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Pepperdine University  
Graduate School of Education and Psychology

THE DISPARITY IN A FREE APPROPRIATE PUBLIC EDUCATION:  
MINORITY PARENTS AND ACCESS THROUGH ADVOCACY

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership, Administration and Policy Studies

by

Melissa E. Moxley

April, 2016

Robert Barner, Ph.D. – Dissertation Chairperson

This dissertation, written by

Melissa E. Moxley

under the guidance of a Faculty Committee and approved by its members, has been submitted to and accepted by the Graduate Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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## VITA

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## ABSTRACT

The United States has been providing federally mandated educational access to children with disabilities for more than 35 years. During this relatively short period of time, the quality of education for children with physical, mental, emotional, and genetic challenges has been enhanced exponentially. Through federal legislation and nationwide litigation, formal structures have been created to ensure that the nation's 7.1 million students with special needs receive a free and appropriate public education. Despite these remarkable achievements, special education is impacted by social, cultural, and economic disparities that continue to plague education in the United States.

One inherent inequality in special education is the pronounced barrier minority parents face in terms of their ability to fully participate in the process of determining the most appropriate education for their child. These barriers are associated with linguistic diversity, socioeconomic challenges, access to information and limited social, cultural and economic capital. These limitations can negatively impact the offer of a free and appropriate public education, and may also be counterproductive to special education legislation that champions parent involvement.

Advocacy is one approach to breaking down these barriers. On as large a scale as federal special education legislation, whose legacy is grounded in advocacy, to the intimate individualized education team meetings, advocacy has proved itself to be a catalyst for varying degrees of access and change.

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

The role of parents in determining the most appropriate education for their special needs child was a focal point in the original Education for All Handicapped Children Act, its amendment the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and each of its reauthorizations. The parents of special education children as the decision makers and most critical members of the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) team are in fact the intention of the legislation as evidenced by the mandates embedded within the law. The right to fully participate in the educational decision making of their child, an intended degree of participation, varies greatly from parent to parent, just as the offer of a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) varies from child to child.

While federal legislation seeks to create access for all, minority families often encounter obstacles related to language, culture, economics, educational knowledge and access to information that negatively impact their ability to fully participate in the process (Brandon, 2007; Lo, 2012; Wakelin, 2008). This, in turn, can negatively impact the type of free and appropriate public education their children are offered. The belief has been that a parent's ability to advocate for their disabled child was connected to that child's opportunity to access a free and appropriate public education (Conroy, Yell, Katsiyannis, & Collins, 2010). At their discretion, the law allows parents to invite individuals to the meeting who are aware of the child or have expertise or knowledge about the child, such as an advocate. Although not specifically called out in the letter of the law, advocacy can certainly be shown in the history and spirit of the law.

The presence and participation of an advocate may mitigate the effect of these well documented obstacles to parent participation. Advocacy, as an expression of social capital, may be used to provide a voice and means to communicate for parents with language barriers. It

might be used to create a bridge between the parents who have a limited education or low socio-economic status, and the experts who surround them during IEP meetings. Culturally diverse parents who feel inferior, unable to connect, and unaware of the practices and protocols in American classrooms, may use advocacy as a means to establish a working relationship with the people who will be determining the course of their child's future.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The inability of minority parents to participate in a meaningful way during Individualized Education Plan meetings can negatively impact their disabled child's offer of a free and appropriate education. The barriers to such participation include: limited education, issues related to low socio-economic status and challenges associated with language barriers. Children with disabilities are entitled to receive an individual plan and services that will support them in being educated to the fullest extent possible. The determinations of such services are made by a team consisting of the child's parents as well as professionals from various areas of specialty in the field of special education. Parents are a key member of this team. Given the barriers to minority parent participation and the necessity of meaningful parent participation, closing this gap is essential to meeting the expectation of the legislation and ensuring the appropriate education of children with special needs nationwide.

### **Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of minority families who face common barriers to parent participation such as: limited education, low socio-economic status and limited language, during Individualized Education Plan meetings, with and without the presence of an external advocate.

## **Research Questions**

1. What are the experiences of minority families as members of the Individualized Education Plan team for their disabled child without the presence of an external advocate?
2. What are the experiences of minority families as members of the Individualized Education Plan team for their disabled child with the presence of an external advocate?
3. How might external advocacy impact the experiences of minority families, specific to their involvement in the Individualized Education Plan meeting?

## **Importance of Study**

A multi-disciplinary team is used to determine the most appropriate educational environment for a child with special needs. The law indicates that the parent of a special needs child is the most critical member of that team. The degree to which minority parents are able to participate as part of that team, in the decision making process, is limited based on factors such as language, lack of information, negative educational experiences and cultural diversity (Al-Hassan, 2002). These limitations perpetuate the disparity in FAPE and can be roadblocks to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act's guarantees of: a free and appropriate public education, in the least restrictive environment, an individualized education program, procedural due process for parents, nondiscriminatory assessment for minority students, and parental participation (Turnbull, 2005).

One manner of reducing these limitations is to increase access for minority families. Advocacy in special education has been used as a means to encourage both access and equity. Advocacy as a tool to support minority parents' full participation in the process may mitigate any

lack of social, cultural, or economic capital often used by non-minority parents to ensure full educational benefit for their children. Advocacy as a means to bridge the gap between cultures, language, understanding and access to information, may support minority parent involvement throughout the process of determining FAPE.

### **Delimitations**

This study is delimited to families who have a child who is currently eligible for and receiving special education services in their district of residence. The families who participate in this study will be from one of the following race or ethnicity groups which meet state and federal reporting guidelines: American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian or Pacific Islander, Black (not of Hispanic origin) and Hispanic.

Only families who have experiences with non-attorney advocates, referred to as *external* or *lay* advocates will be considered as viable participants in this study. Additionally, only families who have worked with advocates who are not members of their family will be considered for participation in the study. This is an effort to control the variable and to understand the experience specific to an advocate as opposed to the experience with an attorney.

### **Limitations**

One pervasive limitation to the study will be the aspect of self-reporting that will naturally occur during the course of identifying and including parents in the study. The self-reporting by parents of being educationally limited, impacted by linguistic diversity, and having participated previously in IEP meetings with and without the assistance of an advocate will be monitored as some of it involves perspective. The potential for bias of family members is significant and will be addressed through the screening protocol and interview questions. Another limitation may be the potential for families who participate in the study to meet the

criteria of being limited in terms of their education, culture, language barriers or socio economic status considered socio-economically challenged, but not necessarily negatively impacted by those common barriers. Additionally, potential bias of the researcher given background and experiences must be acknowledged and closely monitored to ensure the fidelity of the researcher gathered and its analysis.

### **Assumptions**

The researcher assumes that (1) the parents who participate in this study will exercise honesty and forthrightness (2) that the parents will be willing to share their experiences and (3) there is mutual interest and benefit in the research study for parents.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **Overview**

The history of special education through legislation and litigation is the first theme discussed in the literature review. Parental participation is then discussed as it is a focal point in both special education legislation and litigation. Minority parent participation and issues with barriers are presented to provide an overview of the challenges faced by minority parents of children with disabilities as they are charged with participating in the individualized education process. As a means to reduce those barriers, the literature review offers scholarly and timely information on advocacy in special education.

In its summary, the literature review focuses on social capital as a theoretical framework that may potentially be useful in addressing increased minority parent participation on behalf of their disabled children, in the pursuit of a free and appropriate public education through the individualized education process.

### **Restatement of the Problem**

The inability of minority parents to participate in a meaningful way during Individualized Education Plan meetings due to barriers such as a lack of knowledge or understanding, issues related to low socio-economic status and challenges associated with language barriers can negatively impact their disabled child's offer of a free and appropriate education. Children with disabilities are entitled to receive an individual plan and services that will support them in being educated to the fullest extent possible. The determination of such services is made by a team consisting of professionals from a variety of fields. Parents are a key member of this team.



Given the barriers to minority parent participation and the mandate to provide a free and appropriate public education, closing this gap is essential to meeting the expectation of the legislation and ensuring the education of children with special needs nationwide.

### **Restatement of Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of minority families who face common barriers to parent participation such as: limited education, low socio-economic status and limited language, during Individualized Education Plan meetings with and without the provision of an external advocate.

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1. What are the experiences of minority families as members of the Individualized Education Plan team for their disabled child without the presence of an external advocate?
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3. How might external advocacy impact the experiences of minority families, specific to their involvement in the Individualized Education Plan meeting?

### **Literature Search Strategies**

The literature for this review was collected by conducting electronic searches through the Pepperdine University Library and the internet for peer reviewed articles, books, journals, reports, and studies. Databases used to conduct searches include, but were not limited to: PsyInfo, ERIC, Lexis-Nexis, Academic Search Elite and EBSCOHOST.

## **Description of Extent and Nature of Literature**

The most common types of literature referenced for this review were articles contained in scholarly journals. The unique aspects of the themes in this review contributed to the limited availability of relevant and reliable resources, but certainly not to the extent that a thorough examination of current perspectives in the field could not be conducted. Literature spanning many decades was accessed as the issues related to the themes carried historical significance.

## **History of Special Education**

**Legislation and litigation.** The genesis of the special education movement in the United States is associated with the civil rights movement, a very uncertain period, which gave rise to awareness and change (Skiba, 2008). The African American citizens' struggle for equality and successful example of collective perseverance as a platform for change, created opportunities for other minority populations to make their voices, needs and expectations a standard. Individuals with disabilities were able to benefit from the groundwork laid by the civil rights movement. Children with disabilities who were living with conditions such as mental retardation, Down-Syndrome, Cerebral Palsy, deaf-blindness, and many other issues which impacted their ability to fully access their community, came to the forefront. These children, who had needs unlike their same-aged peers, were often educated in substandard environments (Martin, 1996). The primary purpose of which was to serve as a mere holding facility where these very unique and capable children were to exist day after day.

The Supreme Court had previously established the fact that all children were guaranteed the opportunity to be educated on equal terms through *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954. However, the manifestation of that decision did not fully come to fruition through any obvious attempts to educate children with disabilities, assist them in the pursuit of reaching their full

potential, discover ways to enhance their access, or a focus on improving their quality of life for many years.

It took a grassroots advocacy movement, spearheaded by the parents of children with disabilities, to bring attention to the very significant need for disabled children to be educated appropriately (Ong-Dean, 2011). This perfect storm that opened the flood gates for equality in the special needs community included the civil rights movement, a series of lawsuits brought about by parents around the country who were fighting individual issues related to access, equality and maximum benefit, a national spotlight on disabled Americans and several high ranking government officials who had a vested interest in the needs of mentally challenged children. President Kennedy had a mentally disabled sister and Vice President Humphrey had a mentally disabled grandchild (Zettel, 1977). The collective results of these variables provided the foundation, a baseline for what children with disabilities should be provided with to have the same opportunity that their peers have. The legislation and litigation reveal the story of special education in the United States.

In 1966 Public Law 89-750 was developed providing funding for handicapped children and also establishing the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped within the U.S office of Education. This law, named Title VI, was an addition to The Elementary and Secondary Education Act. A follow up action to these initial responses to establish educational benefit for disabled children in the United States was an amendment in 1970 repealing Title VI of The Elementary and Secondary Education Act replacing it with PL 91-230 which established the Education of the Handicapped Act. This legislative document helped the federal government define what it wanted states to do but did not include any specifics about its own role (Zettel, 1977).

The federal government as an active partner did not truly come to be until litigation began to shape the landscape. The decisions being made in district courts would ultimately set the tone and expectations for local education agencies in how they were going to meet the needs of children with disabilities in their care. A very well documented court case involving early special education litigation is *PARC v. The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* brought about in 1971. This class action lawsuit brought to light the fact that mentally retarded children were not being provided equal access to education and in fact this was a violation of their rights under the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment. The decisions rendered in this case would set a precedent for special education.

*PARC v. The Common Wealth of Pennsylvania* determined that there were no children who could not be educated, that education encompassed more than just academics but rather experiences and interactions between students and their environments, and that early intervention was critical to maximizing and realizing the potential of children with disabilities. The result was a federal court ruling which encompassed today's existing principles such as educating students in programs as similar to same-aged peers as possible, due process, early intervention and zero reject meaning public education for all children with disabilities.

During this time, another class action lawsuit was brought about in the District of Columbia. *Mills v. Board of Education in 1972* exposed the occurrence of children being excluded from public schools based on their disabilities. The children involved in the lawsuit were between the ages of seven to sixteen and had a variety of living situations that ranged from being in a state funded institution to residing in their homes with their parents. Again, the court ruled that based on the constitution, all children indeed have the right to be educated and that excluding these children was a violation of due process as well as equal protection. This was also a precedent setting ruling as it acknowledged the challenge parents with special needs children

face logistically and financially when confronted with providing an appropriate education and related services. *Mills v. Board of Education* provided for more funding and balanced funding to occur in order to meet the expectation.

PL 93-380 served the purpose of extending the Education of the Handicapped Act in 1974 as an established set of educational amendments while providing more federal funding. This was the introduction to the framework for current special education legislation. The legislative determination documented the following: full educational opportunities, procedural safeguards for parents and children specific to educational placement, evaluation and identification, educating disabled children with non-disabled children, separate or special classes only when a disability is extremely severe, and procedures for making sure that cultural biases were not present in the assessment of handicapped children.

Eventually congress began to have significant discussions with all stakeholders to hear the need, discuss progress, and determine future implications. In 1975 the call for not only more of an effort in educating children with disabilities but prioritizing those efforts came to be through the creation of PL 94-142. The Education for All Handicapped Children Act embracing the following: access to education, education as a right, management and reporting procedures, financial guidelines, the concept of zero reject, the concept of appropriate education, least restrictive environment, procedural safeguards, free and appropriate public education, single agency responsibility, payments to states for educating children with disabilities, administrative systems to ensure access to children in even the most remote areas of the country, training and professional personnel, and accountability. Subsequent authorizations of Public Law 94-142 and additional legislation for disabled children would span the course of about 14 years.

In 1986 PL 99-372, the Handicapped Children Protection Act was adopted and provided for the reimbursement of legal costs and fees, deemed reasonable, if a parent wins his or her court case. 1986 also ushered in the extension of PL 99-457 which were the amendments to the Education for the Handicapped Act. These amendments extended the offer of FAPE previously introduced in PL 94-142 to children ages three to five and also to infants and toddlers.

After 15 years of intricate legislation, slowly but surely defining the rights of children with disabilities and the responsibilities that States have for those children, PL 101-476 was introduced in 1990 which renamed the Education for the Handicapped to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This amendment and the subsequent reauthorizations reflect the fine tuning of the law to better meet the needs of disabled children and more thoroughly define the state and government level roles and responsibilities. The subsequent reauthorizations included: the 1997 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments (PL 105-17) and ultimately the 2004 Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (PL 108-446) which is the most current special education legislation to date.

One of the most compelling themes in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and its predecessors, is the indication that parental involvement is paramount. Included in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEIA), Congress found the following:

Almost 30 years of research and experience has demonstrated that the education of children with disabilities can be made more effective by- strengthening the role and responsibility of parents and ensuring that families of such children have meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children at school and at home (IDEA 20 U.S.C. § 1400 (c) (5) (B)).

The provision for parent participation is supported in the legislation through the requirement of the Individualized Education Program. This is a legally binding document that has been required since the 1975 Education for All Handicapped Children Act and it is the driving force in the offer of a free and appropriate public education for every child with a disability in the United States (Drasgow, 2001).

### **Individualized Education Plan Meetings**

**History.** The idea that parents would be fully participating members of the Individualized Education Plan team working collaboratively with the school in establishing an appropriate individualized education plan through shared decision making is an expectation that has not changed through the years, but has in fact become more pronounced (Hess, 2006). The process of developing an Individualized Education Program includes three components. The student needs to be evaluated, an individualized education program needs to be developed, and the environment within which the student will be educated must be determined (Drasgow, 2001). The definition of an Individualized Education Program (IEP), who the members of the Individualized Education Program Team are and the procedural aspects of the IEP Meeting have been outlined in section 20 U.S.C. §1414 Evaluations, Eligibility, Determinations, Individualized Education Programs & Educational Placements.

An IEP is a legal document that is prepared for each child with a disability and includes specific components which are required by law. The IEP must include a statement of the student's present levels of performance, how the child's disability impacts their progress in general education, measurable goals and objectives inclusive of benchmarks, any related services, supplementary aids and services, accommodations, modifications, statewide testing needs, documentation of the amount of time student will participate in general education, date

the IEP will be implemented, details on the delivery of services (such as frequency, duration and location of services), measurement of goals and how parents will be informed of progress and the specific determination of any necessary transition services once the student finishes school (Drasgow, 2001).

