



**Parent Feedback About
Individualized Education Program Team Meetings for
Students in Kindergarten Through Grade 12**

**Office of Shared Accountability
Office of Special Education and Student Services**

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Executive Summary

The Office of Shared Accountability (OSA) joined with the Office of Special Education and Student Services (OSESS) to gather feedback from parents of students who receive special education services. This report presents parent feedback from a study that focused on experiences at Individualized Education Program (IEP) team meetings and also explored parent satisfaction with delivery of special education services.

The study included all parents of Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) students who had educational disabilities, were enrolled in kindergarten to Grade 12, and had an IEP meeting between February 1 and May 15, 2013. A paper and pencil survey was mailed to 4,700 parents during spring 2013. Usable, returned surveys totaled 1,495, for a 32% response rate.

Summary of Findings

Nearly all responding parents (typically at least 90%) reported positive experiences with their child's most recent IEP meeting, with respect to the following: implementation of process as intended, communication during meeting, understanding of purpose and of process, climate at meeting, and satisfaction with meeting. In addition, a large majority of all respondents (at least 87%) were highly satisfied or satisfied with each special education service their child received. Findings were very similar across all school types: elementary, middle, high, and special. (The latter are for students with significant disabilities.) Statistically significant differences between these groups are reflected in the recommendations section below.

When asked to list things that worked well at the IEP meeting, 71% of all responding parents did so. The most frequent, positive comments concerned the meeting's organization; collaboration and communication; relationships among staff, student, and parent; and helpful information. When asked to list ways to improve the IEP meeting, 43% of all respondents did so. The most frequent suggestions were to invite all pertinent staff to the meeting; to lengthen the meeting or be more flexible about scheduling; and to increase clarity, explanations, or information.

Summary of Recommendations

Based on the findings, the recommended next steps for IEP meetings are as follows:

- Continue current procedures and strategies with respect to IEP meetings.
- Further enhance the IEP process by providing additional information or a greater emphasis at the meeting on the following topics:
 - For parents of **all** students, focus on what parents should do if they disagree with a decision.
 - For parents of **elementary** school students, focus on: 1) least restrictive environment, 2) related services, and 3) what to do in case of a disagreement for parents who are not meeting for the first time.
 - For parents of **middle** school students, focus on: 1) least restrictive environment and 2) related services.
 - For parents of **high** school students, focus on: 1) extended school year and 2) related services.

- Further enhance the IEP process for parents of students in **special** schools by ensuring that 1) IEP meetings start on time and 2) that parents agree that decisions were made in the child's best interest. Possible approaches to address the latter issue would be to ensure that parent input is heard during the meeting.

The recommended next step for gathering parent feedback is to partner with MCPS offices and Montgomery County community groups and agencies to develop alternative strategies for reaching the following parent groups with lower response rates:

- Parents with students in one the following four programs: Emotional Disabilities Cluster, Hours Based Program, Learning and Academic Disabilities, Resource
- Parents of African American or Hispanic students
- Parents who indicated their home language as Spanish

Parent Feedback About Individualized Education Program Team Meetings for Students in Kindergarten Through Grade 12

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Background

The Office of Special Education and Student Services (OSESS) added a goal regarding parent outreach to its strategic plan for 2011–2012. To support this goal, OSESS formed a Parent Outreach Committee that included parents of students who receive special education services, along with staff members from OSESS, the Office of Shared Accountability (OSA), and the Office of Community Engagement and Partnerships (OCEP). The committee's charge is to systematically develop processes to gather parent feedback as a way to improve services and implement professional development for Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) staff members.

After reviewing current and prior efforts to collect feedback from parents of MCPS students with disabilities, the committee decided to create a survey with a common set of questions and then customize the survey for varied groups of parents, as appropriate. The committee chose to focus first on Individualized Education Program (IEP) team meetings.

An IEP is a written statement and a legal document of the educational program designed to meet a student's individual needs. Every student who receives special education services must have an IEP. There must be a review and revision (if necessary) of the IEP at least once each year at an annual review meeting. Thus, IEP meetings are a common experience for parents, as they are invited in writing to participate in all IEP team meetings for their child, across the years.

The committee's focus was how to improve the IEP process for parents and to determine whether parents felt included and valued during IEP meetings. Members also wanted feedback from parents about delivery of special education services.

As a first step in gathering parent feedback, OSESS joined with OSA to conduct a pilot study of a survey that focused on parents' experiences at IEP team meetings and also explored parent satisfaction with delivery of special education services (Cooper-Martin, 2013). The sample for the pilot study was all parents of students who received special education services and were enrolled in an MCPS class that serves prekindergarten students with disabilities during spring 2012. To collect data, a paper and pencil survey was mailed to each parent in May 2012. The response rate of 26% for the pilot study was somewhat lower than the 32% response rate from elementary school parents to the MCPS 2011–2012 survey of school environment.

The results from the pilot study were very positive. Nearly all responding parents reported positive experiences with their child's most recent IEP meeting, with respect to the following aspects: implementation of process as intended, communication during meeting, understanding of purpose and process, climate at meeting, and satisfaction with meeting. In addition, nearly all respondents were highly satisfied or satisfied with each special education service received.

Based on the pilot study, the recommended next steps for gathering parent feedback were:

- Identify a group of parents with students in a different grade level to receive the survey.
- Revise survey items, as necessary, to be appropriate for the new group of parents.
- Shorten the survey and improve methods of announcing it and of reminding parents to complete it, as a way to increase the response rate.

The OSESS Parent Outreach Committee followed the above recommendations by surveying parents with students enrolled in kindergarten through Grade 12. OSESS and OSA worked together on this survey; this report describes that study and its findings.

Study Questions

The purpose of this study was to expand the pilot study and gather feedback from a larger group of parents of students who receive special education services. The goal was to use the information to improve services and implement professional development for staff.

The study addressed the following questions:

1. What are parents' experiences with IEP meetings? Topics to explore include:
 - a. Implementation of process as intended
 - b. Communication during meeting
 - c. Understanding of purpose
 - d. Understanding of process
 - e. Climate at meeting
 - f. Satisfaction with meeting
 - g. What is working
 - h. What needs improvement
2. How satisfied are parents with the delivery of special education services?

Methodology

Target Population

The target population for this study was all parents of MCPS students who were receiving special education services, were enrolled in kindergarten to Grade 12, and had an IEP meeting between February 1 and May 15, 2013. Surveys went to 1,880 elementary school parents; 1,078 middle school parents; 1,600 high school parents; and 142 parents with students attending MCPS special schools. (The latter are for students with significant disabilities.) This group of 4,700 parents represented 28% of all MCPS students who were receiving special education services as of May, 16, 2013. The target population included families with students in the entire range of MCPS special education programs (Table 1).

Table 1
Target Population by Special Education Program

Special education program	Target population (<i>N</i> = 4,700)	
	<i>n</i>	%
Aspergers	46	1.0
Autism	99	2.1
Autism Resource – Secondary	24	0.5
Bridge	95	2.0
Deaf Hard of Hearing Class	48	1.0
Deaf Hard of Hearing Itinerant	26	0.6
Emotional Disabilities Cluster	106	2.3
Gifted/Learning Disability	56	1.2
Home School Model	733	15.6
Hours Based Program	782	16.6
Learning and Academic Disabilities	1,012	21.5
Learning Center	166	3.5
Learning for Independence	266	5.7
MCPS Special School	117	2.5
Other ^a	32	0.7
Resource	963	20.5
School Community Based	129	2.7

^aOther includes programs with fewer than five students in the target population.

Survey Development

In the spring of 2012, the pilot study for a survey to gather parent feedback was conducted. The Parent Outreach Committee brainstormed ideas for categories of survey questions, generated specific questions, reviewed proposed questions, and provided feedback about the final draft of the survey. This process ensured face validity and content-related validity of the survey questions. The sample for the pilot study was parents of prekindergarten students.

For the current study, the Parent Outreach Committee reviewed the survey used in the pilot study and edited items as needed to ensure that all items were appropriate for parents of students who were older than prekindergarten. The Committee members also eliminated several questions that were not informative about the IEP process or overlapped other questions on the survey.

Survey Structure

The survey had two pages. One page of the survey had the survey directions and included two open-ended questions—one asked what worked well at the IEP meeting and one asked about ways to improve the IEP meeting. There were six versions of this page, including one printed in English on one side and printed in Spanish on the other side. The other five versions were printed in only one of the following languages Amharic, Chinese, French, Korean, or Vietnamese.

The second page included only closed-ended questions. The first section of this page concerned the most recent IEP meeting attended by the parent. The majority of items in this section used the following four-point scale to measure the extent of agreement:

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

The second section of closed-ended questions concerned special education services that the child received. Items in this section measured the extent of satisfaction with each service using the following 4-point scale:

- Very satisfied
- Satisfied
- Dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied

There were six versions of the second survey page, including a Scantron version with all questions printed in both English and Spanish. The other five versions (not Scantron) were printed in English plus one of the following languages: Amharic, Chinese, French, Korean, or Vietnamese.

Data Collection

To increase response rates, the survey was sent in two waves.¹ On June 6, 2013, OSESS mailed the first wave of 4,700 surveys and included a self-addressed, postage-paid envelope for returning the survey to OSA. Survey materials were in the language that parents had indicated for MCPS correspondence; the majority were English (80%) and Spanish (17%). Fewer parents received the survey in French (1%), Vietnamese (1%), or one of the other languages (i.e., Amharic, Chinese, or Korean) (2%).

