition to using mailing lists, additional surveys were distributed to a number of low incidence disability projects throughout the state.

In order to collect reliable data about the information and training needs of parents in content areas related to special education, another objective of the participating organizations developing the survey was to obtain data which reflected an accurate cross-section of the population of parents of children with disabilities within the state. As such, participating organizations were particularly interested in addressing IDEA requirements related to obtaining information and training needs of "underserved parents and parents of children who may be inappropriately identified." To accomplish this task, survey respondents were asked to provide information in a number of demographic categories in which research often has shown to impact the quality, effectiveness, and intensity in the delivery of special education services to students with disabilities. Where appropriate, an operational definition along with a rationale for collecting data in each demographic category, is described below:

Age Because of the wide age range in which services are available to students, it is important to examine variation in this demographic area. Four age groups were established to roughly represent the educational levels of early childhood, elementary, middle, and high

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school years. The following age groupings were used: Less than 5 Years; 6 to 10 Years; 11 to 15 Years; and 16 Years and Older.

Region and Community

Data collected based on the nine Minnesota Educational Cooperative Service Unit (ECSU) regions in Minnesota is intended to provide data about the information and training needs of parents who live in large, less populated geographic areas as opposed to those who live in smaller, but more concentrated population areas. On the survey, respondents were asked to indicate the ECSU region where they resided shown in Table 1:

Northwest	Regions 1 & 2
Northeast	Region 3
West Central	Region 4
North Central	Region 5
Central:	Region 7
Southwest	Regions 6 & 8
South Central	Region 9
Southeast	Region 10
7 County Metro	Region 11

Similar in rationale applied to regions, data were also analyzed according to population of town or city to determine whether differences in responses could be observed with regard to the size of the city or town one resides. Size of community was categorized on the following response options: Rural or Small Town (less than 500 people); Town of 500-3000 People; Town of 3,000-10,000 People; City of 10,000 to 50,000 People; or City of More Than 50,000 People.

Ethnicity

As a result of extensive efforts aimed at studying the issue of disproportionate representation of minority students in special education programs, it was considered important to examine information and training needs from the standpoint of ethnicity. Response options involving ethnicity included: Hispanic; American Indian; African American; Caucasian; or Asian/Pacific Islander. To a large extent, the number of survey participants representing ethnic groups other than "Caucasian" were limited by the numbers of various racial and ethnic minorities included on the mailing lists obtained from the participating organizations.

Because of the relatively small numbers of respondents on the mailing used within groups not identifying themselves as "Caucasian," it was sometimes helpful to combine these groups to represent a generic "minority" group so that the overall percentages of this group could be compared to what was designated as the "nonminority" (i.e. Caucasian) group. Even though this partitioning created an artificial dichotomy of "minority" and "nonminority,"

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groupings, the information obtained as a result of this process was helpful in identifying potential areas of need.

Disability Area Data collected in this demographic area is intended to provide information about the needs of parents based on their child's disability. Although the term "disability" is often used as a general concept, the actual nature of specific disabilities may vary considerably. As such, it is important to learn whether the information and training needs of parents will vary as well. To define "disability" group, response options included the thirteen disability categories defined in federal regulations (e.g., Visual Impairments, Speech/Language, Specific Learning Disabilities).

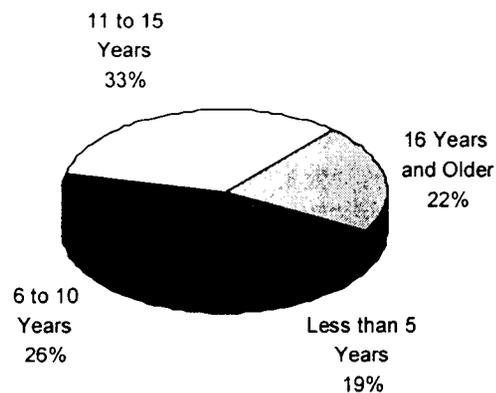
To complete the survey, respondents were asked to rate the option which best described their information needs based on each stimulus item in the five major content areas. In addition, respondents were also given the opportunity to provide comments and recommendations regarding parent information and training activities. Upon completion, respondents returned the survey by simply folding it, using the stamped, self-addressed pre-printed section on the survey form. When sufficient numbers of surveys were returned to CFL staff, they were prepared for data entry procedures and preliminary descriptive analysis.

DESCRIPTION OF RESPONDENT SAMPLE

The various analyses included in this report is based on 2,880 surveys returned by parents of students with disabilities. Based on the demographic variable described in the previous section, the characteristics of the sample are described below:

Age Figure 1 shows the percentage of the respondent sample representing various age groups of students. As shown, the majority of respondents (33%) indicated the ages of their children were between 11 to 15 years, followed by the 6 to 10 year group (26%). In general, age groups were found to be fairly equally distributed among the general sample.

Fig. 1: Sample by Student Age



DESCRIPTION OF METHOD, PROCEDURE & SAMPLE

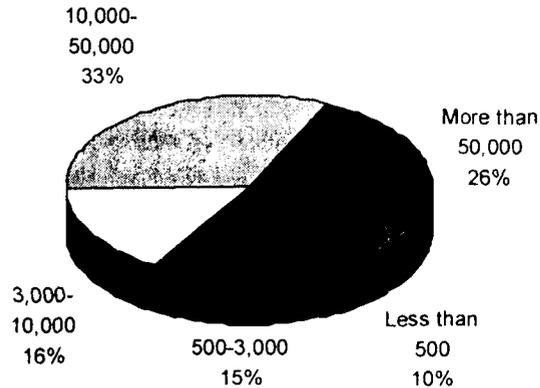
Region and Community

Table 2 indicates the sample based on ECSU region by number and percentage of respondents. As shown, about half of the sample is comprised of parents residing in the 7 County Metro region, an area that includes Minnesota's major metropolitan areas of Minneapolis and Saint Paul and surrounding suburbs. Sample description based on size of City/Town can be seen in Figure 2. Once again, the majority of respondents were found to represent largely urban areas of the state.

Table 2: Sample by Region

	N	Percent
7 County Metro: Region 11	1,417	49%
Central: Region 7	327	11%
South Central: Region 9	169	6%
Northeast: Region 3	167	6%
Southeast: Region 10	164	6%
Southwest: Regions 6 & 8	157	5%
West Central: Region 4	138	5%
North Central: Region 5	133	5%
Northwest: Regions 1 & 2	95	3%
No Region Indicated	113	4%

Fig. 2: Sample by Town/City



DESCRIPTION OF METHOD, PROCEDURE & SAMPLE

Ethnicity Table 3 shows the sample based on ethnicity. As shown, 96% of the respondents were of Caucasian ethnicity, with the remaining 4% comprised of other groups. To provide information about the general representation of the various ethnic groups in which information was obtained on the survey, the sample percents are presented along with the actual population percents for the general Minnesota population.

	N	Sample %	State %
Caucasian	2,540	96%	93%
American Indian	34	1%	1%
African American	26	1%	2%
Hispanic	23	1%	2%
Asian/Pacific Islander	24	1%	2%

Disability Area Table 4 shows the sample representation based on disability area. When comparing state percentages based on child count data, the sample appears to be somewhat overrepresented in "low incidence" categories and underrepresented in "high incidence" categories. These discrepancies can be seen in such areas as Learning Disabilities, Other Health Impaired, Early Childhood Special Education, and Physically Impairments. Based on an in-depth analysis of the categories selected by respondents, it was found that many chose multiple disabilities, not treating them as single, mutually exclusive categories as originally intended. While the sample generally retains some characteristics of the known population based on child count data, the results obtained from this particular demographic should only be interpreted in a very general sense. Additional information about this demographic can be seen in the following section entitled *Approach Used to Analyze Data*.