The collective group of individuals who develop the student's individualized education plan must consist of the following people:

The parents of a child with a disability, not less than one regular education teacher of such child (if child is, or may be participating in the regular environment), not less than one special education teacher, or where appropriate, not less than one special education provider of such child; a representative of the local educational agency, an individual who can interpret the instructional implications of evaluation results, at the discretion of the parent or the agency, other individuals who have knowledge or special expertise regarding the child, including related services personnel as appropriate; and whenever appropriate, the child with a disability (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004, 2012).

An IEP team meeting and the accompanying document are legally binding agreements between parents and a school system that specifically outline the scope of the education the identified child will receive. The development of the IEP during the course of the IEP team meeting is most often where parent participation begins and ends. This becomes the single most important interaction for both the parent and the child. Any barrier to participation limits the development of the individual education plan necessary to meet the needs of the student (Lo, 2012).



## **Barriers to Minority Parent Involvement**

**Parent involvement.** Parental involvement in general has been characterized in a variety of ways. In 2008 Wong defined parental involvement from the perspective of day to day involvement. Wong qualified parental involvement in terms of their knowledge of, participation in and interest in their child's day-to-day life or activities. From a different perspective, Epstein (2011) presents parental involvement in terms of a framework. Epstein's Six Types of Parental Involvement include "parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making and collaborating with the community" (p.396). Most notably, in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 Section 1118, which is aligned with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (Turnbull, 2005; Yell, 2006), parental involvement is defined as

The participation of parents two way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities, including ensuring that parents play an integral role in assisting their child's learning; that parents are encouraged to be actively involved in their child's education at school; that parents are full partners in their child's education and are included, as appropriate, in decision-making and on advisory committees to assist in the education of their child; and that other activities are carried out, such as those described in section 1118 of the ESEA. (p. 3)

Despite the various interpretations of parental involvement, the correlation between student achievement and parent involvement is well documented. The barriers to such involvement are also well documented.

**Barriers to parental involvement.** Research studies conducted on barriers to parent involvement (Gianzero, 1999; Lott, 2001; Gonzalez-DeHass, 2003) seem to continuously produce the same findings. The barriers can be looked at in isolation, or grouped around

economic themes, cultural themes and social themes. Parents reported challenges connected to economics such as being able to take the time off of work for financial reasons as well as atypical work schedules to be able to attend school functions, transportation to go to and from school activities or meetings, issues surrounding childcare and a preoccupation with survival strategies. The barriers that can be related to social issues included concerns regarding interactions with school staff, parents' perceptions about themselves, feelings of uncertainty or inferiority in the school environment and an inability to understand the environment or its expectations. Cultural barriers connected to involvement were reported as limited education, minority or race, language, different cultural values and contrasting perspectives and beliefs.

Hornby and Lafaele (2011) devised the *Model of Factors Acting as Barriers to Parent Involvement*. These authors expanded on Epstein's framework of school, community and home as *Overlapping Spheres of Influence*. The crux of which is the acknowledgement that by focusing the efforts of home, school and community through six areas of focus, children's development is enhanced. The Model of Factors Acting as Barriers to Parent Involvement include individual parent and family factors: parents' beliefs about parental involvement, perceptions of invitations to parent involvement, current life contexts, class, ethnicity and gender; parent-teacher factors: differing goals and agendas, differing attitudes, differing language used; child factors: age, learning difficulties and disabilities, gifts and talents, behavioral problems; and societal factors: historical and demographic, political, economic (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011).

**Barriers to minority parental involvement.** Brandon (2007) offered limitations to parent involvement in their child's education specific to African American parents. Brandon's nine limitations are similar to those indicated by other authors nearly a decade before. The nine

limitations include: cultural and/or linguistic diversity, economics, family composition, parent educational level, school-home communication, parent-teacher interaction, school-parent interaction, success of the child in school, and personal constraints such as time, transportation and child care.

**Barriers to minority parental involvement of children with special needs.** Minority parents of special needs students have been confronted with barriers imposed on their children within special education dating back to the 1950s and 1960s (Skiba, 2008). States have been called to bring the issues with disproportionality and inequality specific to minority students into balance through the legislation's parameters and guidelines for these issues. While this addresses the needs of the students, minority parents also need assistance countering the imbalance they face involving their ability to be equal participants in the education of their children.

**Barriers to parental involvement for culturally and linguistically diverse families with special needs children.** For families with disabled children, parental involvement may include taking their children to be evaluated by specialists, observations in the classroom, various types of testing, participating in their child's therapies and coordinating necessary services with different agencies. From a formal perspective, involvement in the IEP process is an additional layer of participation. Parents of non-disabled children do not have the federal mandate requiring that they participate in the educational decision making of their child. For minority parents of children with disabilities, involvement in this formal process is fraught with barriers especially considering the legal, political and educational context of an IEP.

Cultural and linguistic diversity, socio-economic status, education, knowledge and parental perceptions or feelings, as barriers to participation, resonated in the research on minority parent involvement in special education. In their discussion on the facilitation of meaningful

participation during the Individualized Education Process specific to families who are considered culturally and linguistically diverse, Zhang and Bennett (2003) highlight the following barriers to participation: limited English proficiency, differences in language and dialects, interpersonal communication style differences, acculturation level, attitudes toward disability, family knowledge and comfort with the school infrastructure, a sense of alienation from school, work and time conflicts, transportation problems and childcare needs, and logistic barriers related to income, material resources, transportation and time.

Cheatham (2010) takes a strong position on the importance of language interpretation. The inability to effectively share information or understand information being shared is a challenge for minority families from linguistically diverse backgrounds (Lo, 2012). Despite the requirement for interpretation services to be provided, they are often inadequate to support parents' meaningful participation and understanding of things such as the reports being presented, assessments being administered and the technical nature of the process itself. Cheatham maintains that if the mandates in IDEIA are going to be met, access through quality interpretation, at all stages of the process is non-negotiable.

Cultural diversity can also pose a problem when attempting to arrive at mutually agreed upon educational decisions within the context of the IEP process. Parents' feelings of not being welcomed, of being intimidated, or professionals not understanding the cultural differences that may play a role in a parent's decision making are challenging (Brandon, 2007; Sales, 2001). The school's unfamiliarity with a parent's culture coupled with the parent's unfamiliarity with educational practices in the U.S. hamper effective decision making and collaboration (Al-Hassan, 2002).

**Barriers to parental involvement for socio-economically challenged families with special needs children.** Socio-economic challenges also play a role in barriers to parental involvement. Often times there are life situations that breed feelings of inferiority such as limited economic capital, social capital or cultural capital (Ong-Dean, 2009) which can lessen the degree to which the parent is involved. Issues such as transportation to and from IEP meetings, meeting times that conflict with working parents' schedules, and even a lack of childcare to be able to attend the meeting are actual challenges families face in terms of their capacity to participate. Ladner and Hammonds (2001) indicate that minority parents often fear their children will be treated differently, not given a quality education, may suffer from stereotypes, or their children will not ever be able to participate in regular education due to judgments based on their socio-economic status or race.

**Barriers to parental involvement for families with special needs children who have limited education.** A parent's level of education and knowledge of the special education process further impact their ability to fully participate. Ladner and Hammonds (2001), Wakelin (2008), Ong-Dean (2009) indicate a lack of knowledge or ability to navigate the complex nature of the IEP process puts families at a disadvantage. The lack of knowledge in terms of what questions to ask, understanding their rights, knowledge of the law, the readability levels of the materials being provided and the obvious imbalance of power based on the knowledge of school personnel can create a challenge when it comes to shared decision making. Parent perceptions and feelings of inferiority also stall progress and meaningful participation in special education. Parents may feel awkward, uneasy, intimidated, frustrated, and uncomfortable with school personnel during the process (Dilberto & Staples, 2010). Parents may also perceive that there is a difference between the services their child receives and the services that children of other races, socio-

economic status, or parent education level receive which can inhibit involvement (Council, 2009). A parent who feels inadequate within the IEP setting and not able to fully engage in the process with the team presents a barrier.

Access to information is also a challenge for minority parents engaging in the IEP process. A study conducted on parents' perceptions of the services their child receives stated that the majority of special needs parents surveyed indicated that access to information was important in their ability to determine the appropriate educational programming for their child. Having information about the special education system, where to go, timelines, who to talk to, how the process works and what things mean is important. The capacity to gain information regarding procedures and process proved to be a challenge for parents (Kalyanpur, Harry & Skrtic, 2000). The same barriers that all parents faced were presented, but were magnified for the parents of children with disabilities due to the scope of the process, and the knowledge that their participation contributes to the design and implementation of their child's individual education programming.

## **Advocacy**

**History of advocacy in special education.** The act of advocacy as a means to establish equal access for persons with disabilities has a long history within the disability rights movement. "Early disability rights literature described advocacy as the act of speaking and acting on behalf of another person or group of people to help address their preferences, strengths, and needs" (Wolfensberger as cited in Trainor, 2010, p. 35). Throughout the years it has been evident that the face of advocacy has shaped change for people with disabilities in the United States and abroad.

Through the *Disability Timeline* (National Consortium for Leadership, & Disability for Youth, 2012) the strides by way of advocacy within the disability rights movement can be recounted decade by decade, the highlights of which are included in the following paragraphs. In 1960 the Mongoloid Development Council, now the American National Association for Down Syndrome, became the first organization for parents of children with Down Syndrome. In 1963 South Carolina passed the first code for statewide architectural access in America for the benefit of people with disabilities. *Christmas in Purgatory* authored by Burton Blatt and Fred Kaplan was published just three short years later in 1966, revealing the repulsive way institutionalized Americans were forcibly living.

The 1970s brought about advocacy groups such as Disabled in Action out of New York, and also advocacy efforts in higher education through the founding of the Physically Disabled Students Program at the University of California at Berkeley. This program would be the catalyst for the Center for Independent Living and was founded by Edward Roberts, John Hessler and Hale Zukas. The founding of the program was an effort to bring attention to community living, personal assistance and political advocacy for persons with disabilities. The development of the first legal advocacy center named the National Center for Law and the Handicapped at the University of Notre Dame in 1971, as well as the enactment of the Rehabilitation Act in 1973, are also evidence that the voices of persons with disabilities, and those close to them, were being heard and responded to.

Early in 1981, the United Nations established the International Year of Disabled Persons, which was followed by the 1982 Telecommunications for the Disabled Act in the U.S. mandating public phone access for the hearing impaired. Later in 1988 the Fair Housing Act was amended to include disabled persons. Similarly, in 1990 advocacy efforts came to realization

through the enactment of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Great strides through advocacy efforts were also made when Stanford University turned down Sandra Jensen for a heart transplant in 1995 because she had Down syndrome. Advocacy groups pressure led Stanford to change its decision and perform the surgery, giving Sandra the gift of life despite her disability.

The 21<sup>st</sup> Century reveals no shortage of advocacy efforts. In 2002 a law was passed to provide access for disabled persons to be able to vote. The Help America Vote Act would make it possible for disabled Americans to access the polls. 2006 brought about the ruling by the Supreme Court that the Americans with Disabilities Act includes prisoners, who should not be discriminated against by prison officials. In 2008 the Americans with Disabilities Act was broadened to incorporate the detail necessary to include all persons with disabilities. This brief synopsis of just a few of the accomplishments related to the act of advocacy over the last 40 years reveal its invaluable results.

In a 2005 article which discusses advocacy for students with behavioral challenges that are effective, Murry presents an examination of multiple definitions of advocacy constructed by Fielder in 2002. Fielder exposes characteristics essential to advocacy. The sense is that advocacy and those exercising advocacy should maintain loyalty to whomever is served even when conflict might arise, the pursuit of change to the status quo should always be a goal, the representation of the individual along with the ability to work collaboratively with others, and finally advocacy should bring correction or improvement to the identified issue.

**Parental advocacy.** As shown in the development of national organizations for persons with disabilities, legislation that enforces access and equality, individual advocacy for personal resolve and massive movements to effect change for all, advocacy is present on a variety of levels and in a variety of ways for people with disabilities. As Turnbull and Turnbull noted in



2001, history shows us that the responsibility of advocating for disabled children lies squarely on the shoulders of their parents who are seeking something as simple as an appropriate education and educational opportunities. This was substantiated years later by Conroy, Yell, Katsiyannis and Collins in 2010 when they suggest that parents of children with disabilities are not only the cornerstone of their child’s education but considered to be advocates for their children.

In a 2010 study conducted by Trainor, the manner in which parents advocated was brought to light. The types of advocacy strategies or positions used by parents included the intuitive advocate, the disability specialist, the change agent, and the strategist. Parents participated in a focus group interview as well as an individual interview and the information they provided regarding their experiences advocating for their children was recorded and analyzed. The parents who participated in the study had children with various disabilities, a span of age ranges, various socio-economic backgrounds, and differing ethnicities. Along with revealing various manners in which parents advocate, the study showed how certain types of advocacy strategies are not engaged in by parents who are considered to be minorities or culturally-linguistically diverse.

Table 1

*Study on Parental Advocacy*

	Intuitive	Disability Specialist	Change Agent	Strategist
Minority Parents	Extensive	Access		
Non-Minority Parents	Limited	Access	Extensive	Extensive

*Note.* Adapted from “Diverse Approaches to Parent Advocacy During Special Education Home-School Interactions” by A. A. Trainor, 2010, *Remedial and Special Education*, 31(1), 34–47. Copyright (2010) by University of Wisconsin.

The parent who operates as the Disability Specialist when advocating uses his or her knowledge of the child's particular disability to secure services. Through well-versed conversations about the child's disability type and need, parents are better able to identify and request the most appropriate services. Both minority and non-minority parents accessed this strategy. Parents who function using the Intuitive approach during the individualized education process rely on what they know about their child and what they think is best. The study revealed that this was the main approach used by minority families, and only semi-used by non-minority families. The parent advocates who were identified as Strategists are well versed in procedures and guidelines and usually hold the school system accountable. They leverage the knowledge they do have to gain desired or preferred services. This approach was not used at all by minority families, and was identified with most by non-minority families.

Parents who advocate as Change Agents understand the potential educational benefit for all children, when they are advocating on behalf of their own children. The decisions regarding placement and services made for their children, may impact other children as well. This strategy was not accessed at all by minority families included in the study, and used significantly by non-minority families.

The findings in this study reveal that the manner in which parents advocate is noteworthy, as is the manner in which minority families do not advocate. Universal barriers to parental advocacy exist and may include: a lack of knowledge about the disability, lack of knowledge about educational options, and difficulty interfacing with school officials and complying with procedural requirements (Phillips, 2008).

Culturally diverse families often face these barriers when it comes to advocating for the educational rights of their children. Kalyanpur, Harry and Skrtic (2000) indicates the following

as barriers in advocacy for these families: professional knowledge versus parents' knowledge, parents' right to knowledge, contrasting traditions, equity versus value-inequality, individual rights versus social obligations and choice versus ascribed roles. Professional knowledge versus parent's knowledge is characterized by the extensive information professionals have in contrast with what parents may know about the field of education, disabilities, or specialized instruction and services. This is considered to be a deficit model whose impact is enhanced when you factor in culturally and linguistically diverse families. Parents' right to knowledge involves access to information, their consent, timely receipt of reports from professionals and confidentiality of their child's records. A lack of information also reduces the likelihood that parents are equally as prepared and informed as the professional team with which they are making decisions.

Contrasting traditions, as a barrier, speak to the often stark contrast of the educational or legal system's values versus the values from the culture of the family collaborating with the team.

Equity versus Value-Inequality calls awareness to the potential conflict minority families may feel in the midst of meeting with professionals, since their view may be that professionals hold all of the knowledge and a call to collaborate would be unthinkable for many reasons. One of which has to do with respect.

The expectation that families should place the rights of an individual over social obligations may also be contradictory to norms of families from diverse cultures that are members of the educational community. Certain cultures do not prioritize self or individuals and would be staunchly against promoting individual rights, thus creating yet another roadblock to collaboration and shared decision making. Lastly, the concept of choice as opposed to ascribed roles may be challenging for minority parents as their experiences, values and beliefs may not

lend them to being receptive to a variety of choices, nor may they be aware of the fact that they do have choices.

**External advocacy.** Beyond parents as advocates, families may include someone in the IEP process who specializes in assisting families with securing special education and related services. This person may be considered to be a lay advocate, professional advocate, or even an attorney. In an online article (Till, 2012) for 360 Education, the author comments on the increased number of parents nation-wide who are hiring special education advocates (i.e. attorneys, former special education teachers and other parents) to help them understand special education and fight for services for their children. Alper, Schloss, and Schloss (1995) also discuss the potential need for parents to solicit the services of a professional advocate, especially as the child with a disability gets older.