On June 11, each parent in the target population received a telephone call with a reminder, delivered in multiple languages, to complete the survey. On June 20, OSESS mailed the second wave of surveys to all 4,700 families and a corresponding reminder call was delivered in

¹ The Office of Community Engagement and Partnerships provided money for materials through a Maryland State Department of Education grant.

multiple languages on June 25. The survey closed on August 5, 2013, and responses were no longer accepted after that date.

Ten surveys came back from the initial mailing as undeliverable and thus reduced the total to 4,690. Parents returned 1,708 surveys; 213 were excluded because they were duplicates or the parent had not attended an IEP meeting. Thus, there were 1,495 usable surveys, for an overall response rate of 32% (1,495/4,690). The response rate by school level matched or exceeded the response rates for the MCPS 2012–2013 parent engagement survey (Figure 1).

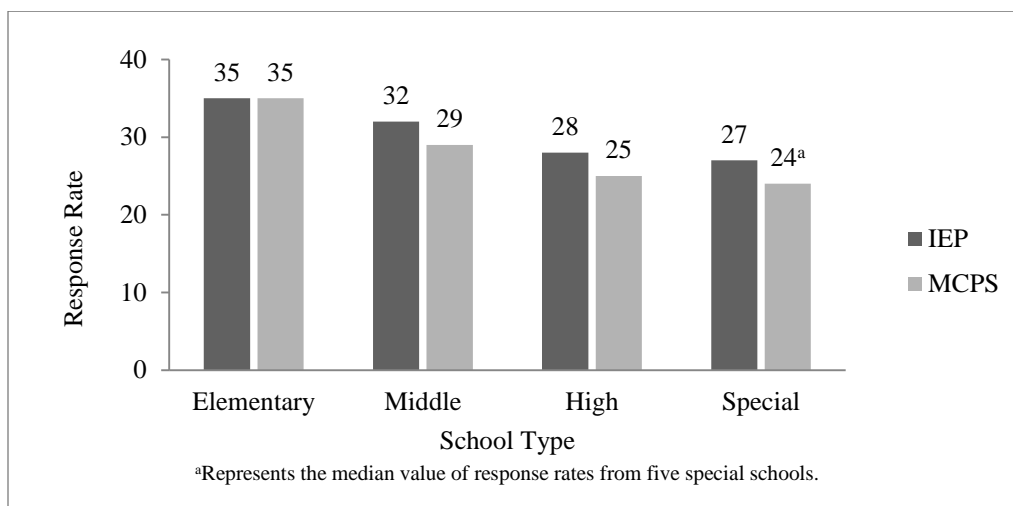


Figure 1. Response rates to IEP parent feedback survey and MCPS parent engagement survey.

For the open-ended questions, responses in languages other than English were translated. OSA staff members reviewed responses to the open-ended questions and grouped them into common categories.

Analysis of Respondent Characteristics

This section analyzes whether the parents who responded to the survey differed from the target population (i.e., all parents who received surveys) on the following indicators: special education program, racial/ethnic group, and survey language.

Special Education Program

Table 2 displays the distribution of special education programs within survey respondents and within the target population. The proportion of parents with students receiving the following programs was higher among survey respondents than among the target population: Aspergers (1.7% vs. 1.0%), Autism (2.5% vs. 2.1%), Gifted/Learning Disability (2.1% vs. 1.2%), Home School Model (16.2% vs. 15.6%), and Learning Center (4.0% vs. 3.5%). However, the proportion of parents with students receiving the following programs was lower among respondents than among the target population of all survey recipients: Emotional Disabilities Cluster (1.9% vs. 2.3%), Hours Based Program (1.9% vs. 2.3%), Learning and Academic Disabilities (1.9% vs. 2.3%), and Resource (1.9% vs. 2.3%).

Table 2
Special Education Program for Respondents and Target Population

Special education program	Respondents		Target population	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Aspergers	25	1.7	46	1.0
Autism	37	2.5	99	2.1
Autism Resource - Secondary	9	0.6	24	0.5
Bridge	32	2.1	95	2.0
Deaf Hard of Hearing Class	17	1.1	48	1.0
Deaf Hard of Hearing Itinerant	12	0.8	26	0.6
Emotional Disabilities Cluster	29	1.9	106	2.3
Gifted/Learning Disability	31	2.1	56	1.2
Home School Model	242	16.2	733	15.6
Hours Based Program	241	16.1	782	16.6
Learning and Academic Disabilities	303	20.3	1,012	21.5
Learning Center	60	4.0	166	3.5
Learning for Independence	83	5.6	266	5.7
MCPS Special School	33	2.2	117	2.5
Other ^a	12	0.8	32	0.7
Resource	287	19.2	963	20.5
School Community Based	42	2.8	129	2.7
Total	1,495	100.0	4,700	100.0

^aOther includes programs with fewer than five students in the target population.

Racial/Ethnic Group

Table 3 displays the distribution for the student's racial/ethnic group within survey respondents and within the target population. Families of Asian and White students responded in higher percentages than the percentage that received surveys, 10.7% vs. 7.9% and 37.9% vs. 32.1%, respectively. Also, the percentage of parents of Black or African American and Hispanic/Latino students that responded to the survey was lower than the percentage of those parents in the total target population, 23.4% and 26.1%, and 24.2% vs. 30.0%, respectively.

Table 3
Student's Racial/Ethnic Group for Respondents and Target Population

Racial/Ethnic group	Respondents		Target population	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Asian	160	10.7	370	7.9
Black or African American	350	23.4	1,225	26.1
Hispanic/Latino	362	24.2	1,411	30.0
White	567	37.9	1,508	32.1
Two or More Races	52	3.5	179	3.8
Total ^a	1,495	100.0	4,700	100.0

^aTotal includes groups with fewer than five students in the group.

Survey Language

As noted above, parents received the survey in different languages. Table 4 displays the distribution of survey languages within respondents and within the target population. Parents indicating their home language as English responded in higher percentages than the percentage in the target population (82.7% vs. 80.4%). The percentage of parents indicating their home language as Spanish responded in lower percentages than the percentage in the target population (14.2% vs. 16.9%). Parents indicating French, Vietnamese, or Other languages as their home language responded to surveys in comparable percentages to their percentages in the target population.

Table 4
Survey Language for Respondents and Target Population

Language	Respondents		Target population	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
English	1,236	82.7	3,777	80.4
French	13	0.9	37	0.8
Other ^a	26	1.7	73	1.6
Spanish	212	14.2	793	16.9
Vietnamese	11	0.7	39	0.8
Total	1,495	100.0	4,700	100.0

^aOther includes languages with fewer than 10 parents (i.e., Amharic, Chinese, Korean).

Summary

The respondent group of parents differed from the target population in terms of the student's special education program and racial/ethnic group and also the survey language. Further analysis revealed an overlap between the last two indicators; 56% of parents with Hispanic/Latino students received surveys in Spanish.

Strengths and Limitations Associated with the Study

This study, like others that make conclusions based on a survey of a sample, faces at least four potential sources of error: sampling error, noncoverage error, nonresponse error, and measurement error (Dillman, 1991). The following procedures were used to reduce error in this survey, hence reducing bias.

- 1) Sampling error is due to the fact that choosing a target population means that certain members of the full population are excluded from the study. This study guarded against this error by including parents of students in all school types, in the entire range of MCPS special education programs, and in all grade levels, except for prekindergarten. The latter group was excluded because the pilot study included those parents.
- 2) Noncoverage error occurs because some members of the full population are not covered by the sampling frame and therefore have no chance of being selected into the target population. This survey included only parents who attended an IEP meeting for their child between February 1 and May 15. Thus, the results may not reflect experiences of parents with meetings at other times of year. The limited time frame for the target

population ensured that the experience was more recent for parents, so they could more accurately respond and decrease measurement error (see #4 below).

- 3) Nonresponse error occurs when respondents do not participate in any part of the survey or do not answer individual survey questions. Although the response rates for this survey equaled or exceeded the response rates for the MCPS parent survey for each school type (see Figure 1 above), they were not 100%, so the survey results may not generalize to all parents of children receiving special education services. As described above, survey response rates from parents differed across special education programs, racial/ethnic groups, and the language in which the parents received the survey. However, it is unknown if the groups with lower response rates would have responded differently.
- 4) Measurement error may result due to respondents' inability to provide accurate information; as noted above, restricting the sample to parents with an IEP meeting within four months of the survey helped reduce this error. Measurement error also may be caused by characteristics of the question (e.g., a question worded so that it cannot be answered accurately). This type of error was reduced by developing the questions with the Parent Outreach Committee, by piloting the survey questions with another group of parents (i.e., prekindergarten), and by revising the questions after the pilot, with the Parent Outreach Committee.

Results

The survey results are presented for the following four groups of parents, according to what school type their child attended:

- Elementary
- Middle
- High
- Special

Because the results were very similar across the four school types, the findings for all school types are presented together. All statistically significant differences between school types, based on chi-square (χ^2) analysis, are noted. In interpreting the findings from parents of students in special schools, it is important to be cautious because the number of respondents was small ($N = 39$).

Not every responding parent answered each item on the survey. Therefore, most tables include footnotes with information on the number of respondents who did answer the items in that table, for each school group.