APPROACH USED TO ANALYZE DATA

A descriptive approach is used to analyze the data collected in this survey. Specifically, percentages are commonly used to describe the frequencies of the various options selected by respondents. In many cases, these percentages are reported based on the responses of specific groups included within each demographic area. For example, percentages are reported for "Parents of Children 5 or Less Years" to describe similarities and differences for the "age" demographic. Readers should become familiar with the various categories used within each demographic area detailed in the previous section. As a means of illustrating differences among groups in their responses on some items, sometimes it was necessary to compare the responses of the specific categorical group (e.g., "Parents of Children 5 or Less Years") with those of the total group for a demographic area. Occasionally, the total sample group is referred to as the "general sample" or "all

DESCRIPTION OF METHOD, PROCEDURE & SAMPLE

Table 4: Sample by Disability

	Sample %	State %
Learning Disability	14.70%	37.44%
Speech/Language	10.80%	18.54%
Emotional/Behavioral	10.00%	16.67%
Early Childhood Special Education	2.30%	8.35%
Mental Impairment	19.20%	7.42%
Other Health Impaired	17.60%	4.18%
Severely Multiply Impaired	0.90%	2.63%
Deaf/Hard of Hearing	5.00%	1.78%
Physically Impaired	8.80%	1.44%
Autistic	7.00%	0.92%
Visual Impairment	2.70%	0.41%
Traumatic Brain Injury	0.80%	0.20%
Deaf/Blind	0.10%	0.02%

respondents” and reflects the obtained percentages for all parents who provided a response to the item, irrespective of demographic variable.

To summarize the responses of multiple items within a section, it was occasionally necessary to “aggregate,” or group together, these items to determine a “mean” or average score. To show the extent to which some the percentages varied among groups, a “standard deviation” was used in some cases as well. The standard deviation is a statistic which indicates dispersion, or “spread” of percentages relative to the average. In general, the larger the standard deviation, the more variability can be observed in the responses among parents. Another measure of variation used to report results was the “range,” simply the difference between the highest and lowest percentage values. Because the response options of *Doesn't Apply* was typically selected at a rate of less than 5% of all respondents for survey parts A through D, these results are not shown in the tables, nor are they included in this report. Rather, all percentages are reported based on the “valid,” or actual number of respondents who selected the *Have Enough*, *Need Some*, or *Need Lots More* options. Finally, readers should note that due to the “rounding” function used in the computer program to prepare this report, not all percentages will necessarily sum to 100%. As a result, the percentages presented in the body of the report and the tables included in the appendices may range from 99% to 101%, depending on whether the numbers were rounded “down” (i.e. to 99%) or “up” (i.e., to 100%).

The primary approach used to examine differences between specific groups within the various demographic areas involved the use of crossbreaks or “crosstabulation” procedures. Crossbreaks provide information that makes it possible to compare groups

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with each other, including information about group percentages, expected and observed frequencies, and other indicators to determine whether “significant” differences occurred. Because this report is intended to provide descriptive information regarding the information and training needs of parents, no formal “tests” of significance (e.g., chi-square) were conducted. However, it was sometimes helpful to view the differences between the standardized residuals generated by the crossbreak analysis to informally determine where potentially important significant differences may have occurred. In this case, a deviation of +2.0 was used to identify such differences.

In the analysis and subsequent interpretation of the obtained results, two limitations in particular must be mentioned. The first involves the multiple responses indicated by parents in the “disability” demographic area. In this case, the results and interpretation contained in this report must be approached with some degree of caution because of the uncertainty as to which disability area indicated truly reflects the actual disability of their child based on federal definitional criteria. However, because the data do reflect general characteristics of the “known” group according to state child count data, analysis procedures were nevertheless applied to determine whether any general response patterns could be observed among the various disability groups. To improve accuracy of reporting disability area in the future, survey respondents should be limited to the selection of only one disability category and that they be encouraged to contact their child’s case manager if uncertain as to the specific disability category of their child.

The second factor which limited the interpretation of survey results was the relatively low numbers of survey participants who represented specific ethnic groups. As such, although results are occasionally reported by specific ethnic groups, readers should be cautioned that this was largely done for illustrative purposes. It is suggested that more reliable results can be obtained by examining differences based on the “minority” and “nonminority” group categories as described in the previous section. Future efforts to collect survey information from minority parents should employ “oversampling” techniques to allow for a more in-depth analysis of parental needs. For example, it would be helpful to attempt to obtain survey information from *all* minority parents of children with disabilities to study priority areas of need. Although this sample would not be “proportional” to the general population, the information which could be obtained from it would be very helpful for service providers and policymakers alike.

Despite the imitations noted above, the data obtained from this survey can be considered as reliable indicators of the information and training needs of parents in Minnesota and within each demographic area. While the present analysis had identified the major areas where information and training needs exist, readers are advised to study the results of this survey and apply other types of interpretive schemes or by generating their own hypotheses about where other needs may exist as well. One must keep in mind that the results of surveys are naturally complex, and although descriptive statistics can help to identify major need areas, the task of uncovering needs not clearly identified by descriptive measures is

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something that is still largely subjective and perhaps best deliberated within the context of groups and committees whose purpose is to identify information and training priorities.

Results

General Sample

To provide readers with an overall “preview” of how parents responded to survey items, it is helpful to provide some information about their “response tendencies.” Although it is recognized that reporting “averages” for the entire scale is likely to reveal little in terms of identifying specific information needs, it is nevertheless of interest to note, as a group, how often they tended to select each of the three options of *Have Enough*, *Need Some*, and *Need Lots More*. Based on a composite of all the items included in survey parts A through D, it was found that, on average, respondents selected the *Have Enough* option at the rate of 46%, the *Need Some* at 36% and the *Need Lots More* at 18%. In addition, a greater degree of variability was observed when respondents selected the *Have Enough* option (standard deviation = 14%) than when they chose *Need Lots More* (standard deviation = 7%). As a result, one would expect to observe a wider range of differences among those selecting the *Have Enough* option than those who indicated they *Need Lots More*. These percentages will be helpful in examining other results based on items presented in the following sections.

To obtain a summary of the results for parts A-D, readers may wish to review Appendixes B and C, which include tables of percentages based on each item. Appendix B indicates the results according to numerical order of the item used in the survey, while Appendix C shows the results when items are ranked in descending order according to composites obtained by summing the *Need Some* and *Need Lots More* response options. Also, summary percentages for part E, *Delivery of Information*, can be seen in Appendixes D-F. The table in Appendix D shows the percentages based on the numerical order of the items, while the tables in Appendixes E and F display percentages ranked by a combination of either the *Acceptable* and *Best Way* response options or the *Not Acceptable* and *Difficult to Access*.

In addition to describing these composite percentages, it is also often helpful to provide information at the “margins”; that is, showing the five items that were most highly ranked as information and training needs and the five items where respondents indicated they *Had Enough* information, an indication of a low need. In the case of determining the five highest items, rankings were determined by summing the percentages of *Need Some* and *Need Lots More* response options. These results are presented in Table 5. As shown, many respondents expressed a need for information and training in areas that involve the recent changes in IDEA, graduation standards testing, how to influence decision-making in special education, planning for transition, and learning more about options that may be available in different educational settings.