Existing literature does not reveal any commonly used or explicit name for people who are hired on behalf of parents with special needs to assist them with the Individualized Education Program process. Those who function in that capacity have been referred to as parents' advocates, lay advocates, external advocates, professional advocates and legal advocates (Ahearn, 2001; Wakelin, 2008; Alper, Schloss & Schloss 1995). Despite the ambiguity in the identification of these individuals, parents can identify advocates nationally and locally through organizations such as the Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates, Inc., the Disability Legal Rights Center, the Parent Advocacy Coalition for Educational Rights, and the National Disabilities Rights Network.

Notwithstanding the existence of organizations, firms, and individuals who act as advocates for parents on behalf of their children with special needs, there are no formal requirements or training associated with functioning in the capacity of a special education

advocate. There has however, been an increase in attention to such requirements as evidenced by the formation of organizations embedded in institutions such as colleges and universities that provide training on advocacy and dispute resolution. Two such entities are Pepperdine University's Education Advocacy Clinic which provides training and advocacy services, as well as the Education Advocacy Program which is associated with both the Disability Rights Legal Center and Loyola Marymount University.

### **Social Capital Theory**

The earliest references to the idea of social capital are attached to the work of Lyda Judson Hanifan in 1916 as well as in 1920. Through his focus on the role of schools in rural communities he offered a definition of social capital that referenced goodwill, fellowship, sympathy and social intercourse between people who comprise a social unit (Smith, 2000-2009). Following Hanifan in the early 1900s, the definitions of social capital are numerous, and varied.

The work of various theorists and scholars has contributed to the information and knowledge base that shape the concept of social capital. In an eclectic document created in April of 1999 to inform a talk at Penn State entitled: "Definitions of Social Capital in Literature" we are graced with a compilation presented in the form of a historical timeline inclusive of the many individuals who referenced the term in their work. While the article begins with Hanifan, it mentions Jane Jacobs who discussed social capital as it relates to neighborliness in 1961, Ulf Hannerz's use of the term in his work surrounding poor urban neighborhoods in 1969 and the reflection of social capital in the favors individuals in those areas did for one another. The document also mentions Pierre Bourdieu beginning around 1972 but spanning many years thereafter. While the document reveals the many and varied definitions of Social Capital it also introduces individuals who contributed to Social Capital as a theory.

Given the varied nature of definitions, there are three major theorists associated with the birth and development of the theory of social capital. Bourdieu, Coleman and Putnam are referenced extensively throughout the literature by other researchers, and to some extent each other. The very distinct way each theorist presents his definition of social capital supports the fact that current research presents varied meanings of social capital (Putnam, 2001; Onyx, 2000; Lee, 2010).

Bourdieu originally introduced three forms of capital in 1986 when he communicated the inability to discuss the way the world is structured and functions without discussing capital in the many forms it can take on. Bourdieu presents forms of capital as a means to describe how privilege breeds privilege. The forms of capital include social, cultural and economic. In that same discussion, Bourdieu (1986) defines social capital as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (p. 51).

Coleman’s perspective on social capital was that everyone has access to it and can benefit from it, not only the privileged. Social capital was defined by Coleman (1988) in the following manner:

Social capital is defined by its function. It is not a single entity but a variety of different entities, with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structures, and they facilitate certain actions of actors—whether person or corporate actors—within the structure (p.98).

In contrast to Bourdieu’s perspective on social capital, Coleman’s perspective serves as a way to broaden discussions about social capital and really view it from less of a negative perspective, to more of a positive one.

Putnam (2000) describes social capital as “...connections among individuals--social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them” (p.19). Putnam is said to have propelled the concept of social capital into current ideology by associating it on a wider scale with civic life or civic engagement. Putnam, as did Coleman, highlighted features of social capital such as trust, norms, networks and reciprocity.

In essence, the literature unveils the ability of social capital to be realized in many ways. Social capital is presented as being centered around relationships and the meaning within those relationships or mutual benefit that can be derived from them, it can only occur through the interactions of individuals and cannot be exercised in isolation. Theorists highlight social capital in terms of highly formal and informal interactions (Putnam, 2001), memberships in groups or associations (Coleman, 1988) and more collective and less individual activities (Lee, 2010). All of which can denote, generate, or postulate some sort of value.

Putnam discusses the occurrence of positive relationships between social capital and societal development, such as in education, through his analysis of a large body of research collected over more than a quarter of a century by DDB Needham, a commercial marketing firm in Chicago. This position is reinforced by current literature on minority parents with disabled children which exposes the disadvantages they face in terms of garnering a free and appropriate public education due to the absence of the features and potential benefits of social capital to help secure those services.

The work of Woolcock (2001) reveals that there are various types of social capital. These are identified as binding, bridging and linking. Binding social capital occurs through the relationships of friends, family and neighbors. Bridging social capital is present in the relationships between slightly more distant relations such as those you work with. Of particular

interest is Woolcock's definition of the third type of social capital which is called Linking social capital. It is presented as social capital that reaches beyond the boundaries of the individual or community, connecting people who may not be similar, allowing the person to leverage more resources than may be readily available in the community (Woolcock, 2001). This can be interpreted as providing access to information or resources through relationships that feature trust, norms networks and reciprocity which provide mutual benefit.

### **Summary**

Special Education in the United States has been shaped by a history of legislation and litigation. Driven by the advocacy of parents and interest groups, legislation and litigation have, among other things, enforced the perspective of parents as participants and partners in the educational decision making for their children. This mandated participation is an attempt to collaborate with the families of special needs children by acknowledging that parents have invaluable information about their child, are equal partners, have an emotional commitment to the child's well-being and success and function in the best interest of the child at all times.

Mandated parent participation and the national perspective on collaboration in special education can be elusive for minority families. The barriers to participation for minority families are numerous. Factors involving culture, language, parent perception, economics, class, ethnicity and social stratification can prevent the desired interactions between school and home that are necessary for the proper development of an educational plan that will meet the needs of the child entitled to the services.

Advocacy has a documented history of being a catalyst for change, access and equity. Advocacy manifests itself in the form of parents participating in the IEP of their child and lay or



external advocates participating on behalf of the child or family. There are no formal structures in place that govern advocacy for special needs children or families.

Similar to advocacy, social capital has varied definitions and has also been identified as a vehicle for access. The literature shows the common themes related to social capital to be norms, networks of trust, and reciprocity. Advocacy as a representation of social capital will be explored in the research study. Advocacy as an example of linking social capital within the context of Individualized Education Plan meetings will be examined through the analysis of the research to determine if in fact one of the representations of social capital that theorists agree on; its value and relevance when explained as bonding, bridging and linking capital, is expressed through advocacy.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **Restatement of the Problem**

The inability of minority parents to participate in a meaningful way during Individualized Education Plan meetings can negatively impact their disabled child's offer of a free and appropriate education. The barriers to such participation include: a lack of knowledge or understanding, issues related to low socio-economic status and challenges associated with language barriers. Children with disabilities are entitled to receive an individual plan and services that will support them in being educated to the fullest extent possible. The determination of such services is made by a team consisting of professionals from a variety of fields and parents. Parents are a key member of this team. Given the barriers to minority parent participation and the necessity of meaningful parent participation, closing this gap is essential to meeting the expectation of the legislation and ensuring the appropriate education of children with special needs nationwide.

### **Restatement of Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of minority families who face common barriers to parent participation such as: limited education, low socio-economic status and limited language, during Individualized Education Plan meetings, with and without the provision of an external advocate

### **Restatement of Research Questions**

1. What are the experiences of minority families as members of the Individualized Education Plan team for their disabled child without the presence of an external advocate?

2. What are the experiences of minority families as members of the Individualized Education Plan team for their disabled child with the presence of an external advocate?
3. How might external advocacy impact the experiences of minority families, specific to their involvement in the Individualized Education Plan meeting?

### **Research Approach and Design**

Phenomenology dates back to the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, but is derived from schools of thought that were introduced as early as the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Scholars associated with phenomenology include Edmund Husserl, who is acknowledged as providing us with phenomenology as it is recognized today. Husserl was a German philosopher whose perspective was shaped by the work of Franz Brentano (1874) and William James (1891), but he was also inspired by earlier works offered by Bernard Bolzano (1835). Ultimately, students of Husserl expanded upon his work while further defining phenomenology and shaping it through their own views. These noted authors include Martin Heidegger, Jean Paul Sartre, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

In order to fulfill the purpose of understanding the experiences of minority families, the qualitative research approach employed in this study will be phenomenology. Phenomenology is about studying phenomena, consciousness, intentionality and also the meaning of our experiences. Based on the tenets of phenomenological research, this study will describe, interpret and analyze the lived experiences of participants.

The study will be structured by using the five elements of phenomenological research, as offered by Creswell (2007) which are: identifying the shared experience, locating the universal nature of the experience, identifying shared experiences among a variety of individuals who are

experiencing the same phenomena, locating the essence of the experience, and an account of the experience. The lived experience of the individual in relation to the lived experiences of other individuals, a fuller understanding of what the experience is or has been, and understanding or capturing as close an approximation of the universality of this lived experience or phenomenon as possible. This will be a descriptive account involving more than one individual and a collective of their experiences. Creswell (2007) offers that, “the basic purpose of phenomenology is to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence” (p.58).

### **Sampling Method, Sample and Participants**

This research study took place in the County of Los Angeles, located in Southern California. The population of interest in this survey was unique and thus, the sampling method best suited to recruit participants that would support the study’s research questions was snowballing. Snowballing is a form of purposive sampling that relies on referrals and existing networks that provide the researcher with access to potential study participants. Through the researchers existing social networks, professional relationships, reasonable recruiting strategies and existing State and local entities involved in special education advocacy, participants for the study were recruited. The researcher used existing relationships with external advocates, attorneys who function as external advocates and relationships within the field of education and special education in Los Angeles County.

### **Human Subjects Considerations**

Permission to conduct this study was obtained from the Internal Review Board of Pepperdine University. Participants in the study were provided with an Informed Consent for Participation in Research Activities (Appendix B) with specific information regarding the

purpose of the study and what their role and responsibilities would be during the course of the study. This occurred prior to the participants being interviewed or asked to provide any demographic data. Information collected that may be considered private was treated with confidentiality. Data collected was only reported using codes for identifying information. Paper copies of research records were stored in locked file cabinets, and electronically stored research records were kept on a laptop computer that is password protected. The human subjects who participated in this study are not identifiable or named in any manner or under any circumstances. The anticipated risks associated with participation in this study may be psychological in nature as the interviews may initiate feelings of emotionality as study participants will be asked to recount previous experiences on two separate occasions. Parents were also participants in this study by virtue of the fact that their children are identified as having some sort of deficit or challenge that prevents them from participating in the general education curriculum without certain supports. This reality alone lends itself to feelings of guilt, angst, worry, anger, depression and fear. Families were afforded the utmost consideration within the context of this study. There is nothing in this study that would be construed as deceptive. Remuneration for participating in the study was provided in the form of the results of the analysis of the data collected, and also with gift cards in the amount of \$10 which were provided to families upon the completion of the interview. There are no obvious conflicts of interest in this study.

### **Data Collection, Setting and Procedures**

The data identified by the researcher that was collected to inform the previously identified research questions consisted of an interview conducted using the Interview Protocol and Questions (Appendix C). Interviews were conducted in person with study participants.

Participation in the study was completely voluntary. Parents were informed of their right to withdraw from the study for any reason and at any time. There were no repercussions or penalties for not participating or for withdrawing from the study. Interviews lasted no more than 60 minutes each. Interviews took place at a time and location that was convenient for the parent.

The total number of participants who completed the interview was eight. Study participants were identified and interviewed beginning in July of 2014. The data collected was outsourced for transcription and was subsequently analyzed manually and by using HyperResearch software to determine the universal themes as well as the essence of the experiences of minority parents in the IEP setting with and without the provision of advocacy.

Data collected through interviews was transcribed and saved both to a flash drive and on a laptop computer that was password protected. Information gathered from surveys was stored in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's home office. Additional materials gathered for the purpose of this study were also kept in researcher's home office and secured. Files for interviews were also created and contain both the tangible documents associated with the data as well as a reference to the electronic location of any supporting documents. These documents were also stored in a secure location.

### **Instrumentation**

Based on information provided by Morse and Richards (2007), the researcher crafted interview questions that were both unstructured and open-ended and could be supported by planned or unplanned probing. It is possible that the subjects being interviewed may go into more of a narrative based on some of the questions and valuable information can be gathered that way as well. An IRB approved translator was present to help with the facilitation of interviews for families who wanted to conduct the interview in their preferred language. The use of a digital

recorder was used to conduct interviews. The researcher's intent was to suspend any assumptions and learn from the research participants.

### **Analytical Techniques**

Data analysis is a systematic search for meaning. It is a way to process qualitative data so that what has been learned can be communicated to others. Analysis means organizing and interrogating data in ways that allow researchers to see patterns, identify themes, discover relationships, develop explanations, make interpretations, mount critiques, or generate theories. It often involves synthesis, evaluation, interpretation, categorization, hypothesizing, comparison, and pattern finding. It always involves what Wolcott calls 'mindwork'...Researchers always engage their own intellectual capacities to make sense of qualitative data. (Hatch, 2002 as cited in Leech, 2007; pp. 148).

The researcher used multiple methods of data analysis to analyze the text provided by the parent interviews. Leech (2007) offers in a research paper published by the American Psychological Association that there are many tools available to analyze qualitative data, however qualitative data analysis seems to be limited to a few tried and true methods. Leech offers that the research community is semi one dimensional in how it analyzes qualitative data as evidenced by a poll taken at a major university where the faculty was queried about how qualitative data can be analyzed and the response rate for *constant comparative analysis* was 80%. Additionally, Leech and Onguwebuzie share the limited presence of diverse analysis techniques in major research texts and university coursework at the graduate level. In essence, there are many tools available to analyze qualitative data and the researcher intends to validate the data through the triangulation of analysis. This strategy will be used to uncover any and all

themes, and also to cross reference the information being provided, while supporting transparency and the pursuit of truth in research.

The data collected and analyzed in this study consists of the interviews conducted with eight families. The data from each parent who participated in an interview was analyzed and included in the study. Creswell's (2007) modified version of Moustakas (1994) modified version of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method. The following steps will be used to analyze the interviews:

- The researcher will describe all experiences related to the phenomena in an effort to remove as much bias as possible and focus on the experiences of the participants in the study.
- A list of significant statements derived from the interviews will be generated; each having equal value and unique in terms of not being similar to other statements
- The list of significant statements will then be arranged into larger units or themes
- A textural description of the participants' experience specific to the phenomenon will be created by the researcher using authentic examples from the interview
- A structural description of the participants' experience will be created that highlights the arena and context in which the phenomena occurred.
- A description of the phenomena incorporating both the textural experience and structural experience will be drafted by the researcher in an effort to document the "essence" of the participants' experience specific to the phenomena.

Transcribed interviews in the form of text were analyzed using Hyper Research Software. This is a commercial software program. This program was provided to the researcher through the issuance of a user license by Pepperdine University. Each interview was coded using Hyper Research Software to determine common themes. The collective of the themes were cross-



referenced to determine the most common themes and any irregularities with regard to experiences.

### **Clarification of Terms**

*Advocate:* Acting or speaking on behalf of another person or group of people to help address their preferences, strengths or needs (Wolfensberger, 1977).

*Child With a Disability:* The term child with a disability means a child (a) with mental retardation, hearing impairments (including deafness), speech or language impairments, visual impairments (including blindness), serious emotional disturbance, orthopedic impairments, autism, traumatic brain injury, other health impairments, or specific learning disabilities; and (b) who, by reason thereof, needs special education and related services (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004, 2012).

*Free Appropriate Public Education:* (FAPE). The term free and appropriate public education means special education and related services that (a) have been provided at public expense, under public supervision and direction, and without charge; (b) meet the standards of the State educational agency; (c) include appropriate preschool, elementary, or secondary school education in the State involved; and (d) are provided in conformity with the individualized education program, required in accordance with section 614(d) of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act 2004 (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004, 2012).

*Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act 2004 (IDEIA)–PL 108-446:* Federal legislation that governs the delivery of services provided for children with disabilities (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004, 2012).

*Individualized Education Plan (IEP):* The term individualized education program or IEP means a written statement for each child with a disability that is developed, reviewed, and revised in accordance with section 614(d) of The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004, 2012).

*Low Socio-Economic Status:* The low socio-economic status community is comprised of people with low income (below the poverty line), low education level (less than 12 years of school) and low opportunity (fewer life choices). This status results from either generational poverty (persistent poverty over several generations of a family) or situational poverty (poverty due to conditions such as divorce, unemployment, disability, or recent immigration). Although there can be many cultural differences across ethnic groups within this population, most suffer from being medically underserved, under- or uninsured, under- or unemployed (Kipke, 2008).