Background

The most recent IEP meeting was also the student's first IEP meeting for 10–14% of respondents, depending on the type of school (Table 5). Among parents of elementary, middle, and special school students, at least 80% of respondents had attended the IEP meeting in the 90 days prior to completing the survey. However, significantly fewer of the responding parents of high school students (69%) indicated that their meeting was within the last 90 days, compared to parents with students in elementary (81%), middle (80%), or special (84%) schools ($\chi^2(df = 3) = 24.1, p < .001$).

Table 5
Background Questions

		Type of school							
		Elementary ($N = 657$)		Middle ($N = 345$)		High ($N = 453$)		Special ($N = 39$)	
Question		<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Was this meeting the first IEP ever held for this child?	Yes	90	13.9	44	12.8	64	14.2	4	10.3
	No	546	84.5	295	86.0	382	84.9	35	89.7
	Don't know/Not sure	10	1.5	4	1.2	4	0.9	0	0.0
Was your meeting held in the last 90 days?	Yes	526	81.0	272	79.8	313	69.2	32	84.2
	No	96	14.8	53	15.5	113	25.0	4	10.5
	Don't know/Not sure	27	4.2	16	4.7	26	5.8	2	5.3

Note. Excludes no responses.

Question 1: Experiences With IEP Meetings

Nearly all respondents reported positive experiences at their child’s most recent IEP meeting.

Implementation Process as Intended

Respondents indicated that the IEP meeting process was implemented as intended. About 90% of all responding parents reported that their meeting started on time and that there was enough time to cover all the information at the meeting (Table 6 and Figure 2). Somewhat fewer parents with students in special schools (80%) reported that their IEP meeting started on time compared to other school types (87–90%). However, there were no statistically significant differences about starting on time among the four different types of schools ($\chi^2(df = 3) = 6.1, p >.05$).

Table 6
Responses to Items on Implementation of Process as Intended by Type of School

Item		Elementary (N = 657)		Middle (N = 345)		High (N = 453)		Special (N = 39)	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Did your meeting start on time?	Yes	565	87.3	309	90.4	403	90.0	31	79.5
	No	66	10.2	24	7.0	34	7.6	6	15.4
	Don’t know/Not sure	16	2.5	9	2.6	11	2.5	2	5.1
Was there enough time at your meeting to cover all of the information?	Yes	581	90.4	312	92.3	404	90.0	33	86.8
	No	45	7.0	17	5.0	31	6.9	4	10.5
	Don’t know/Not sure	17	2.6	9	2.7	14	3.1	1	2.6

Note. Excludes no responses.

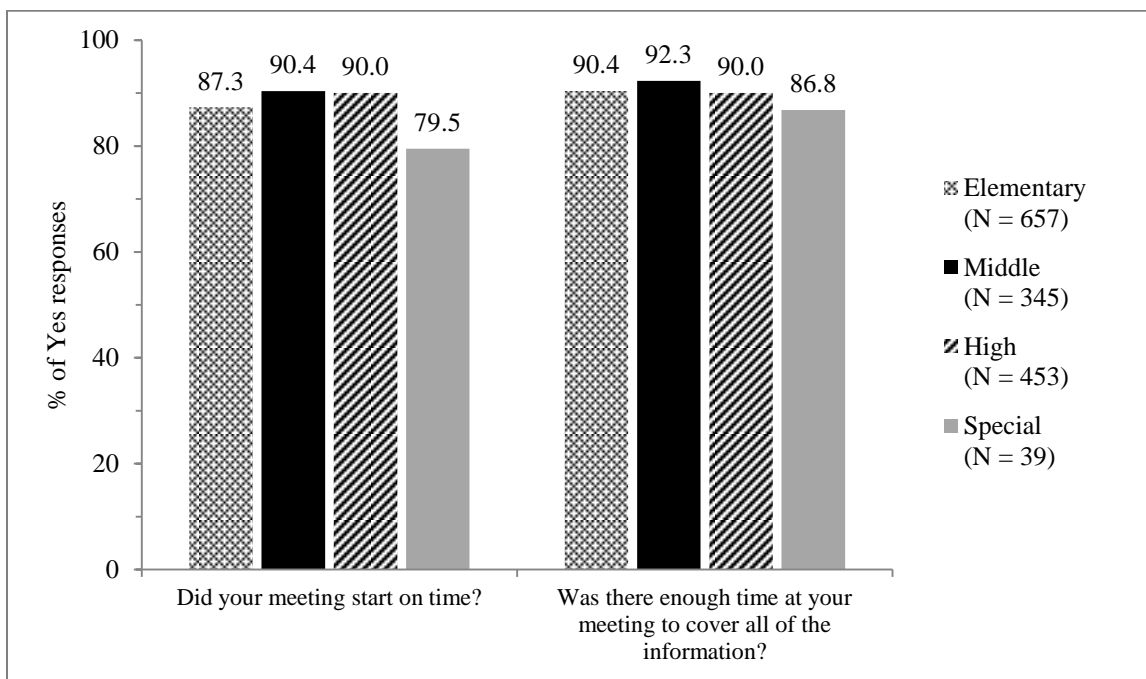


Figure 2. Positive responses to items on implementation of process as intended. (See more details in Table 6 above.)

The final item about implementation had different response options than the preceding items and so is included as Item 1 in Table 7 and Figure 3 below. Almost all respondents (95–98%) strongly agreed or agreed that they were able to give input throughout the meeting.

Communication During Meeting

Almost all respondents reported positive communications during the IEP meeting. About 97% of respondents in each group strongly agreed or agreed that they were able to ask clarifying questions (Item 2 in Table 7 and Figure 3). Also, more than 9 out of 10 respondents in each parent group (92–97%) strongly agreed or agreed that there was at least one member of the school-based team they felt comfortable to contact (Item 3 in Table 7 and Figure 3).

Table 7
Level of Agreement With Items About Implementation of Process or Communication by Type of School

Item	Strongly agree or Agree							
	Elementary (N = 657) ^a		Middle (N = 345) ^b		High (N = 453) ^c		Special (N = 39) ^d	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
1. During the IEP meeting...I had the opportunity to provide input throughout the meeting.	633	97.5	335	98.2	438	97.3	37	94.9
2. During the IEP meeting...I was able to ask clarifying questions.	631	97.1	334	97.9	436	97.1	38	97.4
3. After the IEP meeting...There is at least one member of my school-based IEP team who I feel comfortable contacting.	579	91.9	318	93.5	426	95.5	38	97.4

Note. Excludes no responses.

^aNumber of responses to each item varied from 630–650. ^bNumber of responses to each item varied from 340–341.

^cNumber of responses to each item varied from 446–450. ^dAll respondents answered each item.

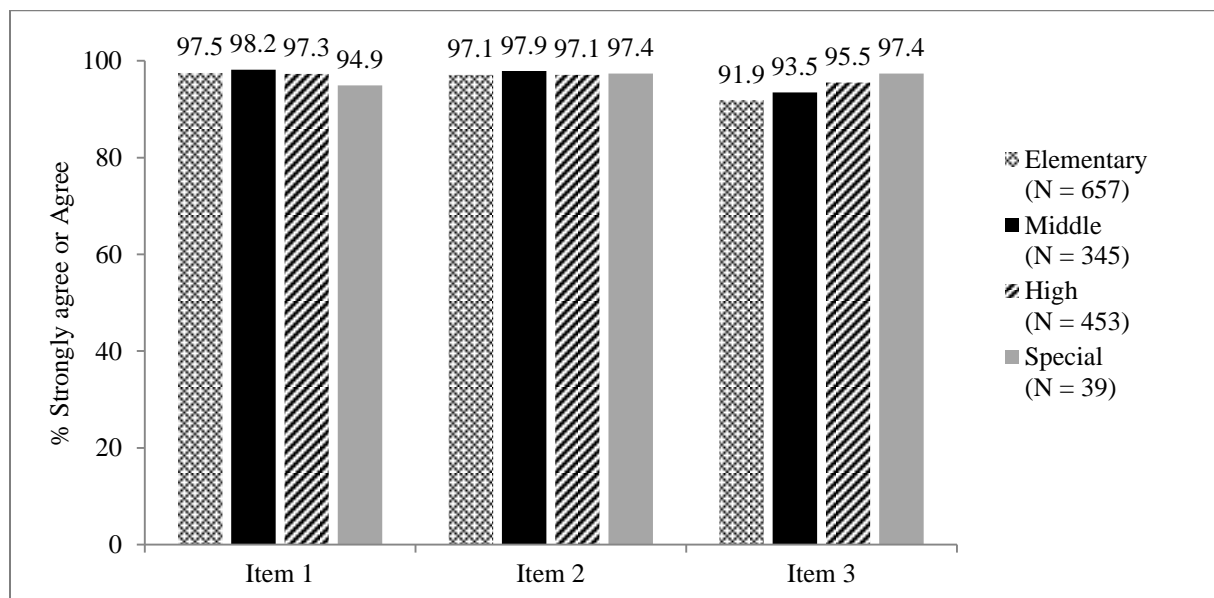


Figure 3. Level of agreement with items about implementation of process or communication. (See more details in Table 7 above.)

Almost all responding parents strongly agreed or agreed that there was enough explanation during the meeting about a variety of topics (Table 8 and Figures 4a and 4b). These topics included the child’s skill, abilities, and needs (93–97%); goals and objectives for the child (92–95%); instructional accommodations (93–97%); educational services (92–97%); supplementary aids and services (91–95%); and the least restrictive environment (88–95%).