RESULTS—GENERAL SAMPLE

Table 5: Five "Highest" Ranked *Need Some* or *Need Lots More* Items

	Have Enough	Need Some	Need Lots More
The recent changes in the Federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).	16%	52%	32%
My child's rights with regard to the new tests required for graduation from high school in Minnesota.	24%	41%	35%
How to influence special education decisions at the local, regional or state level.	30%	46%	24%
Have a plan for transition to adult life.	32%	38%	30%
My child's options for different educational settings.	33%	39%	28%

Table 6 indicates the five items in which the majority of respondents indicated they *Had Enough* information and hence, less likely to indicate an information and training need. These items included those which sampled such topical areas as knowing who to contact for IEP questions, transportation issues, communicating and collaborating with school staff, the child's rights to be educated within the least restrictive environment and in matters involving discipline, suspension, and expulsion. It should be noted, however, even

Table 6: Five Highest Ranked *Have Enough* Items

	Have Enough	Need Some	Need Lots More
Who to contact at my child's school to discuss his/her special education program	83%	12%	5%
Have free transportation between home and school.	69%	20%	11%
How to communicate and collaborate with school personnel regarding my child.	67%	23%	10%
My child's rights to have physical access to school buildings and programs.	64%	25%	11%
My child's rights with regard to school conduct, discipline, suspension and expulsion.	58%	28%	14%

RESULTS—GENERAL SAMPLE

though these items were found to produce the highest rate of *Have Enough* responses, a “need” may still exist among specific groups. For example, although issues involving the child’s rights in the areas of school discipline, suspension, and expulsion may not be seen as a priority area for many parents, a more detailed analysis of the results based on various demographic characteristics, however, suggests that parents of children with Emotional/Behavioral Disorders are more likely than others to identify this as an information and training need.

When asked about their preferences regarding how information and training initiatives should be delivered given various formats (e.g., workshops, individual consultation, newsletter), the *Acceptable* response option was selected by an average of 51% of the respondents irrespective of format type. On average, only 11% of the respondents indicated the proposed formats were *Not Acceptable*. To determine their five highest ranked preferences about how information and training is delivered, the *Acceptable* and *Best Way* response options were combined. In doing so, 94% of respondents indicated that a workshop held at the school was either *Acceptable* or the *Best Way* to meet their information needs. This preference was closely followed by obtaining information directly from school staff (93%) and through the use of community-school newsletters (92%). In addition, information obtained through individual support by a parent advocacy organization and the dissemination of printed materials were also considered to be viable means of delivering information to parents. Percentages of the five most highly ranked information delivery modes as either *Acceptable* or *Best Way* can be seen in Table 7.

Table 7: Five Highest Ranked *Acceptable* or *Best Way* Items

	Acceptable	Best Way	(Combined)
Workshop at School	45%	49%	94%
Consultation w/School Staff	48%	45%	93%
Community School Newsletter	62%	30%	92%
Individual Help—Parent Organization	56%	35%	91%
Printed Materials	62%	29%	91%

To determine the five “least preferred” modes of information delivery, percentages of *Not Acceptable* and *Difficult to Access* response option were combined and placed in rank order to indicate the formats least likely to be utilized by most parents. As shown in Table 8, low acceptance levels were noted on items involving attendance at statewide conferences, accessing information by the computer, attending a regional conference, obtaining materials through the public library or the use of audiotapes. Although not indicated in the table, the item in which most respondents indicated either *Not Acceptable*

Table 8: Five Highest Ranked *Not Acceptable* or *Difficult to Access* Items

	Not Acceptable	Difficult to Access	(Combined)
Statewide Conference	11%	58%	69%
Computer	15%	29%	44%
Regional Conference	5%	33%	38%
Public Library Materials	8%	21%	29%
Audiotapes	12%	12%	24%

or *Difficult to Access* was that which sampled responses about meeting with a home-school liaison. However, because this item specifically indicated "Indian or bilingual" home-school liaison, it is likely that most respondents generally found it not to be applicable to their needs. Also, like other summary information presented throughout this report, some caution must be exercised when interpreting results. For example, with regard to the finding that statewide conferences were highly ranked as a format that was either *Not Acceptable* or *Difficult to Access*, it is possible that respondent ratings might be based on logistical or expense related difficulties involved in attending such conferences, rather than overall effectiveness of such conferences to provide them with useful information and training.

Because the results presented in the above tables are only intended to provide a general perspective about the information and training needs of parents, readers are encouraged to review the results within each of the following sections entitled *Disabilities and Special Education Services*, *Special Education Laws and Rules*, *Resources to Help Families of Children with Disabilities*, *Advocacy and Collaboration Skills*, and *Delivery of Information*. Each section contains additional information about how parents responded on specific items, and includes an analysis of results based on the demographic factors described in the previous section.

Part A: Disabilities and Special Education Services

General Sample

On average, about 44% of all respondents indicated they *Have Enough* information in areas involving how to help their child at home, what types of services are needed, how much services are needed, how to get the school to provide the needed services, and the types of modifications needed to participate within the classroom. An average of 40% of all respondents indicated they *Need Some* information in these areas, followed by 16% who indicated they *Need Lots More*. The most highly ranked need area, where 67% of all survey respondents indicated they would either *Need Some* or *Need Lots More* information, was observed on an item which asked parents about their needs regarding

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the various types of educational options that are available to their child (e.g., continuum or array of services, different placements inside or outside of the district).

Age Age variation was observed on items which probed parent information and training needs regarding their knowledge and awareness of what modifications were needed. In this case, parents of children “16 Years and Older” were more likely to indicate they *Have Enough* information on this topic, while parents of children “Less than Five Years” were more likely to indicate they either would *Need Some* or *Need Lots More* information.

Region and Community

In general, the results obtained from respondents in most regions were found to be consistent with those of the 7 County Metro Region, the region that contains the largest number (49%) of survey respondents. Some differences, however, were noted among survey respondents living in other regions within the state. These were primarily found in the responses of parents from Northwest Regions 1 & 2 and the Southwest Regions 6 & 8 and to a lesser extent, North Central Region 5. For example, on average, the frequency with which the *Need Lots More* option was selected by all respondents ranged from 10% to 16%, while the range for those respondents living in Northwest Regions 1 & 2 was 14% to 26%, and 13% to 23% for those living in Regions 6 & 8. With regard to size of community, few differences could be found among the general sample of survey respondents representing various towns and cities.

Ethnicity In general, respondents who indicated minority group membership were less likely to indicate they *Have Enough* and more likely to indicate they *Need Lots More* information and training in most areas included in this section. This information is presented in Table 9. This response pattern was found to be the case for most minority group respondents, although an exception was noted in the case of Hispanic respondents, whose information needs seemed to be more consistent with the general sample of respondents. On average, 45% of the Caucasian respondents indicated they *Have Enough* information, while the *Need Lots More* category was selected by 15% of this group of respondents. In contrast, American Indian respondents selected the *Have Enough* option at a rate of 27%, and the *Need Lots More* option at approximately double the rate of Caucasian respondents. To a varying degree, a similar pattern was observed in the response patterns of survey participants who identified themselves as African American and Asian/Pacific Islanders.

Disability Area

Differences in response patterns could be observed among several disabilities areas, most notably those representing Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD) and Emotional/Behavioral Disorders (E/BD), and those representing the Physically Impaired (PI) and Severely Multiply Impaired (SMI). In general, respondents representing the SLD and E/BD disability areas were less likely to indicate they *Have Enough* information and more likely to indicate they *Need Lots More* information when compared to parents representing the PI and SMI disability areas. For example, on items which sampled information needs about how parents could help their child with a disability in the home, 37% of the LD respondents and

Table 9: Disabilities and Special Education Services by Minority-Nonminority Groupings*

	Have Enough		Need Lots More	
	Minority	Nonminority	Minority	Nonminority
Mean	34%	45%	24%	15%
Standard Deviation	4%	6%	6%	7%

*Percentages are based on an average for all items included in section.

35% of the E/BD respondents indicated they *Have Enough* information. These percentages are contrasted by those of the PI and SMI groups who selected this option at the much higher rates of 60% and 61%, respectively. Similarly disproportionate discrepancies were also found in the rate in which these respondent groups selected the *Need Lots More* category as well. This response pattern could be observed on items which probed information needs about how parents could help at home, type of services needed by their child, and the quantity of services needed. However, information need differences between disability groups were less evident on items that sampled how to access needed services, knowing what modifications are needed in the child's education program, and understanding the types of educational options available to their children.