*Minority:* For the purpose of this study the term minority will refer to parents who are: (1) American Indian or Alaskan Native. A person having origins in any of the original peoples of North America, and who maintains cultural identification through tribal affiliation or community recognition. (2) Asian or Pacific Islander. A person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, the Indian subcontinent, or the Pacific Islands. This area includes, for example, China, India, Japan, Korea, the Philippine Islands, and Samoa. (3) Black (Not of Hispanic Origin). A person having origins in any of the black racial groups of Africa. (4) Hispanic. A person of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central or South American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race (72 Fed. Reg. 59267, 2007).

*Parent:* The term parent (A) a natural, adoptive, or foster parent of a child (unless a foster parent is prohibited by State law from serving as a parent); (B) a guardian (but not the State if the child is a ward of the State); (C) an individual acting in the place of a natural or adoptive parent

(including a grandparent, stepparent, or other relative) with whom the child lives, or an individual who is legally responsible for the child's welfare; or (D) an individual assigned to be a surrogate parent (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004, 2012).

*Parental Involvement and Parent Participation:* Interchangeable terms. Parental involvement means the participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities, including ensuring: (a) that parents play an integral role in assisting their child's learning; (b) that parents are encouraged to be actively involved in their child's education at school; (c) that parents are full partners in their child's education and are included, as appropriate, in decision making and on advisory committees to assist in the education of their child; and (d) the carrying out of other activities, such as those described in section 1118 (Elementary Secondary Education Act of 1965, 2012).

*School District of Residence:* This term means the school district in which the residency of either the parent or legal guardian is located (Elementary and Secondary Education act of 1965, 2012).

*Special Education:* The term special education means specially designed instruction, at no cost to parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability, including (A) instruction conducted in the classroom, in the home, in hospitals and institutions, and in other settings; And (B) instruction in physical education (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004, 2012).

### **Researcher's Relationship to Study Focus**

I began my career in education as a teacher working with students who had a variety of disabilities. I have been a part of the struggle to provide a quality education in the trenches called

classrooms, as well as in the backrooms called IEP meetings. From a teacher's perspective it can feel like running in place until you look up weeks, months, sometimes years later and see that a child has made progress. From an administrator's perspective you feel torn between the children who the educational system was innately designed for and the children who are the minority but consume the majority of the often limited resources. As a human being, you want it to work for everyone involved in the most appropriate way possible.

Special Education seems to work against the structure it exists within. The imbalance in the delivery of special education services such as placement, designated instructional services, and supports are many. Existing special education legislation, even if fully funded, works against the school system it exists within and in some senses is unreasonable academically, socially, and economically. By identifying issues and looking at them in-depth with the intention of creating reasonable solutions for all, we can help improve education for all students.

If the purpose of research is to discover, uncover or reveal the truth, then the pursuit of research is the pursuit of truth. The researcher intends to pursue the truth, as offered by minority parents, about their experiences in Individualized Education Plan meetings for their child with a disability.

## **Chapter 4: Research Findings**

### **Restatement of the Problem**

The inability of minority parents to participate in a meaningful way during Individualized Education Plan meetings can negatively impact their disabled child's offer of a free and appropriate education. The barriers to such participation include: a lack of knowledge or understanding, issues related to low socio-economic status and challenges associated with language barriers. Children with disabilities are entitled to receive an individual plan and services that will support them in being educated to the fullest extent possible. The determination of such services is made by a team consisting of professionals from a variety of fields and parents. Parents are a key member of this team. Given the barriers to minority parent participation and the necessity of meaningful parent participation, closing this gap is essential to meeting the expectation of the legislation and ensuring the appropriate education of children with special needs nationwide.

### **Restatement of Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of minority families who face common barriers to parent participation such as: limited education, low socio-economic status and limited language, during Individualized Education Plan meetings, with and without the provision of an external advocate.

### **Restatement of Research Questions**

1. What are the experiences of minority families as members of the Individualized Education Plan team for their disabled child without the presence of an external advocate?

2. What are the experiences of minority families as members of the Individualized Education Plan team for their disabled child with the presence of an external advocate?
3. How might external advocacy impact the experiences of minority families, specific to their involvement in the Individualized Education Plan meeting?

### **Demographic Analysis**

There were a total of eight parents who met the criteria and thus participated in the research study. Seven out of eight of the research participants (87.5%) identified themselves as Hispanic: A person of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central or South American or other Spanish culture or origin. One out of eight of the research participants (12.5%) identified themselves as Black (Non-Hispanic). Three out of eight of the participants (37.5%) met the criteria for limited language. Seven out of eight of the participants (87.5%) met the criteria for low socio-economic status. Three out of eight of the participants met the criteria for limited language (37.5%).

Other information gathered from an analysis of the demographics of the study participants show that four out of eight of the participants (50%) were identified under two of the criteria. One out of eight of the participants (12.5%) were identified under all three criteria. Three out of eight of the participants (37.5%) identified themselves under the categories of both limited language and low socio-economic status. Two out of eight of the participants (25%) identified themselves as low socio-economic status and limited education. One out of eight of the participants (12.5%) identified themselves as limited education and limited language. One out of eight of the participants (12.5%) identified themselves as limited language, low socio-economic status and limited education. Three out of eight of the participants (37.5%) identified themselves

as low socio-economic status and no other criteria. One out of eight of the participants (12.5%) identified limited education as the only criteria they met.

Parents who participated in this study had varied experiences with the IEP process. Each participant previously participated in at least two IEP meetings. Families reported participating in as few as one IEP per year or as many as three IEP’s in one year. They reported experiences in IEP meetings from their children being in kindergarten, middle school and also high school. Through the course of the interview process parents revealed that their children had varied eligibilities that entitled them to services such as Learning Disabled, Autism and Intellectually Disabled.

Table 2

*Demographic Analysis of Study Participants*

	<b>ETHNICITY</b>	<b>LIMITED LANGUAGE</b>	<b>LOW SOCIO-ECONOMIC</b>	<b>LIMITED EDUCATION</b>
<b>07012014A</b>	Hispanic		x	x
<b>07012014B</b>	Black			x
	Non-Hispanic			
<b>07082014A</b>	Hispanic	x	x	X
<b>07082014B</b>	Hispanic		x	
<b>07082014C</b>	Hispanic		x	
<b>08052014A</b>	Hispanic		x	
<b>08152014AT</b>	Hispanic	x	x	
<b>09062014AT</b>	Hispanic	x	x	

**Qualitative Analysis of Interviews**

The interviews conducted for the study were coded by the researcher both manually and using Hyperresearch software. The research questions were used to drive the process of coding in both mediums. Interviews were coded specific to experiences without an external advocate present and experiences with an external advocate present.

The manually coded interviews were organized by experiences without an external advocate present, with an external advocate present, in vivo experiences without an external advocate present, in vivo experiences with an external advocate present and finally the themes that arose. Interviews conducted with the presence of an interpreter are marked with an asterisk.

### **Findings for Each Research Question**

**Research question one.** Research Question one asked, “What are the experiences of minority families as members of the Individualized Education Plan team for their disabled child without the presence of an external advocate?” To answer this question the researcher began by using topic coding with each interview. This was done with the intention to develop themes and subsequently identify common themes across all interviews. The researcher then coded each interview using Hyperresearch software to identify topics and themes within and across interviews that were specific to the experiences of families without the presence of an external advocate present during their child’s Individualized Education Plan meeting.

The process of coding interviews manually by the researcher brought to light many topics which were subsequently organized into specific themes. Interview 07012014A reported the following without the presence of an external advocate:

- The child’s issues were never addressed, parent perspective on the child differed from the school’s perspective
- The language or terminology used by the school was hard to understand
- They were talked to as if they were stupid, the parent couldn’t contribute
- the parent felt horrible
- They were labeled as hostile if they decided to say something, the meeting was more informal without representation



- Their concerns weren't heard or were dismissed
- As soon as they wouldn't let them (school/district) do what they want they were considered a hostile parent
- Without an advocate the school will not ask if you have any questions
- It was casual without an advocate, team members leave the meeting more often
- Parent felt scared or intimidated by dates and document being legal from the state, the district gets upset when you bring someone
- If you bring someone you are hostile, without an advocate they felt lost and they also felt embarrassed, dumb and quiet without an advocate.

The themes that were derived from this interview include: IEP does not represent FAPE, Parent was unable to fully participate, parent and school district disagree, parent expressed negative feelings, parent felt there was a lack of professionalism in the meeting, the parent felt a lack of respect during the meeting.

The Hyperresearch software coding for this same interview revealed that when an external advocate was not present:

- The parent expressed negative feelings about the meeting
- Made references to being a hostile parent
- The meeting was informal or less structured
- Parent was unable to understand information in the meeting
- Parent and district were not in agreement regarding the Individualized Education Plan
- Few or no questions were asked of the parent
- School IEP team existing relationships made parent feel isolated
- Parent didn't feel that the IEP was one of quality

- Parent felt that the offer of services was different than what it should be
- Parent felt intimidated
- Parent sought information or education on their own
- Parent felt less educated than other IEP team members
- Parent felt lost
- Parent felt intimidated
- Parent felt nervous
- Parent felt confused
- Parent felt as if they failed.

The themes that were derived from this interview include: IEP does not represent FAPE, parent was unable to fully participate, parent and school district disagree, parent expressed negative feelings regarding their experience in the IEP meeting, parent felt there was a lack of professionalism in the meeting, and the parent felt a lack of respect.

Table 3

*Themes –07012014a*

Without An External Advocate Manually Coded Interview		Without an External Advocate Hyperresearch Coding	
IEP does not represent FAPE	1	IEP does not represent FAPE	2
Parent unable to fully participate	2	Parent unable to fully participate	4
Parent and District disagree	1	Parent and District disagree	1
Negative feelings	7	Negative feelings	18
Lack of professionalism	5	Lack of professionalism	4
Lack of Respect	3	Lack of Respect	1

Interview 07012014B reported that without the presence of an external advocate the parent felt dismissed, as if they didn't know enough, that they didn't know their rights or protocol, the district didn't accept the parent's perspective if it differed from that of the district,

parent got tired of battling the district and felt exhausted or tired, parent just gave up and felt the meeting was horrible without an advocate. The themes that were derived from this interview include: parent and school district disagree, parent expressed negative feelings and parent felt there was a lack of professionalism in the meeting.

The Hyperresearch software coding for this same interview revealed that when an external advocate was not present the parent expressed negative feeling about the meeting, the meeting felt informal or less structured, the parent and the district were not in agreement regarding the IEP, parent felt defeated, parent felt less educated than other IEP team members, parent felt unfamiliar with the process and also felt lost.

The themes derived from this interview include parent was unable to fully participate, parent and school district disagree, parent expressed negative feelings about their experience in the IEP meeting and the parent felt there was a lack of professionalism in the meeting.

Table 4

*Themes –07012014b*

Without An External Advocate Manually Coded Interview		Without an External Advocate Hyperresearch Coding	
IEP does not represent FAPE	0	IEP does not represent FAPE	0
Parent unable to fully participate	2	Parent unable to fully participate	3
Parent and District disagree	1	Parent and District disagree	2
Negative feelings	4	Negative feelings	5
Lack of professionalism	0	Lack of professionalism	1
Lack of Respect	0	Lack of Respect	0

Interview 07082014A reported that without the presence of an advocate they experienced more pressure, didn't have enough time, couldn't get answers, discussed the same point and

couldn't come to agreement, felt dismissed, began to become informed on their own, team members didn't leave the meeting, and protocol wasn't being followed.

The themes that were derived from this interview include: parent and school district disagree, parent expressed negative feelings and parent felt there was a lack of professionalism in the meeting. The Hyperresearch software coding for this same interview revealed that when an external advocate was not present the parent experienced negative feelings, few or no questions were asked of them, they could not come to an agreement regarding the IEP, team members excused themselves frequently and they had to seek information or education on their own.

The themes derived from this interview include parent was unable to fully participate, parent and school district disagree, parent expressed negative feelings regarding experience in the IEP meeting and parent felt there was a lack of professionalism and a lack of respect.

Table 5

*Themes –07082014a*

Without An External Advocate Manually Coded Interview		Without an External Advocate Hyperresearch Coding	
IEP does not represent FAPE	0	IEP does not represent FAPE	0
Parent unable to fully participate	0	Parent unable to fully participate	1
Parent and District disagree	2	Parent and District disagree	4
Negative feelings	3	Negative feelings	2
Lack of professionalism	3	Lack of professionalism	2
Lack of Respect	0	Lack of Respect	2

Interview 07082014B reported that without the presence of an advocate it was difficult, their input wasn't considered, the district took the position that they knew better, the parent experienced frustration and disappointment. The interview also revealed that the parent didn't understand what was going on, there was a feeling of unfriendliness during the meeting. The parent was attending alone and reported that the IEP team was large. The parent reported feeling

emotional without an advocate, misunderstood, as if their contribution wasn't valuable and intimidated by the team's educational backgrounds. The themes that were derived from this interview include: Parent was unable to fully participate, parent expressed negative feelings about their experience in the IEP meeting and the parent felt a lack of respect during the meeting.

The Hyperresearch software coding for this same interview revealed that when an external advocate was not present they experienced negative feelings during the meeting, they could not come to an agreement with the district regarding the IEP, few or no questions were asked the them, they felt less educated than the other IEP team members, parent sought information or education on their own, existing school IEP team relationships made parent feel isolated, parent felt intimidated.

The themes that were derived from the analysis through this coding process include: parent was unable to fully participate, parent and school district disagree, parent expressed negative feelings regarding their experience in the IEP meeting and parent experienced a lack of professionalism during the meeting.

Table 6

*Themes –07082014b*

Without an External Advocate Manually Coded Interview		Without an External Advocate Hyperresearch Coding	
IEP does not represent FAPE	0	IEP does not represent FAPE	0
Parent unable to fully participate	2	Parent unable to fully participate	6
Parent and District disagree	0	Parent and District disagree	1
Negative feelings	9	Negative feelings	4
Lack of professionalism	0	Lack of professionalism	1
Lack of Respect	1	Lack of Respect	0

Interview 07082014C reported that without the presence of an advocate the meeting was unprofessional, the district didn't consider the parent's concerns, it felt like a fight to the parents,

they felt upset, they began to research and become informed on their own, parent felt disrespected by the district, parent felt nervous, parent felt retaliated against for speaking up, and they did not feel like an equal member even though they should. The themes that were derived from this coding process include: parent expressed negative feelings, parent became informed on their own and the parent felt a lack of respect during the meeting.

The Hyperresearch software coding for this same interview revealed that when an external advocate was not present the meeting felt informal or less structured, parent and district were not in agreement regarding the IEP, parent felt nervous, parent sought information on their own and they were referred to as hostile.

The themes derived from this coding process include parent was unable to fully participate, parent and school district disagree, parent expressed negative feelings regarding their experience in the IEP meeting and parent felt there was a lack of professionalism in the meeting.

Table 7

*Themes –07082014c*

Without an External Advocate Manually Coded Interview		Without an External Advocate Hyperresearch Coding	
IEP does not represent FAPE	0	IEP does not represent FAPE	0
Parent unable to fully participate	2	Parent unable to fully participate	3
Parent and District disagree	0	Parent and District disagree	3
Negative feelings	9	Negative feelings	4
Lack of professionalism	0	Lack of professionalism	4
Lack of Respect	1	Lack of Respect	0

Interview 08052014A reported that without the presence of an advocate during their IEP meeting they experienced negative feelings, antagonism, they felt disrespected, confused about information, the district made assumptions, the IEP was hostile, the technical language was hard to understand, they were labeled as hostile, didn't have information and ultimately went to

trainings to become educated on the process. The themes that were derived from coding this interview include: parent was unable to fully participate, parent and school district disagree and parent expressed negative feelings.

The Hyperresearch software coding for this same interview revealed that when an external advocate was not present they experienced negative feelings, felt confused, sought information or education on their own, were referred to as hostile and were unable to understand information in the meeting. The themes that were derived from this interview include: parent was unable to fully participate in the meeting and expressed negative feelings regarding their experience in the IEP meeting.

Table 8

*Themes –08052014a*

Without an External Advocate Manually Coded Interview		Without an External Advocate Hyperresearch Coding	
IEP does not represent FAPE	0	IEP does not represent FAPE	0
Parent unable to fully participate	3	Parent unable to fully participate	6
Parent and District disagree	0	Parent and District disagree	0
Negative feelings	6	Negative feelings	13
Lack of professionalism	0	Lack of professionalism	0
Lack of Respect	0	Lack of Respect	0

Interview 08152014AT\* reported that without the presence of an advocate they were not informed, didn't understand what was happening in the meeting and felt traumatized. The themes that were derived from this interview's coding process include: Parent was unable to fully participate and parent expressed negative feelings. The Hyperresearch software coding for this same interview revealed that when an external advocate was not present they were unfamiliar with the process, sought information on their own, were not in agreement with the district and expressed negative feelings about the IEP meeting. The themes derived from the coding process

in this interview include Parent was unable to fully participate, parent and school district disagree and the parent expressed negative feelings about their experience in the IEP meeting.