Table 8
Level of Agreement With Six Items About Explanations During the IEP Meeting by Type of School

During the IEP meeting there was enough explanation about...	Strongly agree or Agree							
	Elementary (N = 657) ^a		Middle (N = 345) ^b		High (N = 453) ^c		Special (N = 39) ^d	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
4. my child’s skill, abilities, and needs.	587	93.2	320	95.2	413	93.0	38	97.4
5. the goals and objectives for my child.	580	92.8	318	94.9	406	92.1	37	94.9
6. the instructional accommodations for my child (e.g. extended time, scribe).	579	92.8	325	96.7	418	94.4	37	94.9
7. the educational services to be provided for my child.	566	91.7	319	96.7	407	92.7	35	92.1
8. the supplementary aids and services for my child (e.g. break tasks into smaller pieces, step by step directions, repetition of directions).	566	91.0	319	94.9	406	92.7	37	94.9
9. the least restrictive environment (LRE) for my child.	540	87.7	286	88.5	394	90.8	36	94.9

Note. Excludes no responses.

^aNumber of responses to each item varied from 622–630. ^bNumber of responses to each item varied from 335–336.

^cNumber of responses to each item varied from 438–444. ^dAll respondents answered each item.

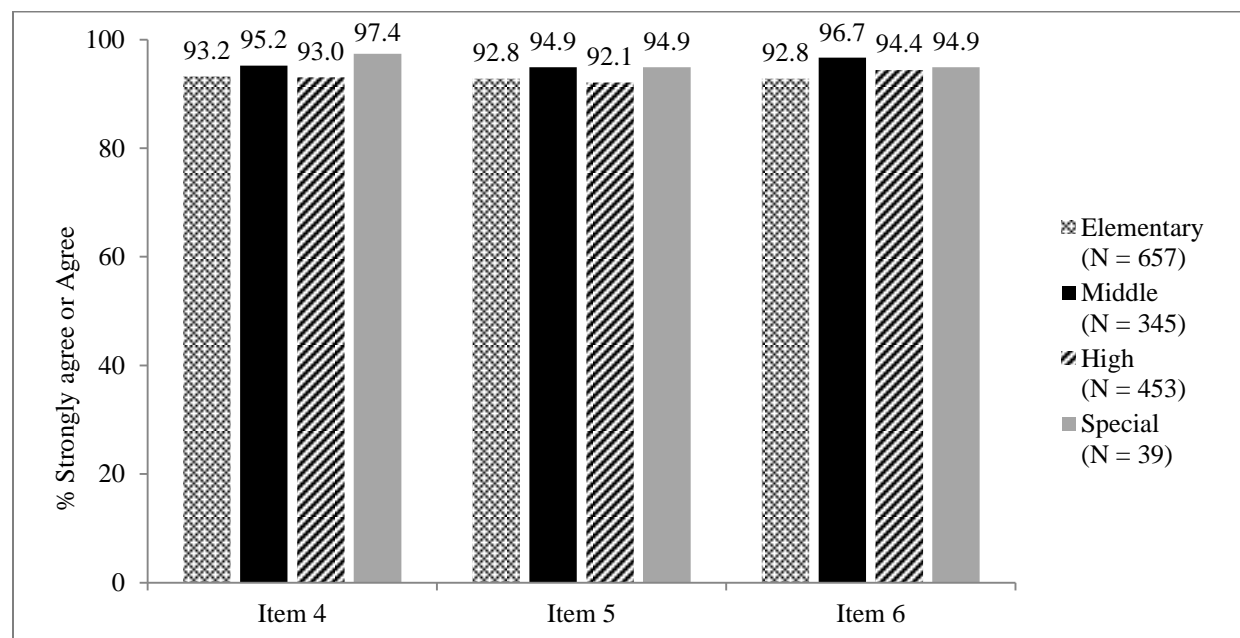


Figure 4a. Level of agreement with items 4–6 about explanations during the IEP meeting. (See more details in Table 8 above.)

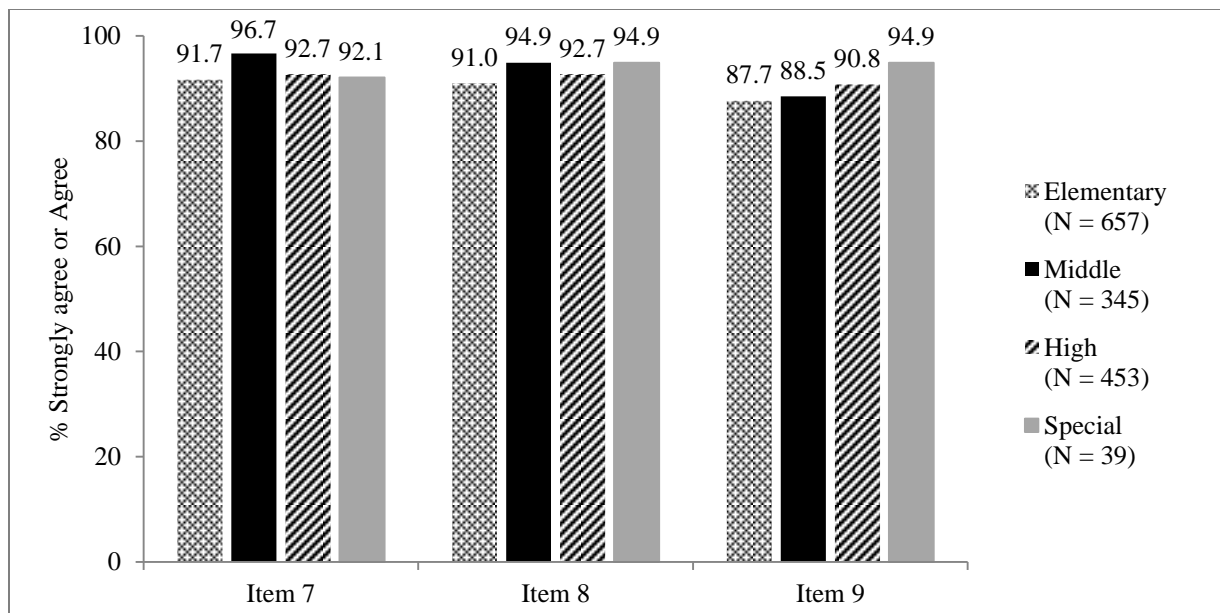


Figure 4b. Level of agreement with items 7–9 about explanations during the IEP meeting. (See more details in Table 8 above.)

Two survey topic items may not have been applicable to all students. These survey items had an additional response option of does not apply. Because many respondents checked this option or skipped the item (up to 43%), the total number of respondents who indicated their agreement is included in Table 9. (Also see Figure 5.) At least 80% of responding parents in each type of school strongly agreed or agreed that there was enough explanation during the meeting about these two topics: extended school year (84–94%) and related services (81–97%).

Table 9
Level of Agreement and Total Number of Responses for Two Items About Explanations During the IEP Meeting by Type of School

During the IEP meeting, there was enough explanation about....		Elementary (N = 657)		Middle (N = 345)		High (N = 453)		Special (N = 39)	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
10. extended school year (ESY) for my child (as appropriate).	Strongly agree or Agree	445	93.3	214	91.1	240	84.2	33	94.3
	Total # of responses	477		235		285		35	
11. related services (for example: occupational therapy (OT), physical therapy (PT), speech, etc.)	Strongly agree or Agree	463	88.9	192	86.1	207	80.5	30	96.8
	Total # of responses	521		223		257		31	

Note. Excludes no responses and respondents that checked “Does not apply.”

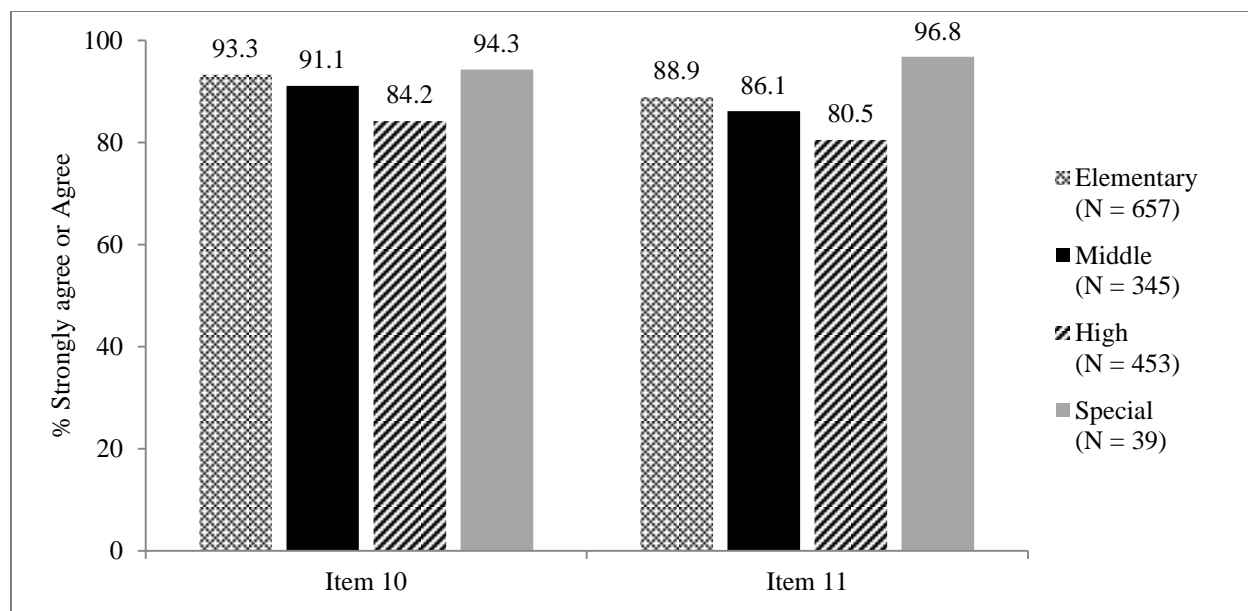


Figure 5. Level of agreement with Items 10 and 11 about explanations during the IEP meeting. (See more details in Table 9 above.)