Part B. Special Education Laws and Rules

General Sample

Based on the general sample of respondents, items involving issues of least restrictive alternative, transportation, and conduct and discipline rights were those in which the majority of respondents indicated they *Have Enough* information. When the options of *Need Some* and *Need Lots More* were combined, the most highly ranked information needs were found in areas which involve transition services (68%), graduation standards testing (76%), and the recent changes in IDEA legislation (84%). These percentages are contrasted with an overall 27% average in which the *Need Some* and *Need Lots More* options were selected for all of the items included in this section.

Age

Occasionally, a relationship based on student age could be observed on items assessing information needs in areas that involve the rights and responsibilities of parents, students, and the school. For example, on an item which probed parents needs specific to the responsibilities of the school, 38% of the group with children "Less than 5 Years Old" indicated they *Have Enough* information, while 51% of the group of parents whose children were "16 Years and Older" indicated the same. While increments in the percentages of those who indicated they *Have Enough* information increased from the youngest to oldest groups, the increase was not quite as pronounced within the middle age categories.

Region and Community

Very little variation was found between either region or size of the community with regard to survey results. In general, irrespective of what region of the state one lives in or the population of their city or township, information needs were highest in areas which involve transition, graduation standards testing, and the changes in IDEA legislation. Although

RESULTS—SPECIAL EDUCATION LAWS AND RULES

regional variation could be seen to a small extent with regard to an item which sampled needs in the area of transportation, the percentage differences were not found to be significant, nor could any discernable differences be found with regard to community size and information needs about transportation issues.

Ethnicity In an analysis of the responses made by “Nonminority” and “Minority” groupings in the categories of *Have Enough* and *Need Lots More*, it was found that minority respondents were somewhat less likely to indicate they *Have Enough* and somewhat more likely to indicate they *Need Lots More* information for most items included in this section. In each case, a difference of approximately ten percentage points was observed, with only a moderate degree of variability noted. These findings are presented in Table 10, where the average percentages for the categories of *Have Enough* and *Need Lots More* are summarized for all items included in this section.

	Have Enough		Need Lots More	
	Minority	Nonminority	Minority	Nonminority
Mean	36%	46%	31%	20%
Standard Deviation	14%	17%	12%	9%

*Percentages are based on an average for all items included in section.

The extent of differences based on ethnicity, however, can be best understood in a breakdown of responses based on specific group membership. In this case, American Indian and African American groups in particular were more likely to indicate higher levels of information needed in areas involving special education laws and rules. However, their responses to items which involve transition, graduation standards, and changes in IDEA, were much like those of the general sample, where all respondents consistently indicated they would either *Need Some* or *Need Lots More* information in these areas.

Disability Area Survey respondents who selected the disability category of Emotional/Behavioral Disorders were consistently found to indicate higher levels of information need on most of the items included in this section. On items involving information and training needs regarding the child’s right to be educated in the least restrictive alternative and transportation issues, this group selected *Need Lots More* information at approximately twice the rate as the general sample. The largest observed difference, however, was noted on an item in which parents were asked about information needs regarding the rights of their child in the areas of school conduct, discipline, suspension, and expulsion. Whereas the *Need Lots More* category was selected by an average of 14% of groups across all disability areas, survey respondents representing the Emotional/Behavioral Disorders group selected this category at a rate of 31%.

RESULTS—RESOURCES TO HELP FAMILIES OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

In relation to the responses of other disability groups, it was found that survey respondents representing the Other Health Impaired disability area tended to select the *Need Lots More* option on items involving the rights and responsibilities of parents and school conduct issues. Also, survey respondents who represented the Early Childhood Special Education group indicated information needs in areas which involve the responsibilities of the school and to a lesser extent, the rights and responsibilities of the parents.

Part C: Resources to Help Families of Children with Disabilities

General Group

Items in which the combined response options of *Need Some* and *Need Lots More* selected by 60% or more of the general sample included those which sampled information and training needs about services available from advocacy groups and “other agencies” (e.g., rehabilitation, health services) and technology and adaptive equipment for their child. With regard to an item which sampled information needs about programs that are intended to help families, 44% indicated they *Have Enough*, 38% reported they *Need Some*, and 18% indicated they *Need Lots More*.

Age

Although found only to a small extent, parents of “older” children (i.e., “16 Years and Older”) were more likely to indicate a need for information about services that are available to their child from other agencies (e.g., rehabilitation services, corrections, mental health, social services) than those of “younger” children (i.e., “Less than 5 Years”). For example, in the group comprised of parents “16 years and Older,” 27% indicated they *Need Lots More* information about this topic, compared to 19% of those representing parents of children “Less than 5 Years.” While it can only be speculated at this point, this difference might represent an increased interest of parents in their child’s transition needs, specifically about preparations needed for postschool and adult living that require the involvement of community agencies.

Age appeared to be a factor that contributed to a small difference observed on an item in which respondents were asked to indicate their need for information and training related to the utilization of technology and adaptive equipment. In general, parents of children “16 Years and Older” were more likely to indicate they *Have Enough* and less likely to indicate they *Need Lots More* information about technology and assistive devices for their children. As such, it might be asserted that obtaining information about assistive technology may be more of a concern for parents of younger children whose needs have not been determined.

Region and Community

In general, parents from Regions 1 & 2 and Regions 6 & 8 were more likely to indicate they *Need Lots More* information about the types of services available from other agencies and advocacy groups. Likewise, these regions indicated similar information needs about programs designed to help families (e.g., respite care), and about assistive technologies for children with disabilities. For example, when combining all items included in this section, the general sample selected the *Need Lots More* option at an average of about 20%, while Regions 1 & 2 and Regions 6 & 8 selected this option at the rates of 31% and 28%,

RESULTS—ADVOCACY AND COLLABORATION SKILLS

respectively. Similarly, when analyzed from the perspective of size of the community, the *Need Lots More* option was selected more frequently by parents representing smaller communities. In the case of items involving information needs about advocacy group support services and assistive technology in particular, a general relationship could be seen with regard to community size and need for information, where the smaller the community, the more likely respondents were to select the *Need Lots More* option.

Ethnicity On items which sampled parent opinions about information needs in areas involving the types of services available from other agencies and assistive technology issues, nonminority respondents were almost twice as likely to indicate they *Need Lots More* information. The differences in the frequency in which minority and nonminority parents selected the *Have Enough* or *Need Lots More* response options for all items included in this section of the survey can be seen in Table 11. The percentages in this table reflect the average of the *Have Enough* and *Need Lots More* categories. As shown, about 40% of nonminority parents indicated they *Have Enough*, while 25% of minority parents responded in a similar manner. In addition, about 19% of the nonminority parents indicated they *Need Lots More* while 37% of minority parents indicated the same.

Table 11: Resources to Help Families by Minority-Nonminority Groupings*

	Have Enough		Need Lots More	
	Minority	Nonminority	Minority	Nonminority
Mean	25%	40%	37%	19%
Standard Deviation	5%	4%	6%	2%

*Percentages are based on an average for all items included in section.

Disability Area A high degree of consistency was found among disability groups on this section of the survey. The only differences noted were in the responses of parents of children with Emotional/Behavioral Disorders and those representing the Severely Multiply Impaired. Approximately 29% of parents of children with Emotional/Behavioral Disorders and 35% of parents representing the Severely Multiply Impaired group indicated they *Need Lots More* information about services that are available from advocacy groups. These percentages can be compared to 19% of the total group who selected the *Need Lots More* option. A similar result was noted on an item which sampled information and training about types of programs that can help families (support groups, respite care, etc.). Once again, both groups of parents (i.e., E/BD and SMI) were more likely to select the *Need Lots More* option.