Table 9

*Themes –08152014at\**

Without an External Advocate Manually Coded Interview		Without an External Advocate Hyperresearch Coding	
IEP does not represent FAPE	0	IEP does not represent FAPE	0
Parent unable to fully participate	2	Parent unable to fully participate	2
Parent and District disagree	0	Parent and District disagree	1
Negative feelings	1	Negative feelings	1
Lack of professionalism	0	Lack of professionalism	0
Lack of Respect	0	Lack of Respect	0

Interview 09062014AT\* reported that without the presence of an external advocate they felt alone and attacked. The themes that were derived from this interview include: parent expressed negative feelings. The Hyperresearch software coding for this same interview revealed that when an external advocate was not present the parent felt defeated, expressed negative feelings about the meeting, the parent sought information on their own, the existing school relationships made the parent feel isolated and the parent and district were not in agreement regarding the IEP. The themes that were derived from this interview include: Parent was unable to fully participate, parent and school district disagree and parent expressed negative feelings about their experience in the IEP meeting.

Table 10

*Themes –09062014at\**

Without an External Advocate Manually Coded Interview		Without an External Advocate Hyperresearch Coding	
IEP does not represent FAPE	0	IEP does not represent FAPE	0

(Continued)



Without an External Advocate Manually Coded Interview		Without an External Advocate Hyperresearch Coding	
Parent unable to fully participate	0	Parent unable to fully participate	2
Parent and District disagree	0	Parent and District disagree	1
Negative feelings	1	Negative feelings	5
Lack of professionalism	0	Lack of professionalism	0
Lack of Respect	0	Lack of Respect	0

Utilizing both forms of coding, manually and through coding software, it has been determined that without the presence of an external advocate in individualized education plan meetings, minority parents have negative experiences, are unable to fully participate in the meeting, experience a lack of professionalism and can be in disagreement with the district regarding their child’s education. Additional experiences documented were the IEP not representing a free and appropriate public education, and the parent feelings a lack of respect during the IEP meeting.

Table 11

*Themes—all interviews combined*

Without an External Advocate Manual Coding		Without n External Advocate Hyper Research	
IEP does not represent FAPE	1	IEP does not represent FAPE	2
Parent unable to fully participate	13	Parent unable to fully participate	27
Parent and District disagree	4	Parent and District disagree	13
Negative feelings	41	Negative feelings	52
Lack of professionalism	8	Lack of professionalism	12
Lack of Respect	5	Lack of Respect	3

**Research question two.** Research Question Two asked, “What are the experiences of minority families as members of the Individualized Education Plan team for their disabled child with the presence of an external advocate?” To answer this question the researcher used the process of topic coding with each interview. This was done with the intention to develop themes

and subsequently identify common themes across all interviews. The researcher then coded each interview using Hyperresearch software to identify topics and themes within and across interviews specific to the experiences of families with the presence of an external advocate present during their child's Individualized Education Plan meeting. The types of advocates study participant's reported using during their child's Individualized Education Plan meetings include friends of the family, other parents who have advocated on behalf of their children, professional advocates and family members. The research reveals that with the presence of an external advocate parents had vastly different experiences than when they participated in meetings without the presence of an advocate. The impact of the presence of an external advocate can be associated with positive outcomes for families.

Interview 07012014A reported that with the presence of an external advocate the meeting was more formal. The parent also revealed that they did their own research. The themes that were derived from this interview include: parent informed/educated on the process and the meeting was more professional.

The Hyperresearch software coding for this same interview revealed that when an external advocate was present the parent was able to advocate on their own after support from the external advocate, they expressed positive feelings, the advocate will ask for detail, the advocate helped them understand what was happening, the meeting was more formal or structured and the team members didn't leave. The themes that were derived from this interview include: positive feeling, parent became informed and the meeting was more professional.

Table 12

*Themes –EO07012014a*

With an External Advocate Manually Coded Interview		With an External Advocate Hyperresearch Coding	
IEP represents FAPE	0	IEP represents FAPE	0
Parent informed/educated on process	1	Parent informed/educated on process	2
Cost associated with advocate	0	Cost associated with advocate	0
Positive feelings	0	Positive feelings	4
Meeting more professional	1	Meeting more professional	0
Meeting more balanced/fair	0	Meeting more balanced/fair	4

Interview 07012014B reported that with the presence of an external advocate the meeting was more orderly, protocol was followed, advocacy was expensive and the cost can be high, the parent learned and researched once given the tools and information from their exposure to the advocate. The parent also revealed that they felt equally matched with the school district when the advocate was present, the quality of the IEP was better and they felt more empowered with an advocate.

The themes that were derived from this interview are that the parent became informed/educated on the process, there was a cost associated with having an advocate, they expressed positive feelings, the meeting was more professional and the meeting was more balanced/fair.

The Hyperresearch software coding for this same interview revealed that when an external advocate was present the meeting was more formal or structured, there was an expense associated with having an advocate, they expressed positive feelings, the advocate asked for details and knows the process, the IEP team was more alert or engaged, the quality of the IEP was better, the parent felt empowered and confident.

The themes that were derived from this interview include: IEP represents FAPE, there is a cost associated with having an advocate present, parent expressed positive feelings and the meeting was more professional.

Table 13

*Themes –EO07012014b*

With an External Advocate Manually Coded Interview		With an External Advocate Hyperresearch Coding	
IEP represents FAPE	0	IEP represents FAPE	1
Parent informed/educated on process	1	Parent informed/educated on process	0
Cost associated with advocate	1	Cost associated with advocate	2
Positive feelings	3	Positive feelings	6
Meeting more professional	2	Meeting more professional	6
Meeting more balanced/fair	1	Meeting more balanced/fair	0

Interview 07082014A reported that with the presence of an advocate they experienced a feeling of being heard and like everyone was paying attention, parent felt comfortable and powerful with an advocate present, parent felt the school was more kind with an advocate and that there was a cost associated with having an advocate. The themes that were derived from this interview include: cost associated with an advocate and positive feelings.

The Hyperresearch software coding for this same interview revealed that when an external advocate was present the parent experienced a more alert or engaged IEP team, parent felt empowered, parent expressed positive feelings, the team members didn't leave the meeting, there was a cost associated with having an advocate, the advocate helped the parent understand what was happening and the advocate knows the process.

The themes that were derived from this interview include: parent became informed or educated on the process, there is a cost associated with advocacy, parent expressed positive feelings regarding their IEP meeting and the meeting was more professional.

Table 14

*Themes –EO07082014a*

With an External Advocate Manually Coded Interview		With an External Advocate Hyperresearch Coding	
IEP represents FAPE	0	IEP represents FAPE	0
Parent informed/educated on process	0	Parent informed/educated on process	1
Cost associated with advocate	1	Cost associated with advocate	1
Positive feelings	3	Positive feelings	7
Meeting more professional	0	Meeting more professional	3
Meeting more balanced/fair	0	Meeting more balanced/fair	0

Interview 07082014B reported that with the presence of an advocate the parent became educated, parent felt relieved with an advocate (less pressured), advocate helped facilitate the meeting, parent learned to advocate with skills they were exposed to from being with the advocate, and the parent felt empowered with the advocate.

The themes that were derived from this interview include: parent became informed/educated on the process, the meeting was more professional and they expressed positive feelings associated with the presence of an advocate.

The Hyperresearch software coding for this same interview revealed that when an external advocate was present they experienced positive feelings, the advocate asked for detail, the advocate knows the process and they felt less emotional with the advocate present. The themes that were derived from the analysis through this coding process include: the parent experienced a more professional meeting and positive feelings during their IEP meeting.

Table 15

*Themes –EO07082014b*

With an External Advocate Manually Coded Interview		With an External Advocate Hyperresearch Coding	
IEP represents FAPE	0	IEP represents FAPE	0
Parent informed/educated on process	2	Parent informed/educated on process	0
Cost associated with advocate	0	Cost associated with advocate	0
Positive feelings	2	Positive feelings	6
Meeting more professional	1	Meeting more professional	6
Meeting more balanced/fair	0	Meeting more balanced/fair	0

Interview 07082014C reported that with the presence of an advocate the meeting was very different—more accountability, the meeting was very professional, there was no intimidation with the advocate present, there was less bias with the advocate, the advocate cost money, there was more balance with the advocate, the advocate takes the emotion out, the parent felt as if they had choices and options and it was not one sided and there was peace of mind with an advocate. The themes that were derived from this coding process include: cost associated with having an advocate, positive feelings, meeting more professional and the meeting was more balanced-fair.

The Hyperresearch software coding for this same interview revealed that when an external advocate was present the meeting was more formal or structured, the advocate knows the process, there was an expense associated with having an advocate, the parent felt empowered, the parent felt confident and the parent felt less emotional with an advocate present. The themes that were derived from this coding process include: cost associated with advocate, positive feelings and the meeting was more professional.

Table 16

*Themes –EO07082014c*

With an External Advocate Manually Coded Interview		With an External Advocate Hyperresearch Coding	
IEP represents FAPE	0	IEP represents FAPE	0
Parent informed/educated on process	2	Parent informed/educated on process	0
Cost associated with advocate	0	Cost associated with advocate	3
Positive feelings	2	Positive feelings	5
Meeting more professional	1	Meeting more professional	3
Meeting more balanced/fair	0	Meeting more balanced/fair	0

Interview 08052014A reported that with the presence of an advocate the parent began to become informed and that there was a cost associated with having an advocate present. The themes that were derived from coding this interview were the parent became informed/educated on the process and there was a cost associated with having an advocate present. The Hyperresearch software coding for this same interview revealed that when an external advocate was present revealed that the parents experienced positive feelings and there was an expense associated with having an advocate. The themes derived from this interview include positive feelings and cost associated with having an advocate.

Table 17

*Themes –EO08052014a*

With an External Advocate Manually Coded Interview		With An External Advocate Hyperresearch Coding	
IEP represents FAPE	0	IEP represents FAPE	0
Parent informed/educated on process	1	Parent informed/educated on process	0
Cost associated with advocate	1	Cost associated with advocate	1
Positive feelings	0	Positive feelings	3
Meeting more professional	0	Meeting more professional	0
Meeting more balanced/fair	0	Meeting more balanced/fair	0

Interview 08152014AT\* reported that with the presence of an advocate the parent began to do research on their own to become more knowledgeable. The theme revealed in this interview was that the parent was informed/educated on the process. The Hyperresearch software coding for this same interview revealed that when an external advocate was present the parent had a negative experience. The theme that was derived from this coding process was the parent experienced a negative experience with an advocate present.

Table 18

*Themes –EO08152014at\**

With an External Advocate Manually Coded Interview		With an External Advocate Hyperresearch Coding	
IEP represents FAPE	0	IEP represents FAPE	0
Parent informed/educated on process	1	Parent informed/educated on process	0
Cost associated with advocate	0	Cost associated with advocate	0
Positive feelings	0	Positive feelings	0
Meeting more professional	0	Meeting more professional	0
Meeting more balanced/fair	0	Meeting more balanced/fair	0

Interview 09062014AT\* reported that with the presence of an external advocate the parent felt good, felt confident, felt like a full participant and felt supported. The themes that were derived from this interview include: parent became informed/educated on the process and had positive feelings. The Hyperresearch software coding for this same interview revealed that when an external advocate was present the parent had positive feelings and felt confident. The theme derived from this interview was the parent experienced positive feelings during their IEP meeting.



Table 19

*Themes –EO09062014at\**

With an External Advocate Manually Coded Interview		With an External Advocate Hyperresearch Coding	
IEP represents FAPE	0	IEP represents FAPE	0
Parent informed/educated on process	1	Parent informed/educated on process	0
Cost associated with advocate	0	Cost associated with advocate	0
Positive feelings	3	Positive feelings	3
Meeting more professional	0	Meeting more professional	0
Meeting more balanced/fair	0	Meeting more balanced/fair	0

Through research question #2, utilizing both forms of coding ( manually and through coding software), it has been determined that with the presence of an external advocate in individualized education plan meetings parents experience positive feelings, a more professional meeting and become educated or informed on the process. Other experiences derived from the interviews include a cost associated with having an advocate present, the IEP representing a free and appropriate public education and a more balanced or fair meeting.

Table 20

*Themes—All Interviews Combined EQ*

With an External Advocate Manual Coding		With an External Advocate Hyperresearch Coding	
IEP represents FAPE	0	IEP represents FAPE	1
Parent informed/educated on process	9	Parent informed/educated on process	3
Cost associated with advocate	3	Cost associated with advocate	7
Positive feelings	13	Positive feelings	34
Meeting more professional	5	Meeting more professional	18
Meeting more balanced/fair	1	Meeting more balanced/fair	4

**Research question three.** Research Question three asked, “How might external advocacy impact the experiences of minority families, specific to their involvement in the Individualized Education Plan meeting?” The In Vivo Without an Advocate comments, represented in Table 21, were used to answer this question. Data was derived from the interviews of the study participants and the themes discovered in research questions one and two.

A review of the themes discovered in research questions one and two, as well as a review of the “in vivo” comments extracted from each interview, suggest that external advocacy impacts the experiences of minority families in a positive manner. Parents revealed that with external advocacy they had positive feelings and experiences during their individualized education plan meetings. External advocacy also contributed to the parents feeling as if the meeting was more professional, balanced and fair. Other residual benefits discovered in an analysis of the data, indicates that with the presence of external advocacy parents felt that the IEP was a representation of a free and appropriate education for their special needs child, and that the parent became more informed and educated on the process as a whole.

The research also suggests that external advocacy impacts the experiences of minority families, specific to their involvement in the Individualized Education Plan meeting financially as “cost associated with advocate” was a fairly prevalent theme in the interviews with parents.

Table 21

*In Vivo With and Without an Advocate*

IN VIVO WITHOUT AN ADVOCATE –07012014A
“When you leave the IEP, you feel like you failed your child, no matter how much you go home and you try to read and understand.”
“..it feels horrible.”

(continued)

IN VIVO WITHOUT AN ADVOCATE -07012014A
“...and I feel that soon as you don’t let them do what they want with your child, you’re a hostile parent. You’re a parasite that they want to just smack in the wall and, and they treat you differently.”
“And firstly, I don’t understand, but the biggest thing was I felt so intimidated. I used to get so nervous.”
“Without an advocate, no matter what, you are lost. You’re lost, and you’re in their hands.”
“You’re gonna leave there feeling, um, confused and feeling like you failed all the way and it’s a shame.”
“..without an advocate you feel dumb and you feel like they use their education and their wording to make everything be okay.”
“...and sometimes it’s the intimidation and it’s also the embarrassment of feeling dumb that keeps parents quiet.”
IN VIVO WITH AN ADVOCATE – 07012014A
“I think when you sit with somebody else, with somebody else, it’s more formal.”
“The aura is different, the environment is different..”
“..but as soon as bring somebody, you’re hostile.”
“With an advocate you don’t feel dumb.”
IN VIVO WITHOUT AN ADVOCATE – 07012014B
“..the first IEP I went without an advocate and they were just kind of like shying me off...they wouldn’t listen. It just wasn’t a professional thing.”
“It’s been a horrible thing.”
“Without the advocate, we’re just sitting down and the principal doesn’t even come to the meeting.”
“But, um without it, we were blind. We just, we were just sitting there wasting our time.”
IN VIVO WITH AN ADVOCATE – 07012014B
“..it just gets so expensive.”
“Now, with the advocate, you know, things were orderly, you know?”
“I know an advocate knows exactly what she’s doing.”
“She’s your mouthpiece.”
“Yeah, they’re your mouthpiece, and they know the ins and outs and they know what the schools are supposed to do, and they know what the schools are not supposed to do...”