The lowest levels of agreement about enough explanation (and the only ones below 90%) were for least restrictive environment among parents of elementary and middle schools students (Item 9 in Table 8), extended school year among parents of high school students (Item 10 in Table 9), and related services among all parent groups, except parents of students in special schools (Item 11 in Table 9). For these last two topics, there were significant differences by type of school. Compared to parents of students in other school types, fewer parents of high school students strongly agreed or agreed about enough explanation for extended school year ($\chi^2(df = 3) = 5.0, p < .05$) and for related services ($\chi^2(df = 3) = 17.7, p < .001$). Note that almost all parents of students in special schools strongly agreed or agreed that there was enough explanation for each topic (Tables 8 and 9).

Understanding of Purpose and Process

Almost all respondents agreed that they understood the IEP meeting's purpose and process (Table 10 and Figure 6). Nearly all responding parents strongly agreed or agreed about understanding the purpose of the IEP meeting (99–100%) and the materials sent prior to the meeting (95–97%). Further, almost all respondents strongly agreed or agreed with three items related to understanding the IEP process. These items included clarity about what services the child will receive (92–94%) and future accommodations (90–97%). Fewer respondents (81–89%) strongly agreed or agreed about the Item 16: knowing what to do in case of a disagreement with a decision. Among all respondents, this item had the lowest level of agreement (i.e., strongly agree plus agree) of any item on the survey. Further there were differences across school types, as follows. Significantly fewer elementary school parents strongly agreed or agreed to this item, compared to parents of middle school students ($\chi^2(df = 1) = 6.1, p < .05$) and of high school students ($\chi^2(df = 1) = 11.2, p < .001$); there was no significant difference compared to parents of students in special schools ($\chi^2(df = 1) = 0.8, p > .05$).

Table 10
Level of Agreement with Items about Understanding the IEP Meeting’s Purpose and Process by Type of School

Item	Strongly agree or Agree							
	Elementary (N = 657) ^a		Middle (N = 345) ^b		High (N = 453) ^c		Special (N = 39) ^d	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
12. I understood the purpose of the IEP meeting.	639	98.5	340	98.8	446	98.5	39	100.0
13. I understood the materials sent to me prior to the IEP meeting.	612	95.2	331	96.8	436	96.7	37	94.9
14. After the IEP meeting...I am clear about what services my child will receive.	577	91.9	322	94.4	411	92.2	35	92.1
15. After the IEP meeting...I am clear about what accommodations my child will receive.	563	90.4	319	94.4	417	93.5	37	97.4
16. After the IEP meeting...I know what to do if I disagree with a decision.	499	81.1	297	87.4	387	88.8	33	86.8

Note. Excludes no responses.

^aNumber of responses to each item varied from 615–649. ^bNumber of responses to each item varied from 338–344.

^cNumber of responses to each item varied from 436–453. ^dNumber of responses to each item varied from 38–39.

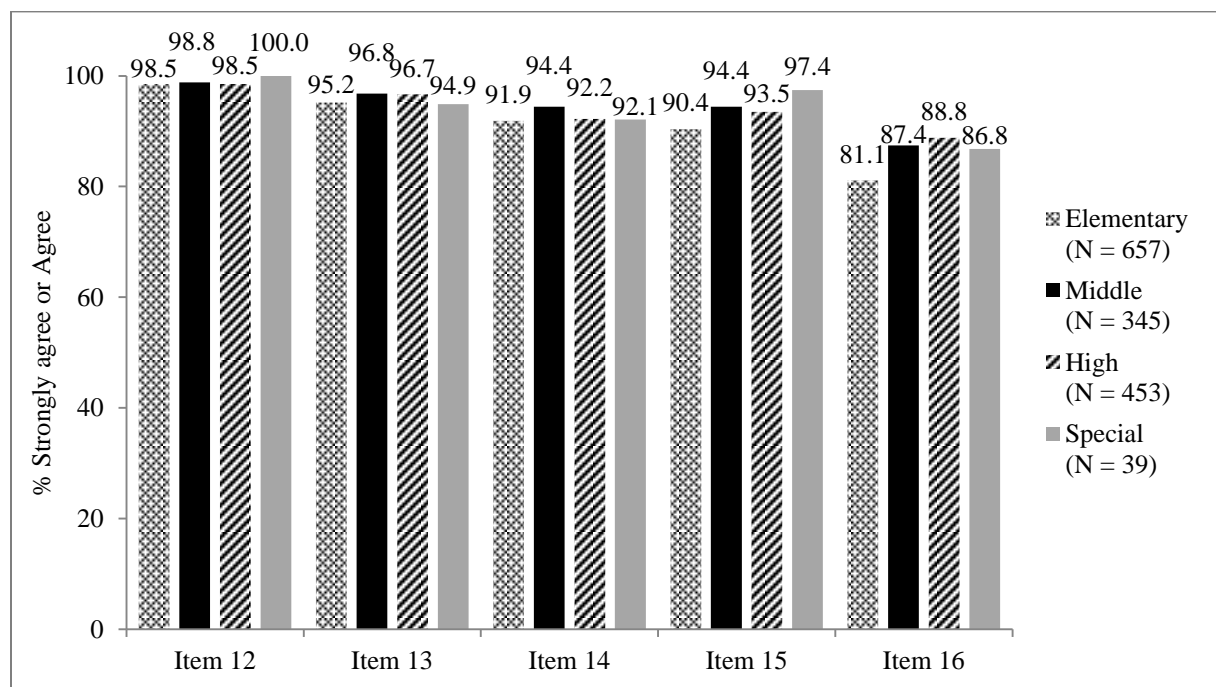


Figure 6. Level of agreement with items about understanding the IEP meeting. (See more details in Table 10 above.)

The differences across school types on Item 16 do not appear to be due to the parent’s experience with attending IEP meetings. Among parents of elementary school students, significantly more of those who said the most recent IEP meeting was the child’s first meeting strongly agreed or agreed about knowing what to do in case of a disagreement (91%) than other elementary school parents (80%), ($\chi^2(df = 1) = 4.7, p < .05$).

Climate

Almost all responding parents reported a positive climate during the IEP meeting (Table 11 and Figure 7). At least 92% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that school-based members of the IEP team made the parent feel welcome (95–99%) and addressed the parent’s concerns (92–96%). Also, nearly all respondents (94–97%) agreed that they felt included as a team member. Additional analyses revealed that across all items on the survey, the highest level of strongly agree was for the item about making the parent feel welcome (at least 74% for each type of school).

Table 11
Level of Agreement with Items About Climate of the IEP Meeting by Type of School

Item	Strongly agree or Agree							
	Elementary (N = 657) ^a		Middle (N = 345) ^b		High (N = 453) ^c		Special (N = 39) ^d	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
17. The school-based members of the IEP team... made me feel welcome.	639	98.5	341	98.8	443	98.2	37	94.9
18. The school-based members of the IEP team... addressed my concerns	602	92.8	325	95.6	418	93.3	35	92.1
19. During the IEP meeting... I felt included as a member of the IEP team.	610	94.1	329	96.2	431	95.8	38	97.4

Note. Excludes no responses.

^aNumber of responses to each item varied from 648–649. ^bNumber of responses to each item varied from 340–345.

^cNumber of responses to each item varied from 448–451. ^dNumber of responses to each item varied from 38–39.

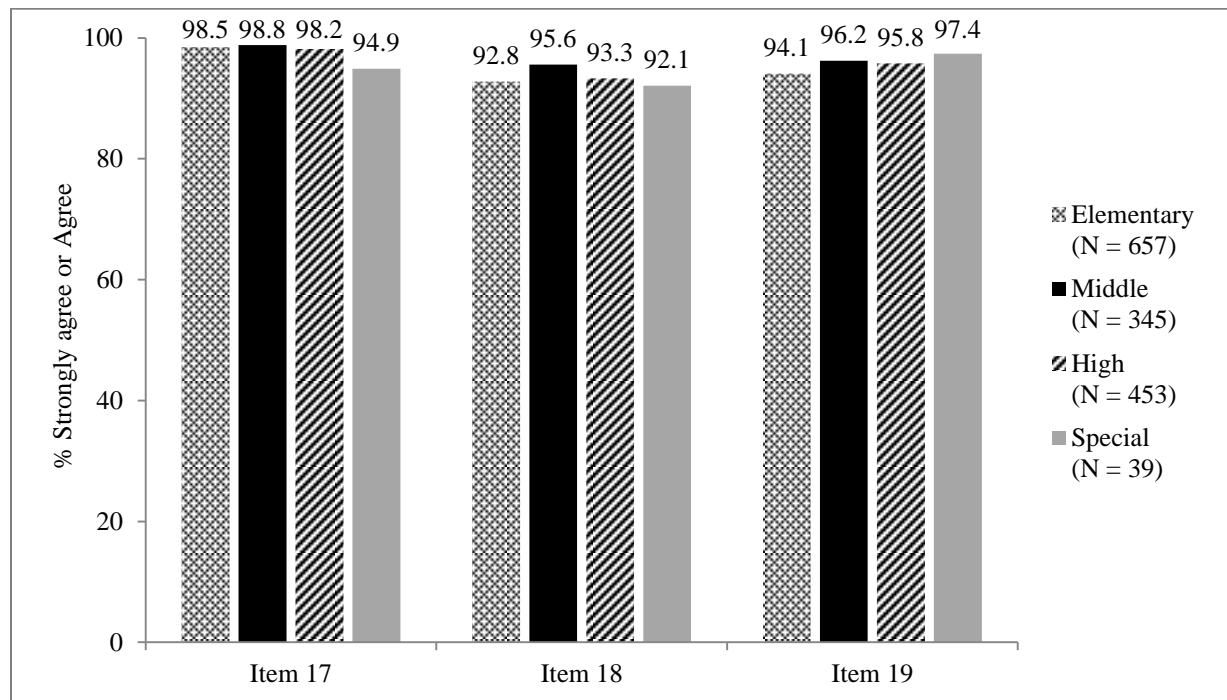


Figure 7. Level of agreement with items about climate of the IEP meeting. (See more details in Table 11 above.)