D. Advocacy and Collaboration Skills

General Group Based on the percentages obtained by the total group of respondents, several definite response patterns could be observed. The most apparent of these was found in the

RESULTS—ADVOCACY AND COLLABORATION SKILLS

manner in which the general sample responded to an item that sampled information needs about knowing who to contact in the event a parent wished to discuss their child's IEP. On this item, 83% of all respondents indicated they *Have Enough* information about this topic, while only about 5% indicated they *Need Lots More*. To a lesser extent, 67% of the general sample indicated they *Have Enough* information about communication and collaboration strategies with school staff and 56% indicated the same on an item involving the use of conflict resolution strategies. The item which yielded the highest percentage ranking in the *Need Lots More* category was observed in an area involving the application of strategies to influence policies and decision-making at the local, regional, and state levels.

Age Few differences could be found between parents of students representing various age groups. As a result, parents in all age groups were consistent in their responses to those of the general sample, indicating the highest need for information about how to influence decision-making at various levels within the state.

Region and Community No significant variation could be found in the manner in which parents of different regions responded to the items contained in this section of the survey. As indicated previously, the majority of respondents indicated they *Had Enough* information in areas that probed their understanding about who to contact for IEP questions and how to communicate and collaborate with school staff. However, respondents representing Regions 6 & 8 were generally more likely to indicate they *Need Lots More* information than those of other regions. Although to a lesser extent, this need was also observed in the responses of parents representing Regions 1 & 2 as well. Few differences could be found among respondents based on community size.

Ethnicity Although minority parents generally tended to indicate higher levels of information needs by selecting the *Need Some* and *Need Lots More* options more frequently than nonminority respondents, the largest difference occurred on an item that sampled information about knowing who to contact in the event parents had questions pertaining to their child's IEP. Although most minority respondents (61%) indicated they already *Have Enough* information about who to contact when they have such a question, more nonminority respondents (84%) indicated the same. Likewise, 39% of minority parents indicated they either *Need Some* or *Need Lots More* information and training about this topic, compared to the 15% of the nonminority parents who selected either of these options. Although to a lesser degree, the same general pattern could be observed on most other items included in this section as well.

Disability Area With regard to disability area, three groups in particular indicated higher information and training needs in areas relating to communication with school staff, "what to do" in the event of communication problems, and the application of conflict resolution strategies. These groups included parents of children with Emotional /Behavioral Disorders, Specific Learning Disabilities, and Other Health Impaired. For example, in response to an item

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which sampled information needs about communicating and collaborating with school staff, 18% of parents of children with Emotional/Behavior Disorders indicated they *Need Lots More* information about this topic. This compares to the 10% of the general sample that indicated information needs at a similar level.

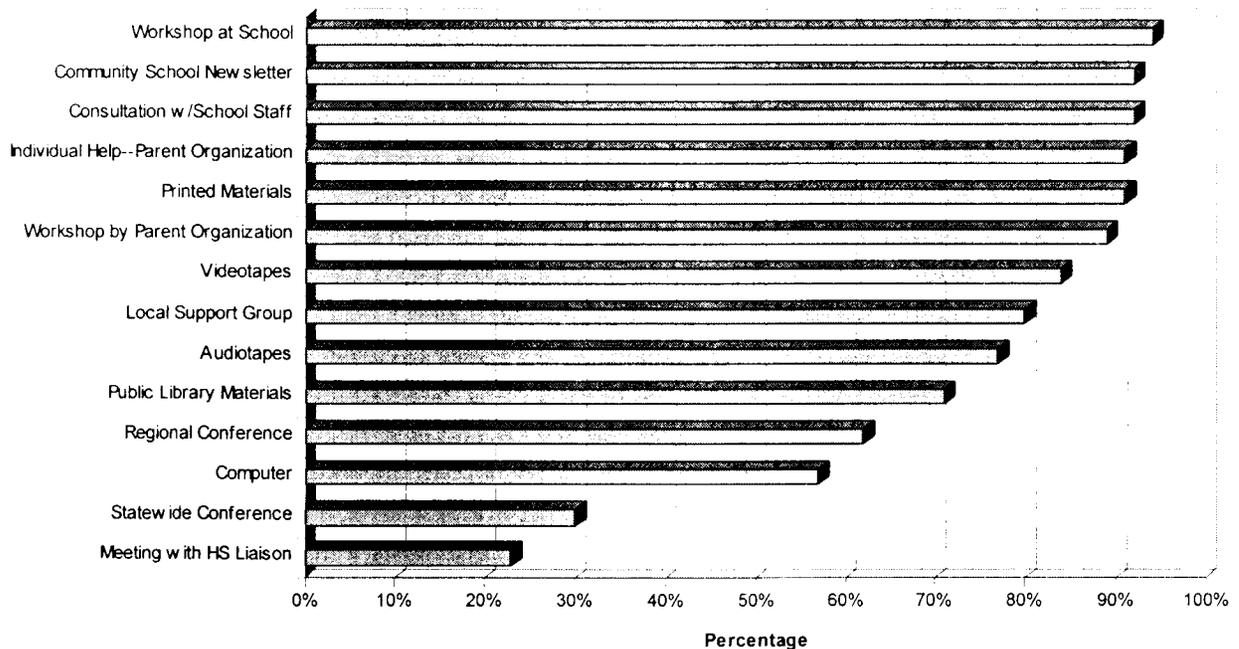
Part E: Delivery of Information

General Group

With regard to overall preferences, 49% of the respondents indicated that a workshop held at the school was the *Best Way* to meet their information needs. This preference was closely followed by obtaining information directly from school staff. Obtaining information through individual support or a workshop by a parent advocacy organization was also rated relatively high by many of the respondents, with somewhat more than 30% of the respondents indicating that this was the *Best Way* to obtain information. A similar number of respondents indicated that community-school newsletters were also a viable means of delivering information to parents.

The *Acceptable* and *Best Way* response options were combined to provide a broad perspective about how to best facilitate information needs of parents. Information delivery modes rated most highly by respondents by combining these two response options can be seen in Figure 3. Consistent with the findings about the “best way” to obtain information, 90% or more of the respondents indicated that school workshops, consultation with school staff, community school newsletter, dissemination of printed materials, and individual help

Fig 3: Information Delivery Modes Rated *Acceptable* or *Best Way*



RESULTS—DELIVERY OF INFORMATION

from a parent organization were considered either *Acceptable* or the *Best Way* to obtain information. In addition, at least 80%, but less than 90%, of the respondents indicated the same with regard to items involving receiving assistance from local support groups, viewing videotapes, and attending workshops sponsored by parent organizations. At least 70%, but less than 80%, of respondents indicated that public library materials and listening to audiotapes were rated *Acceptable* or the *Best Way*, while regional conferences received a combined rating of 62%. Ratings below the 60% level were found on items that involved the use of computer technology, attendance at statewide conferences, and meeting with a home-school liaison to obtain information.

In contrast to the methods of information delivery rated *Acceptable* or the *Best Way*, respondents also had the opportunity to rate those that were *Difficult to Access*. Statewide and regional conferences, computer, public library, and audiotapes were those which received the highest rankings from parent respondents. While these seem to represent information delivery systems that are difficult to access by parents, it should be noted that this does not mean that they necessarily find them to be less useful in terms of obtaining information. For example, in the case of statewide and regional conferences, it may be that events of this nature are more likely to pose logistical problems for parents (e.g., geographic distance, transportation, taking time off from job), hence the high "difficult to access" ratings. Still, what such ratings do not reveal is the extent to which such conferences are valued as a source of information. Simply put, parents may find statewide and regional conferences difficult to attend, but once provided with the opportunity, may find them to be an excellent source to obtain needed information. The same reasoning would also apply to all other modes of information rated as "difficult to access."