(continued)

IN VIVO WITH AN ADVOCATE -07012014B
“...they realized that the advocate is there and they have to be on their best behavior. And things that they didn’t do before, like they brought in a board and, you know, gave the rules, and this is with the advocate.”
“I felt empowered then.”
“I think the quality of the IEP was definitely better...”
IN VIVO WITHOUT AN ADVOCATE – 07082014A
“They are not respectful, they are not respectful when we are alone.”
IN VIVO WITH AN ADVOCATE – 07082014A
“She went with me and then, um, I feel like, uh, everybody was just, I know, paying attention.”
“And, uh, doing everything and then. I mean, I, I felt very comfortable. I felt powerful.”
“...when I had the advocate, so everybody was very,...gentle, and using that other kind voice, and it’s good and everything.”
“I felt good.”
“I felt comfortable...powerful.”
“I use the word powerful, because, um, I knew that everything that, that I haven’t had or saying something...she was on y side, and you know telling me, do this and do that. So helping me and supporting me, and then, feeling that support, it was, it was so, um, so special.
“It’s less stressful...I have respect.”
IN VIVO WITHOUT AN ADVOCATE – 07082014B
“I feel they’re not taking considering my input since I’m the one that knows my child the most.”
“When I’ve been by myself, I felt really, um, disappointed and very frustrated...”
“...it feels like it’s not a friendly meeting just because of the set up.”
“I still feel like I’m alone, you know?”
“...made me seem like I don’t know what I want, you know?”
“Why, you don’t even know what you want”
“...they kind of just threw their...their...their...educational background.”
“...It feels much better having an advocate there, um, because um, if you don’t um you know of tend to me more emotional.”
“But with an advocate, um, I feel like a little bit like the load’s off me...”
“...they help facilitate.”
“...it’s like a moral push.”

(continued)

IN VIVO WITHOUT AN ADVOCATE – 07082014C
“But even from the s all the way to the IEP was super unprofessional.”
“Their idea of what my kids’ education looked like without even giving me any like valid or validation of my concerns or anything.”
“..you’re already kind of like tense and overwhelmed.”
“...it was just like trial and error for me. I really didn’t felt like I knew what I was doing, but I really knew, I knew that I didn’t know.”
“Cause the school they didn’t they don’t explain nothing to you. What you know you get more upset because when they do explain things to you it’s like you’re an idiot like the way that they talk to you and it’s like they were the experts and you don’t now nothing like...”
“You know like the way they even speak to you like I don’t know.”
“So like when I got there I got like very nervous, but I composed myself but inside I was just like, like what’s going on.”
“Because I would literally cry in the car. I would get nervous I was nervous and I’m not a person that gets nervous, and I was like so nervous.
“Because even though they say you’re an equal member of the team you’re really not and I’m serious the parents don’t they don’t value themselves like without your signature they can’t do anything like they can’t implement.”
“Like when I would go by myself there was a lot of like my IEP’s were longer because it was a lot of back and for well I can’t make it that day well can you make it this day.”
“Unproductive.”
“Yes and then you start getting, stressed out, but I see that that is kind of, what they want to do to you.”
“So um, from there she came to the IEP and they acted like different. It was I think it was because there is a witness right it was like there was another person there.”
“And it’s on recording like yeah it’s ridiculous yes so none of that went down it was very professional.”
“Um, everyone was you know talking their turn and whatever and this time there was less team members it was only the appropriate team members it wasn’t no supervisors trying to intimidate me or anything.”
“How they treat you how the meeting goes and how when you come out you’re not as stressed”
“More supported more respected more of a balanced meeting, but then you still have your challenge with the district in terms of just educating your child.”

(continued)

IN VIVO WITH AN ADVOCATE – 07082014C
“Because I have, another person there and they’re a little bit more familiar with the law plus they take the emotion out because it’s not their child.”
“Someone to just be a balance.”
“I do I feel you have to have not just an advocate, but it’s more like a support.”
“And if it’s still like an extra even if it’s just piece of mind.”
IN VIVO WITHOUT AN ADVOCATE -08052014A
“So, um, in my personal experience, ah, they tend to be more antagonistic, more defiant of. Negative towards, you know, your child and their needs and their levels of performance, than when you actually have an advocate.”
“Ah, it could be antagonistic.”
“They, um, tsk, they tend to talk to you as if you’re a dummy.”
“They pretend like they don’t know a lot of things and when you ask any questions, they pretend, “oh, I don’t now. I’ll have to check with the district.”
“And also they lie to you. They lie to you about some policies, about some you know, so, um, unfortunately they use that against parents because most parents are not important.”
“And what they were telling me was just not making sense to me.”
“Ah, because at one point they were so hostile that you felt like you were going into the dragon’s cave.”
“They make it very difficult for you to understand it.”
“Parents don’t have the information, or don’t know what they should be asking for, until you become aware.”
IN VIVO WITH AN ADVOCATE – 08052014A
“When you have an advocate, they’re very watchful of what they say.”
“You know, they think twice before they say anything. They don’t compromise to anything, they don’t agree to anything, ah , and they’re very open to your opinion.”
“Um at that point, it was helpful when he came in again, because he kind of neutralized.”
IN VIVO WITHOUT AN ADVOCATE – 08152014AT*
“My experience participating without an advocate went really bad, because I didn’t know my rights.”
“No one never explain what my rights were, what I could or couldn’t do, they just gave me a piece of paper.”

(continued)

IN VIVO WITHOUT AN ADVOCATE – 08152014AT*
“I didn’t understand any of the laws writing on the paper it was really bad in reality the word to describe this was traumatizing,”
“I wasn’t informed about, I wasn’t educated about it so I started learning all I could.”
“It took me about two years to realize that the experience was really not good at all to put things together and figure out that the result of it was not good.”
IN VIVO WITH AN ADVOCATE – 08152014AT*
“It took me about two years to realize that the experience was really not good at all to put things together and figure out that the result of it was not good.”
“And I’m not saying that’s the case for everyone but at least in my case the advocate could only help me so much and this advocate didn’t even say I can only help you so much he just didn’t say anything.”
IN VIVO WITHOUT AN ADVOCATE – 09062014AT*
“If you don’t have any knowledge about your child’s right, it’s terrible.”
“My first experience was really hard because I didn’t have any knowledge about the laws and the rights of my child. You feel alone, you feel attacked, you feel humiliated.”
“So for me it was really difficult.”
“My experience was really hard, you have to train yourself to know your rights.”
“You have to be really strong.”
“I had a really serious problem with the director of the IEP, she treated me like garbage.”
“The IEP was so extreme, it was so stressful.”
IN VIVO WITH AN ADVOCATE – 09062014AT*
“The past year I participated with a new advocate, it was fantastic. Really fantastic”
“And he prepared himself so I felt confident.”
“The representative really made me feel supported.
“When the advocate became a part of everything they begun to listen to her more, they started listening more to the rights of my daughter.”
“The district sent so many people but I felt really calm because I felt support.”

## Chapter 5: Discussion

The ability of minority parents, to participate in the educational decision making of their children with special needs may be hindered when faced with barriers such as limited language, limited socio-economic status and limited language. The presence of external advocacy as a representation of social capital, used to mitigate existing barriers, may provide the access parents need to ensure that there is no disparity in the federal mandate which requires that each child with an identified disability, being educated in a public school setting, be provided with a free and appropriate public education and that parents have meaningful participation in the process.

This phenomenological study sought to understand the experiences of minority families who face common barriers to parent participation such as: limited education, low socio-economic status and limited language, during Individualized Education Plan meetings, with and without the presence of an external advocate.

The following research questions were used in the study:

1. What are the experiences of minority families as members of the Individualized Education Plan team for their disabled child without the presence of an external advocate?
2. What are the experiences of minority families as members of the Individualized Education Plan team for their disabled child with the presence of an external advocate?
3. How might external advocacy impact the experiences of minority families, specific to their involvement in the Individualized Education Plan meeting?

The participants interviewed for this study included eight families, all parents of children with special needs being educated through an Individualized Education Plan through their district



of residence. This study's participants were all identified as being an ethnic minority as well as a comorbid characteristic of limited language, limited education or limited socioeconomic status. Interviews were conducted in Los Angeles county from June 2014 through September 2014.

### **Interpretation of Key Findings**

**Research question number one.** The purpose of this question was to gather information specific to the experiences of minority families as members of the Individualized Education Plan team for their disabled child without the presence of an external advocate. The research shows that in situations where families participated in an Individualized Education Plan without the presence of an external advocate they reported having negative experiences.

These negative experiences were manifested in an inability to fully participate in the Individualized Education Plan meeting, experiencing situations where there was a lack of professionalism and being in disagreement with the school district regarding their child's education. Other documented experiences with a negative connotation for the parents participating in Individualized Education Meetings without the presence of an advocate include the Individualized Education Plan not representing a free and appropriate public education for their child and a feeling of a lack of respect during the meeting. These documented experiences were found to be commensurate with the literature.

Hess (2006) discusses the increase in the pronounced expectation that parents would fully participate in the IEP decision making process. He discusses shared decision making and collaboration. Parents who participated in this study reported that they were not able to fulfill the expectation in meetings where an advocate was not present. Lo (2012) shares that the development of an IEP is limited when there are any barriers to participation and the IEP itself is necessary in order to meet the needs of the student. The No Child Left Behind Act, which is

aligned to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, defines parental involvement and highlights two way and meaningful communication, and that parents are full partners and included, as appropriate in decision making (Turnbull, 2005; Yell, 2006). This involves strengthening the role of parents and providing meaningful opportunities to participate.

This research study found that one of the negative experiences reported by parents who participated in IEP's, without the presence of an external advocate, was the disagreement with the school district regarding their child's education. Council (2009) reported that parents perceive a difference in services their child receives and also that current special education legislation provides for dispute resolution, procedural safeguards and parental rights for the express purpose of ensuring that parents have a voice and that the decision making process involves all members of the child's IEP team. The groundwork for FAPE was birthed through the 1975 legislation PL-94-142 with highlights a free and appropriate public education, subsequent authorizations – P1 105-17 1997, IDEIA 2004 PL 108-446 finalized and made the language more defined. The IEP not representing a free and appropriate public education as being a negative experience within the IEP meeting, without the presence of an advocate, is in direct contradiction to the law (Drasgow, 2001).

The literature also reveals that parents often have feelings of inferiority, lack of respect, awkwardness and uneasiness during IEP meetings (Dilberto & Staples, 2010). This was highlighted in the research findings as parents reported similar experiences and feelings during IEP meetings where they were not accompanied by an advocate. Brandon (2007) and Sales (2001) also document parents not being welcomed and feeling intimidated during IEP meetings. The parents who participated in this study reported experiences and feelings that mirrored those presented in the literature.

**Research question number two.** In direct contrast to the negative feelings reported by parents in research question number one, the findings in research question number two reveal that with the presence of an external advocate parents reported having positive experiences. Research question number two focused on gathering information specific to the experiences of minority families as members of the Individualized Education Plan team for their disabled child with the presence of an external advocate. Parents indicated that there was a more professional atmosphere during the meeting and they became informed and educated on the process.

Phillips' research in 2008 shares that the barriers to parents advocating for their special needs children include have a lack of knowledge about their child's disability, a lack of knowledge about educational options, and difficulty interfacing with school officials and complying with procedural requirements. An additional barrier counteracted with the presence of an external advocate is supported by the research of Kalyanpur, Harry and Skrtic (2000) who mention equity versus value-inequality. This resonates with those families who experienced feelings of a lack of respect or conflict in the midst of meeting with professionals.

The research study also revealed that with the presence of an external advocate, parents felt that the Individualized Education Plan was more representative of a free and appropriate public education for their child which aligns to Council's findings in 2009 that minority parents often perceive a difference in the services their children are offered (Council, 2009). Till (2012) comments on the increased number of parents nation-wide who are hiring special education advocates to help them understand special education and fight for services for their children. Alper, Schloss, & Schloss, C. (1995) also discuss the potential need for parents to solicit the services of a professional advocate, especially as the child with a disability gets older. Additionally, research question number two produced findings that indicate there can be a

monetary cost associated with having an advocate present. This may be especially significant when dealing with families that are identified as low-socio-economic status.

The impact of external advocacy revealed in this study is paramount given Trainor's 2010 study on the different types of parental advocacy and the classifications of parents who access the various types of approaches to advocacy. The types of advocacy strategies or positions used by parents included the intuitive advocate, the disability specialist, the change agent, and the strategist. Certain types of advocacy strategies are not engaged in by parents who are considered to be minorities or culturally/linguistically diverse. The main approach used by minority families was the intuitive approach. Meaning they were less likely to use their knowledge of the child's particular disability to secure services. They are less likely to be well versed in procedures and guidelines to hold the school system accountable and leverage the knowledge they do have to gain desired or preferred services. And, they are less likely to understand the potential educational benefit for all children, when they are advocating on behalf of their own children knowing that decisions regarding placement and services made for their children, may impact other children as well. With the presence of an external advocate minority families in this study were able to access advocacy strategies offered by Trainor (2010) such as the disability specialist, strategist or change agent that were previously not accessed by minority families.

**Research question number three.** Research question number three focused on gathering information specific to how external advocacy might impact the experiences of minority families in their involvement in the Individualized Education Plan meeting. The research suggests that external advocacy has a positive impact on the experiences of minority families. In fact, the positive impact that minority families experienced with the presence of an external advocate

mitigate the universal barriers to parental advocacy presented by Phillips in 2008, which highlights a lack of knowledge about the disability or educational options. Phillips work also discusses the difficulty parents have interacting with school personnel and the challenges associated with complying with the federal law. Shelby Till (2012) exposed the increase in the number of parents nation-wide who are hiring advocates to help them understand special education and secure services for their children. Alper, Schloss & Schloss (1995) also discussed the potential need for parents to solicit the services of a professional advocate, especially as the child with a disability gets older.

Parents reported positive feelings and experiences during their child's Individualized Education Plan meeting. External advocacy contributed to parents feeling as if the meeting was more professional, balanced and fair. The research also shows that parents felt as if the documented created in these meetings were more representative of a free and appropriate public education for their child and that they were more informed and educated as a result of external advocacy. Another component impacting the parent's experience with an external advocate was the financial cost associated with having an advocate present. These findings are commensurate with previously documented literature on the experiences of minority families with cultural, linguistic, educational and socioeconomic disparities or differences, within Individualized Education Plan meetings. The findings from this particular aspect of the study were gathered in an effort to inform further research, policy and practices

### **The Findings Related to the Hypothesis**

The data collected and analyzed in this study exemplify advocacy as a representation of many of the varied definitions of social capital. From Bourdieu's definition of social capital the data from this study showed that advocacy, as resource, connects networks through relationships

that produce value. Parents are connected with school networks through advocates where there is an observation of mutual acquaintance or recognition. Coleman (1988) speaks of social capital as a function, many entities with two common denominators: social structure and the facilitation of specific actions of individuals who are a part of that structure. The research shows that advocacy, the act of advocacy helped facilitate very specific outcomes for parents during the course of Individualized Education Plan meetings. Those same outcomes were not identified during the Individualized Education Plan meetings where an advocate was not present.

Putnam (1995) defined social capital as “features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit” (p.67). The research shows that advocacy used within the context of IEP meetings by families established norms, social trust and did facilitate coordination and cooperation. Advocacy in this study also exemplified Brehm and Rahn’s 1997 definition of social capital due to the cooperative relationships established during meetings where an advocate was present and the resolution of problems that occurred.

The work of Woolcock (2001) has shown us that there are various types of social capital. These are identified as binding, bridging and linking. Binding social capital occurs through the relationships of friends, family and neighbors. Bridging social capital is present in the relationships between slightly more distant relations such as those you work with. Woolcock’s definition of the third type of social capital which is called Linking social capital, really speaks to the way advocacy presented itself as social capital in this study. Linking social capital is presented as social capital that reaches beyond the boundaries of the individual or community, connecting people who may not be similar, allowing the person to leverage more resources than may be readily available in the community (Woolcock, 2001). This can be interpreted as

providing access to information or resources through relationships that feature trust, norms, networks and reciprocity which provide mutual benefit. Advocacy is the link in this research study. The difference between research question number one – what are the experiences of minority families during individualized education plan meetings, who face barriers to participation such as cultural and linguistic diversity, limited socio-economic status and limited education without the presence of an advocate; and research question number two – what are the experiences of minority families during individualized education plan meetings, who face barriers to participation such as cultural and linguistic diversity, limited socio-economic status and limited education with the presence of advocacy, was advocacy. In this research study, advocacy served as the source of social capital that reached beyond the boundaries of the individual or community, connecting people who may not be similar, allowing the person to leverage more resources than may be readily available (Woolcock, 2001). Parents reported positive experiences with the presence of an advocate, a more balanced and fair meeting, an individualized education plan that exemplifies a free and appropriate public education for their child, more information, more education, and less fear and anxiety. Parents in this study were connected with advocates who assisted them in leveraging more resources than were readily available.

## **Conclusion**

The longstanding battle of families with special needs children is heavily documented through federal legislation, litigation and school system reform. What is not heavily documented are the battles of families who have special needs children, who face barriers to participation in the individualized education plan process directly related to their cultural or linguistic diversity, limited education or low socio-economic status. The children of these families are the real focus.