Satisfaction With Meeting

A large majority of respondents expressed satisfaction with the IEP meeting (Table 12 and Figure 8). At least 90% of parents strongly agreed or agreed that the information presented was an accurate description of their child (92–96%). At least 85% of parents strongly agreed or agreed that school-based members of the team made decisions in their child’s best interest (85–97%). However, significantly fewer parents of students in special schools (85%) strongly agreed or agreed that decisions were made in the child’s best interest, compared to parents of students in other types of schools (93–97%) ($\chi^2(df = 3) = 12.9, p < .01$).

Table 12
Level of Agreement With Items About Satisfaction With the IEP Meeting by Type of School

Item	Strongly agree or Agree							
	Elementary (N = 657) ^a		Middle (N = 345) ^b		High (N = 453) ^c		Special (N = 39) ^d	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
20. During the IEP meeting...I felt the information presented was an accurate description of my child.	600	92.9	328	96.2	431	95.4	36	92.3
21. The school-based members of the IEP team...made decisions in the best interest of my child	591	93.4	326	97.0	412	92.6	33	84.6

Note. Excludes no responses.

^aNumber of responses to each item was 633 or 646. ^bNumber of responses to each item was 336 or 341.

^cNumber of responses to each item was 445 or 452. ^dAll respondents answered each item.

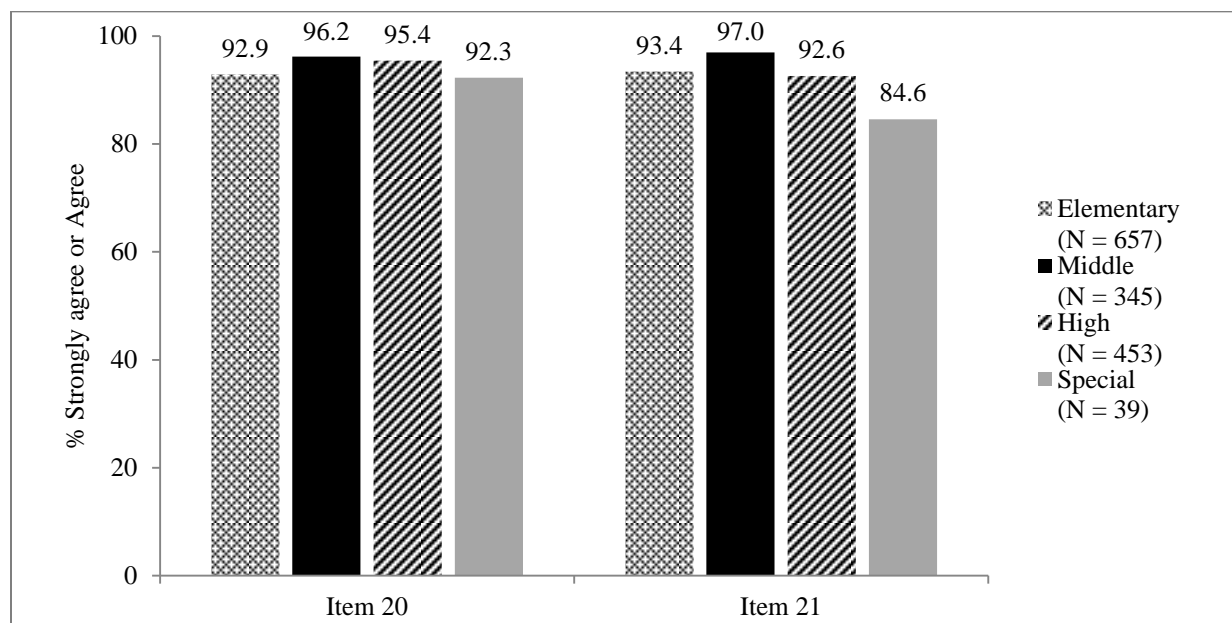


Figure 8. Level of agreement with items about satisfaction with the IEP meeting. (See more details in Table 12 above.)

What is Working

When asked to list one or two things that worked well at the IEP meeting, about 7 out of 10 of all responding parents (1,065, 71%) provided at least one positive comment. The response rate for this question was similar across types of schools:

- Elementary school: 485, 74%
- Middle school: 241, 70%
- High school: 317, 70%
- Special school: 28, 72%

Table 13 presents all categories of comments about things that worked well at the IEP meeting that were made by at least 10% of parents who responded to this question within one type of school.² Percentages in Table 13 are based only on the parents who responded to this question.³ Among parents who provided a positive comment, one quarter to more than one third of each parent group described collaboration and communication (25–39%) and the meeting’s organization (27–36%) as something that worked well at the IEP meeting. Examples for the former category were parent and IEP team brainstormed together, collaborated as a team to make a decision, and shared information with each other. Examples of what worked well about the meeting’s organization were good use of time; appropriate staff in attendance; and staff was prepared, professional, and on time.

Table 13
Most Frequent Comments About Things That Worked Well at the IEP Meeting by Type of School

Please tell us one or two things that worked well at the IEP meeting. Category	Elementary (<i>N</i> = 657) ^a		Middle (<i>N</i> = 345) ^b		High (<i>N</i> = 453) ^c		Special (<i>N</i> = 39) ^d	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
1. Collaboration and communication	148	30.5	66	27.4	80	25.2	11	39.3
2. Meeting’s organization	147	30.3	65	27.0	111	35.0	10	35.7
3. Good relationship/communication among staff, student, and parent	112	23.1	62	25.7	81	25.6	7	25.0
4. Helpful information	114	23.5	54	22.4	67	21.1	7	25.0
5. Goals, plans, or services made or provided	58	12.0	36	14.9	32	10.1	4	14.3
6. Positive, general comments	53	10.9	21	8.7	30	9.5	4	14.3
7. Student included in IEP meeting	3	0.6	18	7.5	31	9.8	1	3.6
8. Atmosphere: welcoming, open, not rushed	31	6.4	19	7.9	16	5.0	4	14.3

Note. Excludes no responses. Respondents could make more than one comment.

^aNumber of responses = 485. ^bNumber of responses = 241. ^cNumber of responses = 317. ^dNumber of responses = 28.

About one quarter of parents who provided a positive comment (23–26%) described good relationships or communication among staff, student, and parent as something that worked well (category 3). Examples of these comments were staff works well with, communicates well about, or expresses concern about the student. Also among parents who made a positive comment, one fifth to one quarter (21–25%) mentioned helpful information (Category 4), such as the IEP team provided explanation of terms, services, and processes; shared useful information; or answered questions.

² See Table A1, Appendix A for all categories of comments about things that worked well.

³ See Table B1, Appendix B for percentages based on the total number of parents who submitted a survey.

Among respondents who made a positive comment, 15% or fewer wrote about Categories 5–8 in Table 13. At least one tenth of these respondents (10–15%) mentioned that goals, plans, or services were made or provided (Category 5); this category included making changes to or adjusting the IEP and resolving issues. Nearly one tenth or more of parents who answered this question (9–14%) made positive, general comments about the meeting (e.g., meeting is fine). Among high school parents who made a positive comment, one tenth (10%) appreciated including the student in the IEP meeting. Among parents of students in special schools who made a positive comment, about one eighth (14%) described the meeting’s atmosphere as welcoming, open, or not rushed.

What Needs Improvement

When asked to list one or two ways to improve the IEP meeting, about 60% of all responding parents (916, 61%) provided at least one comment. However, about one sixth (270, 18%) of parents indicated that they were happy with the meeting or had no concerns. Thus, the percentage of respondents who made a suggestion was closer to four out of ten for all respondents (644, 43%) and for three out of four school types:

- Elementary school: 275, 42%
- Middle school: 137, 40%
- High school: 209, 46%
- Special school: 22, 56%

Table 14 presents all categories of comments about ways to improve the IEP meeting that were made by at least 10% of parents who responded to this question within one type of school. Percentages in Table 14 are based only on the parents who responded to this question.⁴

Table 14
Most Frequent Comments About Ways to Improve the IEP Meeting by Type of School

Please tell us one or two ways to improve the IEP meeting. Category	Elementary (<i>N</i> = 657) ^a		Middle (<i>N</i> = 345) ^b		High (<i>N</i> = 453) ^c		Special (<i>N</i> = 39) ^d	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
1. Invite all pertinent staff and specialists to IEP meeting, especially classroom teacher	45	16.4	40	29.2	77	36.8	3	13.6
2. Lengthen meeting; Schedule meetings with parents and school in mind for maximum participation	60	21.8	28	20.4	37	17.7	5	22.7
3. Increase clarity, explanations, or information	59	21.5	33	24.1	36	17.2	4	18.2
4. Listen to parents during meeting; Involve parents in decision process	40	14.5	15	10.9	28	13.4	4	18.2
5. Improve communication between home and school by adding follow up meetings or providing updates for student	46	16.7	21	15.3	20	9.6	0	0.0
6. Provide documents that demonstrate implementation of accommodations or modifications as detailed in IEP	23	8.4	14	10.2	13	6.2	0	0.0
7. Demonstrate professional behavior	16	5.8	5	3.6	11	5.3	3	13.6

Note. Excludes no responses and responses without ways to improve. Respondents could make more than one comment.