Responses Based on Region, Ethnicity, and Disability

In general, a high degree of consistency was found in the responses of parents representing various special education regions within the state (e.g., 7 County Metro, Northwest Regions 1 & 2). As a result, modes of information delivery rated "acceptable" or "best way," did not change in any appreciable way with regard to the order in which they were ranked. For example, irrespective of whether respondents resided in a highly populated area or one that is very sparsely populated, they still tended to indicate that school workshops were either the most acceptable or best way to obtain information.

When these data were analyzed from the standpoint of ethnicity, it was found that the same general order of preferences were retained with one exception. This involved the extent to which minority parents expressed their preferences about obtaining information by "meeting with an Indian or bilingual home-school liaison." In this case, a distinct difference was noted in the responses among "minority" and "nonminority" respondent groups. These results are presented in Table 12. In a further breakdown of these results by specific ethnicity groups, it was found that the highest *Acceptable* and *Best Way* ratings were provided by American Indian and Hispanic respondents.

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Table 12: Preferences in Meeting With Home-School Liaison by Minority-Nonminority Groupings

	Not Acceptable	Difficult	Acceptable	Best Way
Minority	39%	14%	31%	16%
Nonminority	69%	10%	19%	2%

**Printed Materials
Language Preferences**

When information preferences were analyzed to determine if any differences could be observed with respect to the manner in which information is obtained and disability category, no notable differences could be found. In general, irrespective of the various disability groups represented by respondents, preferences regarding modes of obtaining information and training remain about the same as the general sample.

In addition to obtaining information about the overall feasibility of using printed materials, participants were provided with the opportunity to indicate their language preferences of those printed materials. Respondents were asked to indicate their preferences based on the following language options: English, Spanish, Asian, African, and "Other." Table 13 represents responses when respondents were partitioned into "minority" and "nonminority" groups.

Table 13: Language Preferences of Information and Training Materials by Minority-Nonminority Groupings

	English	Spanish	Asian	African	Other
Minority	84%	11%	2%	—	2%
Nonminority	99%	—	—	—	1%

As shown, most indicated that English was the preferred language for printed information and training materials. However, some minority parents indicated a preference for informational materials printed in Spanish. Some degree of caution needs to be exercised when interpreting this table, however, since percentages are based on about half of the minority respondents who could have potentially responded to this item.

Internet Access

When asked, "Do you have access to the Internet at home or in the community?" almost two-thirds (65%) of the total group of respondents indicated they did have access in either location. Although somewhat variable, community size seemed to be a factor relating to access, based on the observed difference between the least and most populated community categories—that is, towns or cities with 500 or less people, and those with 50,000 and over. In the case of the former, 57% of respondents indicated they had access to the Internet, while about 70% of the latter group responded in a similar fashion. In a

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crossbreak analysis based on ethnicity, 57% of minority respondents indicated that they had access either in the home or community. Although it was found that the majority of respondents reported they had access to the Internet, few indicated that information received "via computer" was either *Acceptable* or the *Best Way* to obtain information. Additional data about this information mode will be needed in the future to determine: (1) current skills and experiences with regard to using the Internet, since the technology may be "accessible," but is not often used, and (2) how likely parents would actually use this mode of gaining information if it were made more widely available.

Summary of Results

General Group

The results of this survey reflect several findings worthy of discussion. One very positive finding is that many parents seem to be aware of the basic rights of their child to obtain an education in the public schools. Also, many seem to know whom to contact when they have questions about their child's IEP and feel they are able to communicate and collaborate with school staff. To some extent, these results might reflect the progress that has been made over the years to inform parents about their rights under IDEA. However, recent legislative initiatives and changes in public policy now seem to be catalysts in which new information and training needs have emerged. According to the results of this survey, one of the strongest indications for information was observed by 84% of the respondents who indicated they either *Need Some* or *Need Lots More* information about the recent changes in IDEA. Similarly, the recent legislative initiatives to implement Minnesota's graduation standards is a source that has prompted a great deal of interest among parents. Once again, 80% of the respondents indicated they *Need Some* or *Needs Lots More* information in this area. Also, interest in policy issues does not just seem to be confined to the application of knowledge or skills only intended to help with their own child since more than two-thirds (69%) indicated they *Need Some* or *Need Lots More* information and training in how to influence special education decision-making at the local, regional, or state level.

In addition to needs arising as a result of changes in public policy, parents are also interested in obtaining transition information that can be used to plan for post-school, community, and adult living experiences. In this same vein, they are interested in learning more about the role of such community agencies as rehabilitation services, social services, health services, and mental health providers. Also, parents of younger children in particular indicate a strong need to obtain information and training about assistive technologies that are available to help their children.

Results from this survey also showed that many parents have an interest in learning more about services that are available from advocacy groups and programs in general that are aimed at providing support to families (e.g., respite care, home-health care). Another component of this need was seen in the 64% of the respondents who indicated they *Need*

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Some or Need Lots More information about how to work with other parents to provide mutual support and improve programs for students.

Age Even though results based on the general sample did not show strong levels of information needs in such areas as identifying needed services and how to access services, age did appear to be a factor in which such differences could be observed. For example, it was found that parents of younger children, particularly at the early childhood level, were more likely to indicate information needs about these topics than parents of older children. Similarly, parents of younger children were more likely to indicate needs in areas that involve special education laws and rights. Parents of younger children also tended to indicate a stronger level of need for information related to assistive technologies that are available to help their child at home and school. In contrast, parents of older children were more apt to indicate a need for information about transition and other services that are available within the community.

To a large extent, the differences found between various age groups may be a reflection of a relationship between the length of time their child has been receiving special education services and the types of information needs perceived by parents. In the case of younger parents who are "new" to the service delivery system, many express stronger needs to obtain information about their basic rights, the types of services needed, and how to access such services. For parents whose children have been receiving services for a number of years, many of these issues have been addressed and they are more interested in obtaining information related to transition and postsecondary living objectives.

**Region and
Community**

In general, survey results showed that respondents who live in large, more sparsely populated areas were often more likely to indicate higher levels of needs than those living in more concentrated population centers. Although this relationship was not consistently found in all need areas, it was observed on items in which geography impacts accessibility. For example, information needs in an area like special education laws and rules did not seem to vary as much between respondents of different regions as did those focusing on access to advocacy group support and programs to help families (e.g., respite care, home health care). Although in reverse, a similar relationship can be made about community size and needs about advocacy group, where the smaller the community, the more likely to indicate a need for such support. To some extent, the overall logistics of living in a small community or large geographical area may be factors which limit accessibility to assistance from advocacy groups and other types of parent support options.

Ethnicity

When survey results are analyzed from the standpoint of "minority" and "nonminority" respondents, an entirely new constituency seems to have been identified in which information needs are generally high and cover all aspects of the special education process. Unlike the general sample of respondents who reported only moderate or low information needs in such areas as basic rights, identifying service needs of their child, and how to access these services, minority parents were often observed to have stronger needs in not

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only these, but most other areas as well. Although it was somewhat difficult to identify needs based on specific groups, African American and American Indian respondents often indicated higher than average levels of information and training needs. However, overall survey data indicate that more extensive information and training efforts will be necessary to address the wide range of needs often shown by minority parents.

Disability Even though the limitations described in an earlier section reduce the precision in which survey results may be interpreted in this demographic area (see *Approach Used to Analyze Data*), it was nevertheless found that parents of children with Emotional/Behavioral Disorders often indicated higher levels of need than parents of other disability areas. Compared to the general sample, parents of children within this disability area indicated relatively higher levels of need involving such areas as how parents could help their child at home, conduct and discipline issues, and services from advocacy groups. This finding was observed with a fair degree of consistency in all sections of the survey that sampled information and training needs. Occasionally, these needs were also expressed by parents of children with Specific Learning Disabilities, and to a lesser extent, parents of children with physical impairments and those identified as multiply impaired.