The research presented in this study provides an authentic account of the families who face these common barriers. Their truth, as presented, should not be negated or dismissed but addressed as the injustice that it is. The stark contrast in experiences cannot be denied. And in fact, should be highlighted for practitioners, politicians and activists so that the education system can work towards balance and proportionality in its day to day provision of education for children with disabilities.

While the experiences of families who participated in the study without the presence of external advocacy are disheartening, what is more troubling is the fact that this disparate situation has a negative impact on the free and appropriate public education of thousands of children in The United States.

This study reveals the potential positive impact external advocacy may have on creating a more equitable situation for children with disabilities and their parents who are charged with participating in the development of their educational planning year after year. With such a monumental task as this, all efforts to create an environment of trust, accountability and balance should be the focus of local and state educational agencies nationwide.

### **Recommendations for Policy and Practice**

**Recommendation one.** At the local, state, and federal level, research designed to inform us of the experiences of minority families within the context of individualized education plan meetings should be conducted. The research should also focus on variables such as cultural and linguistic diversity, limited education, and low-socioeconomic status. This research should be used to shape the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act.



**Recommendation two.** Training for educators who will be participants in Individualized Education Plan meeting that will assist them in their professional presentation, accountability and expectations. This should take place within various school systems throughout the United States, but specifically in areas or schools that service minority populations of students with special needs.

**Recommendation three.** Research at the county or state level that will inform local education agencies of the types of advocates and advocacy services that are being accessed in the community. An inventory of advocacy services, personnel and practices should be taken to inform next steps.

**Recommendation four.** Training at a local or state level for persons who will be participating in Individualized Education Plan meetings under the auspices of being an advocate or advocating in the meeting on behalf of the parent or child. This training should be multi-faceted and include topics such as special education law, best practices in special education, and mediation.

**Recommendation five.** School districts or individual school sites should provide orientations or welcome workshops for parents after initial evaluations that recommend services for children. These workshops should provide an overview of special education legislation, descriptions of services and service providers and explanations of the various types of environments that children who receive services may be a part of.

**Recommendation six.** A focus on building trust between all members of the Individualized Education Plan team through positive interactions, communication, relationship building and transparency should be prioritized. This should be done prior to the team meeting.

**Recommendation seven.** Administrative credential programs should incorporate training for prospective administrators that will provide them with the background and training necessary to appropriately and effectively participate in Individualized Education Plan meetings.

### **Recommendation for Future Research**

With such a limited amount of research on specific aspects of this study such as advocacy, minority family outcomes in special education, costs associated with advocacy, the varied degree of special education services for minority children with special needs in low socio-economic areas, with limited education or those that are considered culturally and linguistically diverse, there are many aspects that can, and should be further explored.

**Future research questions.** Future research should explore the following questions:

What role might advocates play in the context of IEP meetings

1. What are the needs of minority families within the individualized education plan meeting
2. How might current educators be supported and trained to streamline and standardized participation and decision making in the IEP process to ensure equitable access for all families.
3. How might costs associated with the presence of an external; advocate be mitigated
4. Should advocacy be monitored at a state or federal level?
5. What might schools, districts or local education agencies do to establish trust between themselves and parents of children with special needs who receive services under their care?

## **Final Summary**

The disadvantages that children with special needs are predisposed to, specific to their identified disability, is a daily struggle that has implications that spread throughout the various facets of their lives To further impact these children and their families in a negative way because of their limited use of the English language, the difference in their culture, the nature of their socio-economic status, or how educated they may or not be is a travesty. Every best effort should be made socially, politically and economically to ensure that federal legislation is executed and that not just the families, but the children have access to a free and appropriate public education.

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APPENDIX A

IRB Approval Letter

PEPPERDINE UNIVERSITY

Graduate & Professional Schools Institutional Review Board

December 17, 2013

Protocol #: E0313D13

Project Title: The Disparity in a Free Appropriate Public Education: Minority Parents and Access Through Advocacy

Dear \_\_\_\_\_ :

Thank you for submitting your application, *The Disparity in a Free Appropriate Public Education: Minority Parents and Access Through Advocacy*, for expedited review to Pepperdine University's Graduate and Professional Schools Institutional Review Board (GPS IRB). The IRB appreciates the work you and your advisor, Dr. Robert Barner, completed on the proposal. The IRB has reviewed your submitted IRB application and all ancillary materials. As the nature of the research met the requirements for expedited review under provision Title 45 CFR 46.110 (Research Category 7) of the federal Protection of Human Subjects Act, the IRB conducted a formal, but expedited, review of your application materials.

I am pleased to inform you that your application for your study was granted **Full Approval**. The IRB approval begins today, **12/17/2013**, and terminates on **12/17/2014**. Your final consent form has been stamped by the IRB to indicate the expiration date of study approval. One copy of the consent form is enclosed with this letter and one copy will be retained for our records. **You can only use copies of the consent that have been stamped with the GPS IRB expiration date to obtain consent from your participants.**

Please note that your research must be conducted according to the proposal that was submitted to the GPS IRB. If changes to the approved protocol occur, a revised protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB before implementation. For **any** proposed changes in your research protocol, please submit a **Request for Modification form** to the GPS IRB. Please be aware that changes to your protocol may prevent the research from qualifying for expedited review and require submission of a new IRB application or other materials to the GPS IRB. If contact with subjects will extend beyond **12/17/2014**, a **Continuation or Completion of Review Form** must be submitted at least one month prior to the expiration date of study approval to avoid a lapse in approval.

A goal of the IRB is to prevent negative occurrences during any research study. However, despite our best intent, unforeseen circumstances or events may arise during the research. If an unexpected situation or adverse event happens during your investigation, please notify the GPS IRB as soon as possible. We will ask for a complete explanation of the event and your response. Other actions also may be required depending on the nature of the event. Details regarding the timeframe in which adverse events must be reported to the GPS IRB and the appropriate form to be used to report this information can be found in the *Pepperdine University Protection of Human Participants in Research: Policies and Procedures Manual* (see link to "policy material" at <http://www.pepperdine.edu/irb/graduate/>).

6100 Center Drive, Los Angeles, California 90045 ■ 310-568-5600

Please refer to the protocol number denoted above in all further communication or correspondence related to this approval. Should you have additional questions, please contact me. On behalf of the GPS IRB, I wish you success in this scholarly pursuit.

Sincerely,

Chair, Graduate and Professional Schools IRB  
Pepperdine University

cc:

Vice Provost for Research and Strategic Initiatives  
Director Research and Sponsored Programs  
Faculty Chair



# APPENDIX B

## Informed Consent

**GPS IRB APPROVAL**  
PEPPERDINE UNIVERSITY

### INFORMED CONSENT PARENTS PARTICIPATING IN STUDY

IRB # E0313D13  
December 17, 2014

**VALID UNTIL  
DATE ABOVE**

This research is being conducted as part of a requirement for a doctoral degree from Pepperdine University. My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am a doctoral student completing this research study in the Graduate School of Education and Psychology. The purpose of this study is to understand more about the experiences of parents who face common barriers to participation such as language, socio-economic status, and limited education in the Individualized Education Plan meeting. Experiences with and without an advocate are the focus of this study.

You will be asked to participate in a 45-60 minute interview in person with the researcher. The interview will be recorded digitally and transcribed. The recording and transcription will only be available to the researcher and the members of the dissertation committee. The recording and transcription will be assigned a number in order to maintain confidentiality.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may withdraw from the study for any reason and at any time. There will be no repercussions or penalties for not participating or for withdrawing from the study. There are no costs or foreseeable risks to you or any other participant in the study. Confidentiality is a priority and each transcribed interview and interview protocol will be assigned a number to ensure confidentiality.

For your participation in the interview be given a Target gift card in the amount of \$10 upon completion of the interview. Additionally, the outcomes of the research will be provided to you if you so choose.

If you have further questions regarding this research, you may contact me, the primary investigator, \_\_\_\_\_ or my faculty supervisor \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact \_\_\_\_\_ Chairperson of the GPS IRB at Pepperdine University by phone at \_\_\_\_\_ or by email at: \_\_\_\_\_.

**CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH:**

I understand that this research has been reviewed by Graduate and Professional Schools (GPS) Institutional Review Board, Pepperdine University. For research-related problems or questions regarding participants' rights, I may contact \_\_\_\_\_ Chairperson of the GPS IRB at Pepperdine University at \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_

I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this consent form.

By signing this document, I consent to participate in this study.

**Participant Name (Print):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Participant Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

*I have explained and defined in detail the research procedure in which the subject has consented to participate. Having explained this and answered any questions, I am cosigning this form and accepting this person's consent.*

**Principal Investigator Full Name (Print):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Principal Investigator Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX C

### Parent Interview Screening Protocol

#### Parent Interview Screening Protocol

Date:

Time:

Subject:

Interview No.

Date:

Time:

#### SCREENING PROTOCOL

Study participants will be:

- Parents of a child with a disability (The population will only include those who meet the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act's definitions of "parent")
- Subjects will be parents between the ages of 21-65, with one or more children with a disability.
- Being funded by their school of residence through an Individualized Education Plan,
- Reside in the State of California and
- Identified as one of the following ethnic groups accepted by the State of California and Federal reporting standards: (1) American Indian or Alaskan

Native. A person having origins in any of the original peoples of North America, and who maintains cultural identification through tribal affiliation or community recognition. (2) Asian or Pacific Islander. A person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, the Indian subcontinent, or the Pacific Islands. This area includes, for example, China, India, Japan, Korea, the Philippine Islands, and Samoa. (3) Black (Not of Hispanic Origin). A person having origins in any of the black racial groups of Africa. (4) Hispanic. A person of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central or South American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race.

- Co-existing characteristic of limited education or

OR

- low socio-economic status

OR

- language barrier

Participated in an IEP with and without an advocate who is not a licensed attorney or family member



## APPENDIX D

### Interview Protocol

#### INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

The principal investigator will review the following information prior to beginning the interview:

- You have agreed to participate in this study by participating in this interview.
  - This interview will help us understand the experiences of minority families who face common barriers to participation in the IEP.
  - All information will be kept strictly confidential
  - Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide you do not want to participate there will not be any repercussions
1. Have you attended IEP meetings before?
  2. Have you attended IEP's without the presence of an advocate?
  3. Have you attended IEP's with the presence of an advocate?
  4. Was the advocate a family member?
  5. Was the advocate a licensed attorney?
  6. What is your ethnicity?
  7. What level of school have you completed?
  8. Have you used a translator or asked for a translated copy of your child's IEP in the past?
  9. Does your child qualify for Free and Reduced Lunch at school?
  10. Can you tell me about your experiences when you participated in IEP's without an advocate?
  11. Can you share more of your thoughts and feelings about that meeting?

12. Now can you tell me about your experiences in IEP meetings with the presence of an advocate?

13. Can you share more of your thoughts and feelings about that meeting?

# APPENDIX E

## Research Flyer

**RESEARCH STUDY PARTICIPANTS MUST BE:**

THE PARENT OF A CHILD WITH SPECIAL NEEDS WHO IS CURRENTLY BEING EDUCATED THROUGH AN IEP IN THEIR DISTRICT OF RESIDENCE AND ARE CONSIDERED A RACIAL OR ETHNIC MINORITY (AMERICAN INDIAN OR ALASKAN NATIVE, ASIAN OR PACIFIC ISLANDER, BLACK OR HISPANIC)

**AND**

LOW-INCOME OR HAVE LIMITED EDUCATION OR LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENT.

PARTICIPANTS WILL BE COMPENSATED

**THE DISPARITY IN A FREE APPROPRIATE PUBLIC EDUCATION**  
MINORITY PARENTS AND ACCESS THROUGH ADVOCACY

**Disadvantaged Parents**  
"Those who experience social or economic limitations for full participation in American society: racial and ethnic minority-group members such as blacks and Hispanics, low-income families, poorly educated parents, and those who do not speak English" (Moles, 1993).

**IDEA 20 U.S.C. 1400 (c)(5)(B)**  
"Almost 30 years of research and experience has demonstrated that the education of children with disabilities can be made more effective by strengthening the role and responsibility of parents and ensuring that families of such children have meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children at school and at home"

*If you, or anyone you know, meets the guidelines for participating in this research study please contact the researcher*

APPENDIX F

Manual Coding 07012014A

TOPIC CODING
Without the presence of an external advocate
Child's issues never addressed
Parent perspective on child differs from school's perspective
Language/terminology used by school hard to understand
Talk to you as if stupid
Can't contribute- ill-informed
Feel horrible
Labeled as hostile if you decide to say something
More informal without representation
Concerns aren't heard or dismissed
As soon as you don't let them do what they want you're a hostile parent
No advocate then the school will not ask if you have any questions
Casual without an advocate
Team members leave the meeting more often.
Feel scared or intimidated by dates and document being legal and from the state
The district gets upset when you bring someone
Bring someone and you're hostile
Without an advocate feel lost
Embarrassment feeling dumb and quiet without an advocate
With the presence of an external advocate
More formal when represented
Parent does their own research
IN VIVO WITHOUT AN ADVOCATE
"When you leave the IEP, you feel like you failed your child, no matter how much you go home and you try to read and understand."
"..it feels horrible."
"...and I feel that soon as you don't let them do what they want with your child, you're a hostile parent. You're a parasite that they want to just smack in the wall and, and they treat you differently."
"And firstly, I don't understand, but the biggest thing was I felt so intimidated. I used to get so nervous."
"Without an advocate, no matter what, you are lost. You're lost, and you're in their hands."
"You're gonna leave there feeling, um, confused and feeling like you failed all the way and it's a shame."
"..without an advocate you feel dumb and you feel like they use their education and their wording to make everything be okay."
"...and sometimes it's the intimidation and it's also the embarrassment of feeling dumb that keeps parents quiet."
IN VIVO WITH AN ADVOCATE

"I think when you sit with somebody else, with somebody else, it's more formal."			
"The aura is different, the environment is different.."			
"..but as soon as bring somebody, you're hostile."			
"With an advocate you don't feel dumb."			
"With an advocate, you feel like they...the advocate stops at certain points and she asks if you have any questions."			
"But she breaks it down, the important parts a little bit at a time so you will understand. And the flow is different. They're a lot more alert. They don't leave. It's not as casual."			
"I feel like somebody is standing behind my child"			
THEMES -07012014A			
WITHOUT AN EXTERNAL ADVOCATE		WITH AN EXTERNAL ADVOCATE	
IEP does not represent FAPE	1	IEP represents FAPE	0
Parent unable to fully participate	2	Parent informed/educated on process	1
Parent and District disagree	1	Cost associated with advocate	0
Negative feelings	7	Positive feelings	0
Lack of professionalism	5	Meeting more professional	1
Lack of Respect	3	Meeting more balanced/fair	0

APPENDIX G

Manual Coding 07012014B

TOPIC CODING			
Without an external advocate present			
Parent feels dismissed			
Parent doesn't know enough			
Parent didn't know rights or protocol			
Didn't accept parent's perspective if different from district's			
Parent gets tired of battling the district-feel exhausted and tired,			
Parent gives up			
Horrible without an advocate			
With an external advocate present			
Orderly with an advocate			
Followed more protocol with advocate			
Advocacy gets expensive			
The cost associated with advocacy can be high			
Parent learns and researches once given the tools or information			
Equally matched when an advocate is present			
Better quality of IEP with advocate			
Parent felt more empowered with an advocate, level playing field			
IN VIVO WITHOUT AN ADVOCATE			
"..the first IEP I went without an advocate and they were just kind of like shying me off...they wouldn't listen. It just wasn't a professional thing."			
"It's been a horrible thing."			
"Without the advocate, we're just sitting down and the principal doesn't even come to the meeting."			
"But, um without it, we were blind. We just, we were just sitting there wasting our time."			
IN VIVO WITH AN ADVOCATE			
"..it just gets so expensive."			
"Now, with the advocate, you know, things were orderly, you know?"			
"I know an advocate knows exactly what she's doing."			
"She's your mouthpiece."			
"Yeah, they're your mouthpiece, and they know the ins and outs and they know what the schools are supposed to do, and they know what the schools are not supposed to do..."			
"...they realized that the advocate is there and they have to be on their best behavior. And things that they didn't do before, like they brought in a board and, you know, gave the rules, and this is with the advocate."			
"I felt empowered then."			
"I think the quality of the IEP was definitely better..."			
THEMES -07012014B			
WITHOUT AN EXTERNAL ADVOCATE		WITH AN EXTERNAL ADVOCATE	
IEP does not represent FAPE	0	IEP represents FAPE	0

Parent unable to fully participate	2	Parent informed/educated on process	1
Parent and District disagree	1	Cost associated with advocate	1
Negative feelings	4	Positive feelings	3
Lack of professionalism	0	Meeting more professional	2
Lack of Respect	0	Meeting more balanced/fair	1