^aNumber of responses = 275. ^bNumber of responses = 137. ^cNumber of responses = 209. ^dNumber of responses = 22.

⁴ See Table A2, Appendix A for all categories of ways to improve.

See Table B2, Appendix B for percentages based on the total number of parents who submitted a survey.

Among secondary school parents who provided a suggestion, the most frequent one (from 29% of middle school parents and 37% of high school parents) was to invite all pertinent staff and specialists to the IEP meeting (Category 1). This suggestion came from fewer parents of elementary (16%) or special school students (14%) who suggested an improvement, perhaps because their students have fewer teachers.

Among parents who suggested an improvement, the most frequent comment from elementary or special school groups (22–23%) was to lengthen meetings and to be flexible when scheduling them (Category 2). In addition to not rushing meetings, parents asked for meetings to start on schedule so as not to force families to wait or to create a progressive delay of meetings as the day passes, and to find more convenient times so that parents do not have to miss work and staff can attend the entire meeting. Meeting length and scheduling also was a concern to secondary parents; about one fifth of middle and high school parents who made a suggestion (18–20%) included this one.

Among parents who made a suggestion, the second or third most frequent comment for each school type (17–24%) was to increase clarity, explanations, or information (Category 3). Parents asked that staff avoid educational language when talking to parents, provide more data on students, and give more explanation about their goals for students and service options available. A couple of parents asked for an overview or orientation meeting to cover everything from the language of an IEP to what happens during an IEP meeting.

Categories 4 and 5 in Table 14 focused on involvement of parents. For each school type, at least 10% of parents who provided a way to improve the IEP meeting asked staff to listen to them during the meeting and include them in the decision process (11–18%). This suggestion was among the top three from parents of students in special schools (18%). Another suggestion was to improve communication between home and school by adding follow-up meetings or providing updates for students throughout the year (Category 5). At least one in ten of elementary, middle, and high school parents who provided a suggestion made this request (10–17%), but none of the parents with students in special schools did so.

Among parents who provided a way to improve the meeting, a small group (6–10%) with students in elementary, middle, and high school requested documents that demonstrate implementation of accommodations or modifications as detailed in IEP (Category 6). Likewise, a small group of parents for each school type (4–14%) asked for school staff to demonstrate professional behavior (Category 7), by being prepared with accurate information about each student and being open to parent suggestions or requests during the IEP meeting.

Question 2: Satisfaction with Services

Responding parents reported high levels of satisfaction with the special education services that their child received (Figures 9 and 10). When asked, How satisfied are you with each of the following, nearly all respondents were very satisfied or satisfied with each of the following services: instruction (92–95%), accommodations (91–93%), and delivery of services as described on the IEP (89–92%) (Figure 9).

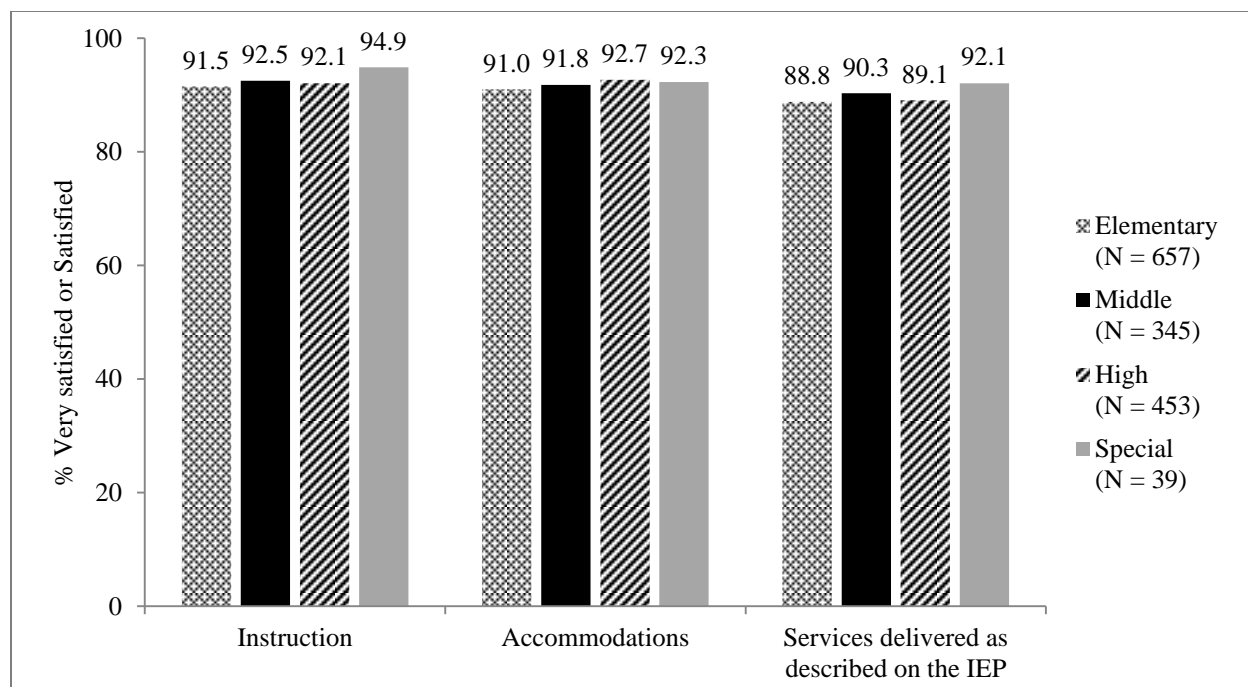


Figure 9. Level of agreement with items about satisfaction with special education services.

Note. Excludes no responses. Number of responses to each item varied from 607–623 for elementary, from 329–335 for middle, from 430–443 for high, and from 38–39 for special schools.

For two services that not all students received, the survey items about satisfaction had an additional response option of does not apply. Because many parents checked this option or skipped the item (up to 56%), the total number of respondents who indicated their satisfaction for each service is included in Figure 10. A very high majority of parents who responded were very satisfied or satisfied with transportation (94–95%) and related services (87–91%).

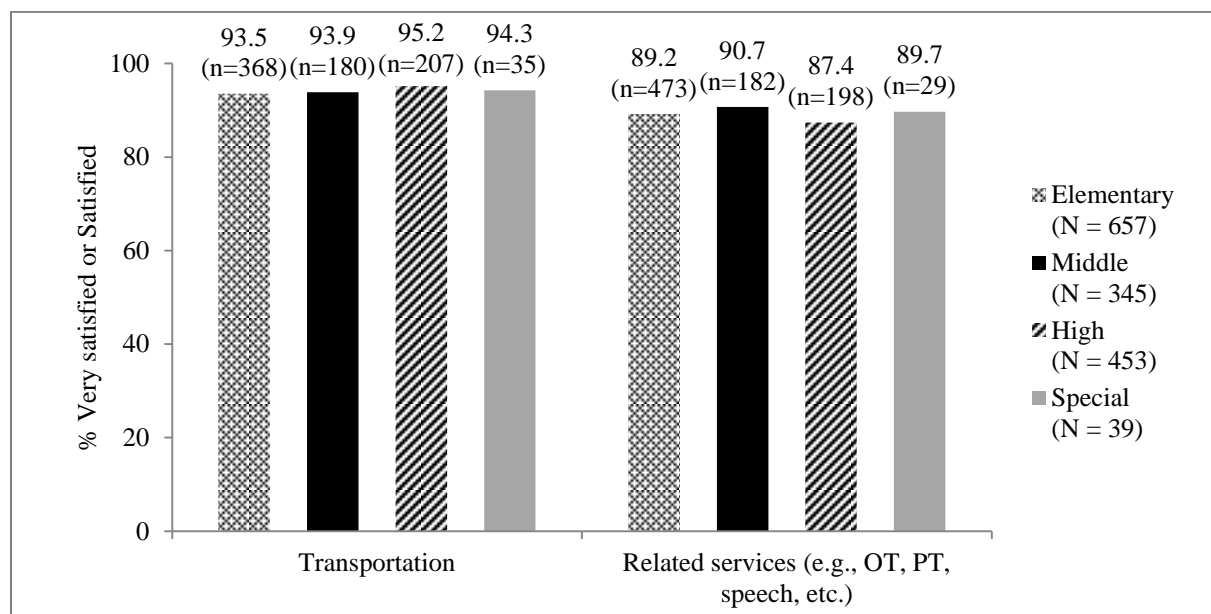


Figure 10. Level of agreement with items about satisfaction with special education services.