Information Delivery Preferences

With regard to the delivery of information and training, respondents indicated that workshops held at school, individual consultation with school staff, and community-school newsletters are the modes they most prefer. However, individual help from parent organizations and the dissemination of printed materials were also found to be popular among many participants. In contrast, statewide and regional conferences were consistently rated low as a source of obtaining training and information, perhaps reflecting problems associated with such issues as transportation, lodging arrangement, taking time off of work, and a host of related issues which make attendance at such conferences difficult.

In an analysis of items of information delivery modes and demographics, it was found that preferences remained the same for all regions. That is, both the most and least populated regions ranked preferences in a similar manner. A similar finding was observed when results were analyzed on the basis of disability type. When viewed from the perspective of "minority" and "nonminority," however, it was found that minority parents were more likely to indicate a higher level of acceptability in obtaining information from an American Indian or bilingual home-school liaison. Also, minority respondents, particularly Hispanic parents were more likely to indicate a need to have printed information printed in Spanish. However, for all other groups, English was consistently ranked as the most preferred language mode for printed information and training materials. Finally, although survey results revealed that about two-thirds of respondents have access to the Internet, many still indicated that using the computer to access information was either *Not Acceptable* or *Difficult*.

Survey of Parents of Children with Disabilities
Minnesota Department of Children, Families & Learning

Do you have a child between the ages of birth and 21 who has an Individual Education Plan (IEP) or an Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP)?

- Yes *If you receive more than one copy of this survey from different organizations, please complete and return only one copy.*
- No *If you do not have a child with an IEP or IFSP, please disregard this survey! Thank you for your support for special education.*

What is his/her age? ____ If you have more than one child with an IEP or IFSP, please write all of their ages.

What is the disability category on your child's IEP or IFSP? If you have more than 1 child, please put their ages in the space between the box and the disability (age 11 deaf/hard of hearing, age 14 specific learning disability, etc.)

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mental Impairment (mentally retarded, developmentally disabled, Down Syndrome, etc.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Other Health Impaired (epilepsy, asthma, juvenile arthritis, Tourette's Syndrome, ADD, ADHD, etc.) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Specific Learning Disability (LD, SLD, learning disabled, dyslexia, etc.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Autistic |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Visual Impairment | <input type="checkbox"/> Deaf-Blind (dual sensory impaired) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Deaf/Hard of Hearing | <input type="checkbox"/> Severely-Multiply Impaired |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Emotional/Behavioral Disorder (E/BD, mentally ill, bipolar disorder, etc.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Traumatic Brain Injury |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Speech/Language Impairment (articulation problem, stuttering, language delayed, etc.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Early Childhood Special Education |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Physically Impaired (uses a wheelchair, crutches, Cerebral Palsy, Spina Bifida, Multiple Sclerosis, etc.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please describe): |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Unknown |

How old was your child/children when he/she began to receive special education services? _____

Where do you live? Please answer all three (3) questions. Use the map to complete question I.

I. Which Region?

- 7 County Metro Area (Region 11)
- Northwest (Regions 1 & 2)
- Northeast (Region 3)
- Central (Region 7)
- South Central (Region 9)
- West Central (Region 4)
- Southwest (Regions 6 & 8)
- North Central (Region 5)
- Southeast (Region 10)

II. Type of Town/City?

- Rural or Small Town (less than 500 people)
- Town of 500-3,000 people
- Town of 3,000-10,000
- City of 10,000-50,000
- City of More Than 50,000

III. What Best Describes Your Race/Ethnicity?

- Hispanic
- American Indian
- African American
- Caucasian
- Asian/Pacific Islander

Please rate your level of knowledge of the special education topics listed below using the following scale:

- 0 This topic doesn't apply to my situation
- 1 I have enough information and/or training about this topic for my needs and don't need any more.
- 2 I'd like some information and/or training about this topic.
- 3 I need lots of information and/or training about this topic.

Part A. Disabilities and Special Education Services

1. My child's disability and how I can help him/her at home.
2. What type of services my child needs, such as special instruction, physical therapy, developmental/adaptive phy ed (DAPE), assistive technology, counseling, psychological services, etc.
3. How much service my child needs.
4. How to get the services my child needs in school.
5. What type of modifications and accommodations my child needs to take part in regular school instruction and activities.
6. My child's options for different educational settings (continuum or array of services, different placements inside or outside of the district).

Part B. Special Education Laws and Rules

7. My rights and responsibilities within the school system as the parent of a child with a disability.
8. The school's responsibilities to provide an appropriate education for my child.

	Have Enough	Need Some More	Need Lots More
1. My child's disability and how I can help him/her at home.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. What type of services my child needs, such as special instruction, physical therapy, developmental/adaptive phy ed (DAPE), assistive technology, counseling, psychological services, etc.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. How much service my child needs.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. How to get the services my child needs in school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. What type of modifications and accommodations my child needs to take part in regular school instruction and activities.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. My child's options for different educational settings (continuum or array of services, different placements inside or outside of the district).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. My rights and responsibilities within the school system as the parent of a child with a disability.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. The school's responsibilities to provide an appropriate education for my child.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Have Enough	Need Some More	Need Lots More
9.1 My child's rights to: Have physical access to school buildings and programs. Go to school in the least restrictive environment (LRE).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9.2 Make progress in regular education subjects such as math and social studies.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9.3 Have free transportation between home and school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9.4 Have a plan for transition to adult life.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9.5 Take part in extra-curricular activities.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. My child's rights with regard to school conduct, discipline, suspension and expulsion.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. My child's rights with regard to the new tests required for graduation from high school in Minnesota.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. The recent changes in the Federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Part C: Resources to Help Families of Children with Disabilities			
13. Services for my child that are available from other agencies (such as rehabilitation services, health services, corrections, mental health, social services, etc).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. Services that are available from disability and/or advocacy groups.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15. Programs that can help my family and me (such as parent support groups, respite care, home-health care, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16. Technology and adaptive equipment that can help my child in school and at home.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Part D: Advocacy and Collaboration Skills			
17. Who to contact at my child's school to discuss his/her special education program.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18. How to communicate and collaborate with school personnel regarding my child.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
19. What to do if I have trouble communicating or working with staff at my child's school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
20. Ways of resolving conflicts related to my child's special education program (such as conciliation, mediation, due process hearing, etc.).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
21. How to be a confident and effective advocate for my child.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Have Enough	Need Some More	Need Lots More
22. How to work with other parents to provide mutual support and improve special education programs.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
23. How to influence special education decisions at the local, regional or state level.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Do you have access to the Internet at home or in the community? yes no

If you could do one thing to improve the flow of information to parents of children with disabilities, what would you do?
Is there anything else you would like to tell us? (Please use space below).

E. Delivery of Information

Following is a list of several methods of getting information and training to parents. Assuming that all of these options were available, please indicate your preferences using the following scale:

- 0 This option is not acceptable to me.
- 1 It's difficult for me to access information this way.
- 2 This is an acceptable way for me to get information.
- 3 This is the best way for me to get information related to special education.