APPENDIX H

Manual Coding 07082014A

TOPIC CODING			
Without an external advocate present			
More pressure without an advocate			
Not enough time			
Can't get answers			
Discuss the same point and don't agree			
Parent feels dismissed, district has different perspective			
Parent began to become informed			
Team members leave when there's no advocate			
Protocol wasn't being followed			
With an external advocate present			
Parent felt heard with advocate, like everyone was paying attention			
Parent felt comfortable and powerful with advocate.			
With advocate parent feels school was more kind			
Cost associated with advocates			
IN VIVO WITHOUT AN ADVOCATE			
"They are not respectful, they are not respectful when we are alone."			
IN VIVO WITH AN ADVOCATE			
"She went with me and then, um, I feel like, uh, everybody was just, I know, paying attention."			
"And, uh, doing everything and then. I mean, I, I felt very comfortable. I felt powerful."			
"...when I had the advocate, so everybody was very,...gentle, and using that other kind voice, and it's good and everything."			
"I felt good."			
"I felt comfortable...powerful."			
"I use the word powerful, because, um, I knew that everything that, that I haven't had or saying something...she was on y side, and you know telling me, do this and do that. So helping me and supporting me, and then, feeling that support, it was, it was so, um, so special.			
"It's less stressful...I have respect."			
THEMES -07082014A			
WITHOUT AN EXTERNAL ADVOCATE		WITH AN EXTERNAL ADVOCATE	
IEP does not represent FAPE	0	IEP represents FAPE	0
Parent unable to fully participate	0	Parent informed/educated on process	0
Parent and District disagree	2	Cost associated with advocate	1
Negative feelings	3	Positive feelings	3
Lack of professionalism	3	Meeting more professional	0
Lack of Respect	0	Meeting more balanced/fair	0



APPENDIX I

Manual Coding 07082014B

TOPIC CODING			
Without an external advocate present			
Difficult without an advocate			
Don't consider parents input			
District took position that they knew better			
Parent feels frustrated and disappointed			
District only puts their recommendations			
Parent didn't understand what was going on			
Parent feels like meeting is unfriendly			
Parent is by herself and IEP team is large			
Parent gets emotional when there's no advocate			
Parent feels misunderstood			
Parent feels like their contribution isn't valuable			
Parent felt intimidated by educational backgrounds			
With an external advocate present			
Parent got educated			
Parent feels relieved with an advocate- less pressured			
Advocate helps facilitate			
Parent learned to advocate, learned skills from being with advocate			
Parent felt empowered with advocate			
IN VIVO WITHOUT AN ADVOCATE			
"I feel they're not taking considering my input since I'm the one that knows my child the most."			
"When I've been by myself, I felt really, um, disappointed and very frustrated..."			
"...it feels like it's not a friendly meeting just because of the set up."			
"I still feel like I'm alone, you know?"			
"...made me seem like I don't know what I want, you know?"			
"Why, you don't even know what you want"			
"...they kind of just threw their...their...their...educational background."			
IN VIVO WITH AN ADVOCATE			
"...It feels much better having an advocate there, um, because um, if you don't um you know of tend to me more emotional."			
"But with an advocate, um, I feel like a little bit like the load's off me..."			
"...they help facilitate."			
"...it's like a moral push."			
THEMES – 07082014B			
WITHOUT AN EXTERNAL ADVOCATE		WITH AN EXTERNAL ADVOCATE	
IEP does not represent FAPE	0	IEP represents FAPE	0
Parent unable to fully participate	2	Parent informed/educated on process	2
Parent and District disagree	0	Cost associated with advocate	0

Negative feelings	9	Positive feelings	2
Lack of professionalism	0	Meeting more professional	1
Lack of Respect	1	Meeting more balanced/fair	0

APPENDIX J

Manual Coding 07082014C

TOPIC CODING
Without an external advocate present
Unprofessional
District didn't consider the parent concerns
Felt like a fight to parents
Parent felt upset
Parent began to research and became more informed
Parent felt disrespected by district
Parent felt nervous
Parent felt retaliated against for speaking up
Parent does not feel like an equal member even though they should be
With the presence of an external advocate
Very different with an advocate – more accountability
Very professional with advocate
No intimidation with advocate
Less bias with advocate
Advocacy cost money
More balance with an advocate
Advocate takes the emotion out
Parent feels as if they have choices, options, not one sided.
Advocate cost money
Peace of mind with an advocate
IN VIVO WITHOUT AN ADVOCATE
"But even from the s all the way to the IEP was super unprofessional."
"Their idea of what my kids' education looked like without even giving me any like valid or validation of my concerns or anything."
"..you're already kind of like tense and overwhelmed."
"...it was just like trial and error for me. I really didn't felt like I knew what I was doing, but I really knew, I knew that I didn't know."
"Cause the school they didn't they don't explain nothing to you. What you know you get more upset because when they do explain things to you it's like you're an idiot like the way that they talk to you and it's like they were the experts and you don't now nothing like..."
"You know like the way they even speak to you like I don't know."
"So like when I got there I got like very nervous, but I composed myself but inside I was just like, like what's going on."
"Because I would literally cry in the car. I would get nervous I was nervous and I'm not a person that gets nervous, and I was like so nervous."
"Because even though they say you're an equal member of the team you're really not and I'm serious the parents don't they don't value themselves like without your signature they can't do anything like they can't implement."
"Like when I would go by myself there was a lot of like my IEP's were longer because it was a

lot of back and for well I can't make it that day well can you make it this day."
"Unproductive."
"Yes and then you start getting, stressed out, but I see that that is kind of, what they want to do to you."
IN VIVO WITH AN ADVOCATE
"So um, from there she came to the IEP and they acted like different. It was I think it was because there is a witness right it was like there was another person there."
"And it's on recording like yeah it's ridiculous yes so none of that went down it was very professional."
"Um, everyone was you know talking their turn and whatever and this time there was less team members it was only the appropriate team members it wasn't no supervisors trying to intimidate me or anything."
"How they treat you how the meeting goes and how when you come out you're not as stressed"
"More supported more respected more of a balanced meeting, but then you still have your challenge with the district in terms of just educating your child."
"Because I have, another person there and they're a little bit more familiar with the law plus they take the emotion out because it's not their child."
"Someone to just be a balance."
"I do I feel you have to have not just an advocate, but it's more like a support."
"And if it's still like an extra even if it's just piece of mind."

THEMES -07082014C			
WITHOUT AN EXTERNAL ADVOCATE		WITH AN EXTERNAL ADVOCATE	
IEP does not represent FAPE	0	IEP represents FAPE	0
Parent unable to fully participate	0	Parent informed/educated on process	0
Parent and District disagree	0	Cost associated with advocate	2
Negative feelings	6	Positive feelings	6
Lack of professionalism	1	Meeting more professional	1
Lack of Respect	1	Meeting more balanced/fair	2

APPENDIX K

Manual Coding 08052014A

TOPIC CODING			
Without the presence of an external advocate			
Negative			
Antagonistic			
Parent felt disrespected without an advocate			
District makes assumptions			
Parent felt confused about information			
District’s perspective on child differed from the parent			
Felt IEP was hostile			
Technical language of IEP difficult to understand			
Parent went to trainings			
Parent felt labeled as hostile			
Parent didn’t have information			
With the presence of an external advocate			
Parent began to become informed			
Cost associated with advocate			
IN VIVO WITHOUT AN ADVOCATE			
“So, um, in my personal experience, ah, they tend to be more antagonistic, more defiant of. Negative towards, you know, your child and their needs and their levels of performance, than when you actually have an advocate.”			
“Ah, it could be antagonistic.”			
“They, um, tsk, they tend to talk to you as if you’re a dummy.”			
“They pretend like they don’t know a lot of things and when you ask any questions, they pretend, “oh, I don’t now. I’ll have to check with the district.”			
“And also they lie to you. They lie to you about some policies, about some you know, so, um, unfortunately they use that against parents because most parents are not important.”			
“And what they were telling me was just not making sense to me.”			
“Ah, because at one point they were so hostile that you felt like you were going into the dragon’s cave.”			
“They make it very difficult for you to understand it.”			
“Parents don’t have the information, or don’t know what they should be asking for, until you become aware.”			
IN VIVO WITH AN ADVOCATE			
“When you have an advocate, they’re very watchful of what they say.”			
“You know, they think twice before they say anything. They don’t compromise to anything, they don’t agree to anything, ah , and they’re very open to your opinion.”			
“Um at that point, it was helpful when he came in again, because he kind of neutralized.”			
THEMES – 08052014A			
WITHOUT AN EXTERNAL ADVOCATE		WITH AN EXTERNAL ADVOCATE	
IEP does not represent FAPE	0	IEP represents FAPE	0

Parent unable to fully participate	3	Parent informed/educated on process	1
Parent and District disagree	0	Cost associated with advocate	1
Negative feelings	6	Positive feelings	0
Lack of professionalism	0	Meeting more professional	0
Lack of Respect	0	Meeting more balanced/fair	0

APPENDIX L

Manual Coding 08152014AT

TOPIC CODING			
Without the presence of an external advocate			
Parent not informed			
Parent didn't understand			
Traumatized			
With the presence of an external advocate			
Parent began to do research on their own to become more knowledgeable			
Advocate didn't know			
IN VIVO WITHOUT AN ADVOCATE			
"My experience participating without an advocate went really bad, because I didn't know my rights."			
"No one never explain what my rights were, what I could or couldn't do, they just gave me a piece of paper."			
"I didn't understand any of the laws writing on the paper it was really bad in reality the word to describe this was traumatizing,"			
"I wasn't informed about, I wasn't educated about it so I started learning al I could."			
"It took me about two years to realize that the experience was really not good at all to put things together and figure out that the result of it was not good."			
IN VIVO WITH AN ADVOCATE			
"It took me about two years to realize that the experience was really not good at all to put things together and figure out that the result of it was not good."			
"And I'm not saying that's the case for everyone but at least in my case the advocate could only help me so much and this advocate didn't even say I can only help you so much he just didn't say anything."			
THEMES – 08152014AT			
WITHOUT AN EXTERNAL ADVOCATE		WITH AN EXTERNAL ADVOCATE	
IEP does not represent FAPE	0	IEP represents FAPE	0
Parent unable to fully participate	2	Parent informed/educated on process	1
Parent and District disagree	0	Cost associated with advocate	0
Negative feelings	1	Positive feelings	0
Lack of professionalism	0	Meeting more professional	0
Lack of Respect	0	Meeting more balanced/fair	0

APPENDIX M

Manual Coding 09062014AT

TOPIC CODING			
Without the presence of an external advocate			
Parent felt alone/attacked			
With the presence of an external advocate			
Parent felt good			
Parent felt confident			
Parent felt like a full participant			
Parent felt supported			
IN VIVO WITHOUT AN ADVOCATE			
"If you don't have any knowledge about your child's right, it's terrible."			
"My first experience was really hard because I didn't have any knowledge about the laws and the rights of my child. You feel alone, you feel attacked, you feel humiliated."			
"So for me it was really difficult."			
"My experience was really hard, you have to train yourself to know your rights."			
"You have to be really strong."			
"I had a really serious problem with the director of the IEP, she treated me like garbage."			
"The IEP was so extreme, it was so stressful."			
IN VIVO WITH AN ADVOCATE			
"The past year I participated with a new advocate, it was fantastic. Really fantastic"			
"And he prepared himself so I felt confident."			
"The representative really made me feel supported."			
"When the advocate became a part of everything they begun to listen to her more, they started listening more to the rights of my daughter."			
"The district sent so many people but I felt really calm because I felt support."			
THEMES -09062014AT			
WITHOUT AN EXTERNAL ADVOCATE		WITH AN EXTERNAL ADVOCATE	
IEP does not represent FAPE	0	IEP represents FAPE	0
Parent unable to fully participate	0	Parent informed/educated on process	1
Parent and District disagree	0	Cost associated with advocate	0
Negative feelings	1	Positive feelings	3
Lack of professionalism	0	Meeting more professional	0
Lack of Respect	0	Meeting more balanced/fair	0



## APPENDIX N

### Code Book – Hyperresearch Analysis

Attended IEP's	code	8
Attended IEP's with an advocate	code	8
Attended IEP's without an advocate	code	8
Demographic Information	Group	
African American	code	1
Hispanic - Mexican-Latino	code	7
Limited Education	code	3
Limited Language	code	3
Limited Socio-Economic	code	7
Experiences without an Advocate Present	Group	
Few or no questions asked of parent	code	3
IEP meeting is different with a man present	code	3
Meeting Informal/less structured	code	9
Parent and district not in agreement regarding IEP	code	13
Parent didn't feel that the IEP was one of quality	code	1
Parent expressed negative feelings about meeting	code	26
Parent felt as if they failed	code	1
Parent felt confused	code	5

Parent felt defeated	code	2
Parent felt intimidated	code	4
Parent felt less educated than other IEP team members	code	3
Parent felt lost	code	2
Parent felt nervous	code	3
Parent felt that the offer of services is different than what it should or could be	code	1
Parent seeks information or education on their own	code	19
Parent unable to understand information in meeting	code	2
Parent unfamiliar with the process	code	3
Reference to being a hostile parent	code	5
School IEP team existing relationships make parent feel isolated	code	4
Team members excuse themselves frequently	code	1
Experiences with an advocate present	Group	
Advocate helps parent understand what is happening	code	2
Advocate knows the process	code	7
Advocate will ask for detail	code	4
Expense associated with having an advocate	code	7
Experience with advocate negative	code	1
IEP team more alert or engaged	code	2
Meeting more formal or structured	code	6

Parent able to advocate on their own after support from external advocate	code	1
Parent feels less emotional with advocate present	code	2
Parent felt empowered	code	5
Parent felt confident	code	4
Positive feelings	code	23
Quality of IEP better	code	1
Team members don't leave	code	2

## APPENDIX O

### All Codes

#### All Codes

- Attended IEP's
- Attended IEP's with an advocate
- Attended IEP's without an advocate
- Demographic Information
  - African American
  - Hispanic - Mexican-Latino
  - Limited Education
  - Limited Language
  - Limited Socio-Economic
- Experiences with an advocate present
  - Cost Associated with Advocate
  - Expense associated with having an advocate
  - Experience with advocate negative
  - IEP Represents FAPE
    - Quality of IEP better
  - Meeting more balanced/fair
  - Meeting More Professional
    - Advocate knows the process
    - Advocate will ask for detail
    - IEP team more alert or engaged
    - Meeting more formal or structured
    - Team members don't leave
  - Parent Informed/educated on process
    - Advocate helps parent understand what is happening
    - Parent able to advocate on their own after support from external advocate
  - Positive Experiences
    - Feeling Confident
    - Feeling empowered
    - Parent feels less emotional with advocate present
    - Positive feelings
- Experiences without an Advocate Present
  - IEP Does Not Represent FAPE
    - Feeling that the offer of services is different
    - Feeling that the quality of the IEP document is less
  - Lack of Professionalism
    - Fewer or no questions asked of parent
    - Meeting Informal/less structured
    - Team members excuse themselves frequently
  - Lack of Respect
    - IEP meeting is different with a man present
  - Negative Experiences
    - Feeling as if they failed
    - Feeling confused
    - Feeling defeated
    - Feeling intimidated
    - Feeling Lost

Feeling Nervous  
Negative Feelings  
Reference to being a hostile parent  
School IEP team existing relationships make parent feel isolated  
Parent and District Disagree  
Disagreement regarding child's abilities services needs  
Parent Unable to Fully Participate  
Feeling less educated than other team members  
Parent seeks information or education on their own  
Unable to understand information  
Unfamiliar with the process

Table 1

*Study on Parental Advocacy*

	Intuitive	Disability Specialist	Change Agent	Strategist
Minority Parents	Extensive	Access		
Non-Minority Parents	Limited	Access	Extensive	Extensive

*Note.* Adapted from “Diverse Approaches to Parent Advocacy During Special Education Home-School Interactions” by A. A. Trainor, 2010, *Remedial and Special Education*, 31(1), 34–47. Copyright (2010) by University of Wisconsin.

Table 2

*Demographic Analysis of Study Participants*

	ETHNICITY	LIMITED LANGUAGE	LOW SOCIO-ECONOMIC	LIMITED EDUCATION
<b>07012014A</b>	Hispanic		x	x
<b>07012014B</b>	Black Non-Hispanic			x
<b>07082014A</b>	Hispanic	x	x	x
<b>07082014B</b>	Hispanic		x	
<b>07082014C</b>	Hispanic		x	
<b>08052014A</b>	Hispanic		x	
<b>08152014AT</b>	Hispanic	x	x	
<b>09062014AT</b>	Hispanic	x	x	