Note. Excludes no responses and respondents who checked “Does not apply.”

Recommendations

Analysis of these largely positive survey results identified a few areas for improvement (i.e., those in which less than 90% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that their experiences were positive), as reflected in the following program recommendations:

- Continue current procedures and strategies with respect to IEP meetings.
- Further enhance the IEP process by providing additional information at the meeting or before the meeting (e.g., through written materials webinars) or by placing a greater emphasis at the meeting on the following topics:
 - For parents of **all** students, focus on what parents should do if they disagree with a decision.
 - For parents of **elementary** school students, focus on: 1) least restrictive environment, 2) related services, and 3) what to do in case of a disagreement for parents who are not meeting for the first time.
 - For parents of **middle** school students, focus on: 1) least restrictive environment and 2) related services.
 - For parents of **high** school students, focus on: 1) extended school year and 2) related services.
- Further enhance the IEP process for parents of students in **special** schools by ensuring that IEP meetings: 1) start on time and 2) that parents agree that decisions were made in the child's best interest. Possible approaches to address the latter issue (based on parent suggestions for improvement) would be to ensure that parent's input is heard during the meeting.

The recommended next step for gathering parent feedback is to partner with MCPS offices and Montgomery County community groups and agencies to develop alternative strategies for reaching the following parent groups with lower response rates:

- Parents with students in one the following four programs: Emotional Disabilities Cluster, Hours Based Program, Learning and Academic Disabilities, Resource
- Parents of African American or Hispanic students
- Parents who indicated their home language as Spanish

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Appendix A

Table A1
All Comments About Things That Worked Well at the IEP Meeting by Type of School,
Among Parents Who Provided a Comment

Please tell us one or two things that worked well at the IEP meeting. Category	Elementary (N = 657) ^a		Middle (N = 345) ^b		High (N = 453) ^c		Special (N = 39) ^d	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
1. Collaboration & communication	148	30.5	66	27.4	80	25.2	11	39.3
2. Meeting's organization	147	30.3	65	27.0	111	35.0	10	35.7
3. Good relationship/communication among staff, student & parent	112	23.1	62	25.7	81	25.6	7	25.0
4. Helpful information	114	23.5	54	22.4	67	21.1	7	25.0
5. Goals, plans, or services made or provided	58	12.0	36	14.9	32	10.1	4	14.3
6. Positive, general comments	53	10.9	21	8.7	30	9.5	4	14.3
7. Student included in IEP meeting	3	0.6	18	7.5	31	9.8	1	3.6
8. Atmosphere: welcoming, open, not rushed	31	6.4	19	7.9	16	5.0	4	14.3
9. Information sent home prior to IEP meeting or heard with staff between IEP meetings	22	4.5	10	4.1	11	3.5	1	3.6
10. Other things that worked well (not classified into other categories)	17	3.5	6	2.5	9	2.8	0	0.0
11. Scheduling IEP meetings	11	2.3	5	2.1	6	1.9	2	7.1
12. Meeting staff	11	2.3	2	0.8	8	2.5	0	0.0
13. Interpreter or advocate provided for IEP meeting	7	1.4	5	2.1	3	0.9	0	0.0
14. Provided ideas/activities so I could help my child at home	8	1.6	3	1.2	2	0.6	0	0.0

Note. Excludes no responses. Respondents could make more than one comment.

^aNumber of responses = 485. ^bNumber of responses = 241. ^cNumber of responses = 317. ^dNumber of responses = 28.

Table A2
All Comments on Ways to Improve the IEP Meeting by Type of School,
Among Parents Who Provided a Comment

Please tell us one or two ways to improve the IEP meeting. Category	Elementary (N = 657) ^a		Middle (N = 345) ^b		High (N = 453) ^c		Special (N = 39) ^d	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
1. Invite all pertinent staff and specialists to IEP meeting, especially classroom teacher	45	16.4	40	29.2	77	36.8	3	13.6
2. Lengthen meeting; Schedule meetings with parents and school in mind for maximum participation	60	21.8	28	20.4	37	17.7	5	22.7
3. Increase clarity, explanation, or information	59	21.5	33	24.1	36	17.2	4	18.2
4. Listen to parents during meeting; Involve parents in decision process	40	14.5	15	10.9	28	13.4	4	18.2
5. Improve communication between home & school by adding follow up meetings or providing updates for student	46	16.7	21	15.3	20	9.6	0	0.0
6. Provide documents that demonstrate implementation of accommodations or modifications as detailed in IEP	23	8.4	14	10.2	13	6.2	0	0.0
7. Demonstrate professional behavior	16	5.8	5	3.6	11	5.3	3	13.6
8. Other ways to improve	21	7.6	7	5.1	4	1.9	2	9.1
9. Provide information before the meeting	11	4.0	5	3.6	15	7.2	2	9.1
10. Simplify paperwork and other paperwork or forms	16	5.8	5	3.6	5	2.4	1	4.5
11. Reports and documents for IEP meeting and their delivery/availability	12	4.4	5	3.6	10	4.8	2	9.1
12. Not happy with IEP meeting and what it provided	9	3.3	2	1.5	10	4.8	2	9.1
13. Include student in meeting	8	2.9	6	4.4	6	2.9	0	0.0
14. Don't take time from meeting to enter information into the computer	8	2.9	0	0.0	6	2.9	0	0.0
15. Not happy with the services student receives	6	2.2	4	2.9	4	1.9	0	0.0
16. Provide better meeting rooms or areas	1	0.4	0	0.0	2	1.0	0	0.0

Note. Excludes no responses and responses without ways to improve. Respondents could make more than one comment.

^aNumber of responses = 275. ^bNumber of responses = 137. ^cNumber of responses = 209. ^dNumber of responses = 22.

Appendix B

Table B1
All Comments About Things That Worked Well at the IEP Meeting by Type of School,
Among All Parents Who Responded to the Survey

Please tell us one or two things that worked well at the IEP meeting. Category	Elementary (N = 657)		Middle (N = 345)		High (N = 453)		Special (N = 39)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
1. Collaboration & communication	148	22.5	66	19.1	80	17.7	11	28.2
2. Meeting's organization	147	22.4	65	18.8	111	24.5	10	25.6
3. Good relationship/communication among staff, student & parent	112	17.1	62	18.0	81	17.9	7	18.0
4. Helpful information	114	17.4	54	15.7	67	14.8	7	18.0
5. Goals, plans, or services made or provided	58	8.8	36	10.4	32	7.1	4	10.3
6. Positive, general comments	53	8.1	21	6.1	30	6.6	4	10.3
7. Student included in IEP meeting	3	0.5	18	5.2	31	6.8	1	2.6
8. Atmosphere: welcoming, open, not rushed	31	4.7	19	5.5	16	3.5	4	10.3
9. Information sent home prior to IEP meeting or heard with staff between IEP meetings	22	3.4	10	2.9	11	2.4	1	2.6
10. Other things that worked well (not classified into other categories)	17	2.6	6	1.7	9	2.0	0	0.0
11. Scheduling IEP meetings	11	1.7	5	1.5	6	1.3	2	5.1
12. Meeting staff	11	1.7	2	0.6	8	1.8	0	0.0
13. Interpreter or advocate provided for IEP meeting	7	1.1	5	1.5	3	0.7	0	0.0
14. Provided ideas/activities so I could help my child at home	8	1.2	3	0.9	2	0.4	0	0.0

Note. Respondents could make more than one comment.

Table B2
All Comments on Ways to Improve the IEP Meeting by Type of School,
Among All Parents Who Responded to the Survey

Please tell us one or two ways to improve the IEP meeting. Category	Elementary (N = 657)		Middle (N = 345)		High (N = 453)		Special (N = 39)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
1. Invite all pertinent staff and specialists to IEP meeting, especially classroom teacher	45	6.8	40	11.6	77	17.0	3	7.7
2. Lengthen meeting; Schedule meetings with parents and school in mind for maximum participation	60	9.1	28	8.1	37	8.2	5	12.8
3. Increase clarity, explanation, or information	59	9.0	33	9.6	36	8.0	4	10.3
4. Listen to parents during meeting; Involve parents in decision process	40	6.1	15	4.4	28	6.2	4	10.3
5. Improve communication between home & school by adding follow up meetings or providing updates for student	46	7.0	21	6.1	20	4.4	0	0.0
6. Provide documents that demonstrate implementation of accommodations or modifications as detailed in IEP	23	3.5	14	4.1	13	2.9	0	0.0
7. Demonstrate professional behavior	16	2.4	5	1.5	11	2.4	3	7.7
8. Other ways to improve	21	3.2	7	2.0	4	0.9	2	5.1
9. Provide information before the meeting	11	1.7	5	1.5	15	3.3	2	5.1
10. Simplify paperwork and other paperwork or forms	16	2.4	5	1.5	5	1.1	1	2.6
11. Reports and documents for IEP meeting and their delivery/availability	12	1.8	5	1.5	10	2.2	2	5.1
12. Not happy with IEP meeting and what it provided	9	1.4	2	0.6	10	2.2	2	5.1
13. Include student in meeting	8	1.2	6	1.7	6	1.3	0	0.0
14. Don't take time from meeting to enter information into the computer	8	1.2	0	0.0	6	1.3	0	0.0
15. Not happy with the services student receives	6	0.9	4	1.2	4	0.9	0	0.0
16. Provide better meeting rooms or areas	1	0.2	0	0.0	2	0.4	0	0.0

Note. Respondents could make more than one comment.