- 24. Statewide conference
- 25. Regional conferences or workshops
- 26. Workshops/meetings in my child's school
- 27. Workshops put on by parent organizations or disability advocacy groups
- 28. Meeting with an Indian or bilingual home-school liaison
- 29. Printed materials

	Not Acceptable	Difficult to Access	Acceptable	Best Way
24. Statewide conference	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
25. Regional conferences or workshops	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
26. Workshops/meetings in my child's school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
27. Workshops put on by parent organizations or disability advocacy groups	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
28. Meeting with an Indian or bilingual home-school liaison	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
29. Printed materials	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

APPENDIX A--PARENT SURVEY

- | | | | | |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 30. School or community newsletter | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 31. Via computer | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 32. Public library materials | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 33. Videotapes | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 34. Audiotapes | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 35. Local support group | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 36. Individual consultant with school staff in person or on telephone | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 37. Individual help from a parent or parent organizations | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 38. Other | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Appendix B: Parts A-D Percentages by Item Order

Item Number and Description	Have Enough	Need Some	Need Lots More
1 My child's disability and how I can help him/her at home.	47%	42%	11%
2 What type of services my child needs (e.g., instructional, physical therapy).	50%	40%	11%
3 How much service my child needs.	46%	44%	10%
4 How to get the services my child needs in school.	45%	38%	17%
5 What type of modifications and accommodations my child needs to take part in regular school instruction and activities.	46%	39%	15%
6 My child's options for different educational settings (continuum or array of services, different placements inside or outside of the district).	33%	39%	27%
7 My rights and responsibilities within the school system as the parent of a child with a disability.	50%	34%	16%
8 The school's responsibilities to provide an appropriate education for my child.	45%	35%	21%
9.1 My child's rights to: Have physical access to school buildings and programs (i.e., least restrictive alternative).	64%	25%	11%
9.2 Make progress in regular education subjects such as math and social studies.	52%	33%	15%
9.3 Have free transportation between home and school.	69%	20%	11%
9.4 Have a plan for transition to adult life.	32%	38%	30%
9.5 Take part in extra-curricular activities.	42%	36%	22%
10 My child's rights with regard to school conduct, discipline, suspension and expulsion.	58%	28%	14%
11 My child's rights with regard to the new tests required for graduation from high school in Minnesota.	24%	41%	35%
12 The recent changes in the Federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).	16%	52%	32%
13 Services for my child that are available from other agencies (e.g., rehabilitation services, health services, and social services).	39%	39%	22%
14 Services that are available from disability and/or advocacy groups.	37%	45%	19%
15 Programs that can help my family and me (such as parent support groups, respite care, home-health care, etc.)	44%	38%	18%
16 Technology and adaptive equipment that can help my child in school and at home.	34%	45%	21%
17 Who to contact at my child's school to discuss his/her special education program.	83%	12%	5%
18 How to communicate and collaborate with school personnel regarding my child.	67%	23%	10%
19 What to do if I have trouble communicating or working with staff at my child's school.	52%	33%	15%
20 Ways of resolving conflicts related to my child's special education program (such as conciliation, mediation, due process hearing, etc.).	56%	31%	13%
21 How to be a confident and effective advocate for my child.	48%	36%	17%
22 How to work with other parents to provide mutual support and improve special education programs.	43%	41%	16%
23 How to influence special education decisions at the local, regional or state level.	31%	46%	24%

Appendix C: Parts A-D Percentages Ranked by Need Some and Need Lots More

Item Number and Description	Have Enough	Need Some	Need Lots More
12 The recent changes in the Federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).	16%	52%	32%
11 My child's rights with regard to the new tests required for graduation from high school in Minnesota.	24%	41%	35%
23 How to influence special education decisions at the local, regional or state level.	31%	46%	24%
9.4 Have a plan for transition to adult life.	32%	38%	30%
6 My child's options for different educational settings (continuum or array of services, different placements inside or outside of the district).	33%	39%	27%
16 Technology and adaptive equipment that can help my child in school and at home.	34%	45%	21%
14 Services that are available from disability and/or advocacy groups.	37%	45%	19%
13 Services for my child that is available from other agencies (e.g., rehabilitation services, health services, and social services).	39%	39%	22%
9.5 Take part in extra-curricular activities.	42%	36%	22%
22 How to work with other parents to provide mutual support and improve special education programs.	43%	41%	16%
15 Programs that can help my family and me (such as parent support groups, respite care, home-health care, etc.)	44%	38%	18%
8 The school's responsibilities to provide an appropriate education for my child.	45%	35%	21%
4 How to get the services my child needs in school.	45%	38%	17%
3 How much service my child needs.	46%	44%	10%
5 What type of modifications and accommodations my child needs to take part in regular school instruction and activities.	46%	39%	15%
1 My child's disability and how I can help him/her at home.	47%	42%	11%
21 How to be a confident and effective advocate for my child.	48%	36%	17%
2 What type of services my child needs (e.g., instructional, physical therapy).	50%	40%	11%
7 My rights and responsibilities within the school system as the parent of a child with a disability.	50%	34%	16%
9.2 Make progress in regular education subjects such as math and social studies.	52%	33%	15%
19 What to do if I have trouble communicating or working with staff at my child's school.	52%	33%	15%
20 Ways of resolving conflicts related to my child's special education program (such as conciliation, mediation, due process hearing, etc.).	56%	31%	13%
10 My child's rights with regard to school conduct, discipline, suspension and expulsion.	58%	28%	14%
9.1 My child's rights to: Have physical access to school buildings and programs (i.e., least restrictive alternative).	64%	25%	11%
18 How to communicate and collaborate with school personnel regarding my child.)	67%	23%	10%
9.3 Have free transportation between home and school.	69%	20%	11%
17 Who to contact at my child's school to discuss his/her special education program	83%	12%	5%

Appendix D: Delivery of Information (Part E) Items by Item Order

Item Number and Description	Not Acceptable	Difficult to Access	Acceptable	Best Way
24 Statewide Conference	12%	58%	27%	3%
25 Regional Conference	5%	33%	51%	11%
26 Workshop at School	2%	4%	45%	49%
27 Workshop by Parent Organization	2%	9%	56%	33%
28 Meeting with HS Liaison	67%	10%	20%	3%
29 Printed Materials	6%	3%	62%	29%
30 Community School Newsletter	4%	4%	62%	30%
31 Computer	15%	28%	43%	14%
32 Public Library Materials	8%	21%	62%	9%
33 Videotapes	7%	9%	67%	17%
34 Audiotapes	12%	12%	65%	12%
35 Local Support Group	5%	15%	56%	24%
36 Consultation w/School Staff	3%	5%	47%	45%
37 Individual Help--Parent Organization	3%	7%	57%	34%

**Appendix E: Delivery of Information (Part E) Items Ranked by
Acceptable and Best Way**

Item Number and Description	Not Accept- able	Difficult to Ac- cess	Acceptable	Best Way
26 Workshop at School	2%	4%	45%	49%
36 Consultation w/School Staff	4%	5%	48%	45%
30 Community School Newsletter	4%	3%	62%	30%
37 Individual Help--Parent Organization	3%	7%	56%	34%
29 Printed Materials	6%	3%	62%	30%
27 Workshop by Parent Organization	2%	8%	56%	33%
33 Videotapes	7%	9%	67%	17%
35 Local Support Group	5%	15%	55%	24%
34 Audiotapes	12%	12%	65%	12%
32 Public Library Materials	8%	21%	63%	9%
25 Regional Conference	5%	33%	52%	11%
31 Computer	15%	29%	43%	14%
24 Statewide Conference	11%	58%	27%	3%
28 Meeting with HS Liaison	67%	10%	21%	3%

**Appendix F: Delivery of Information (Part E) Items Ranked by
Not Acceptable and Difficult to Access**

Item Number and Description	Not Accept- able	Difficult to Ac- cess	Acceptable	Best Way
28 Meeting with HS Liaison	67%	10%	20%	3%
24 Statewide Conference	12%	58%	27%	3%
31 Computer	15%	28%	43%	14%
25 Regional Conference	5%	33%	51%	11%
32 Public Library Materials	8%	21%	62%	9%
34 Audiotapes	12%	12%	65%	12%
35 Local Support Group	5%	15%	56%	24%
33 Videotapes	7%	9%	67%	17%
27 Workshop by Parent Organization	2%	9%	56%	33%
37 Individual Help--Parent Organization	3%	7%	57%	34%
29 Printed Materials	6%	3%	62%	29%
30 Community School Newsletter	4%	4%	62%	30%
36 Consultation w/School Staff	3%	5%	47%	45%
26 Workshop at School	2%	4%	45%	49%