1. Executive Summary

Background and Purpose of Study

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004 requires that each state develop a six-year performance plan. This State Performance Plan (SPP) evaluates the State’s efforts to implement the requirements and purposes of IDEA and illustrates how the State will continuously improve upon this implementation. The Texas SPP was submitted to the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) at the U.S. Department of Education (USDE) for approval on January 30, 2006. OSEP approved the Texas SPP on May 22, 2006. The Texas SPP was most recently updated February, 2014.

OSEP identified five monitoring priorities and twenty indicators to be included in the SPP. For each of the indicators, the State must report progress on measurable and rigorous targets and improvement activities over a six-year period of time. The findings presented in this report summarize survey findings related to Indicator 8: Percent of parents with a child receiving special education services who report that schools facilitated parent involvement as a means of improving service and results for children with disabilities.1 This report covers the ninth administration of the survey (spring 2014), with previous surveys conducted in fall 2006, spring 2007, spring 2008, spring 2009, spring 2010, spring 2011, spring 2012, and spring 2013.

Research Goals

Each year, one-sixth of the Texas school districts are selected to participate in the study, ensuring each district of 50,000 students or less is included once in the six year cycle. Districts with 50,000 or greater students are included in the study each year. The survey is offered in English and Spanish, and as a web or online survey, in order to encourage as many parents as possible to complete the survey. Eligible participants are selected based on specific demographic characteristics of their child, such as ethnicity, eligible disability category, and grade level. The research is focused on: communication between schools, teachers and parents; school climate; teacher’s involvement with parents of their students; and parent’s involvement with their child’s education.

Specific Objectives

The survey is intended to produce anonymous and unbiased data that will inform TEA of the successful areas of the special education programs, and the areas where improvements are necessary. Each question falls into one of the following categories:

- Environment
- Communication
- ARD/IEP Participation

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• Results

Each of the eight closed-ended survey questions are abstract questions with sub-dimensions designed to inspire parents to respond candidly and with little burden.

Survey Approach and Development

Parent Survey

Survey development and production. In September 2005, the Parent Coordination Network reviewed questions from the National Center for Special Education Accountability Monitoring (NCSEAM) Parent Survey and the Statewide Survey of Parents of Students with Disabilities that had been distributed by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and Regional Education Service Center 9 (Region 9) in 2003. A separate survey development committee was created to develop the SPP survey in fall 2008. The survey’s questions focus on the following issues: parent satisfaction, communication between parents and school, parents’ understanding of information, services and information provided, school climate, the teacher’s role, and parent participation in training. English and Spanish versions were developed.

Sampling. In 2014, 18,663 parents were selected to be included in the survey from 144 districts across the state. One-sixth of all Texas districts are sampled each year, with every district included at some point during a six-year cycle. However, each district with at least 50,000 students is included each year. Once districts and campuses were randomly selected for 2014, which is the first year of a new six-year cycle, parents were randomly selected based on demographic characteristics of their child including ethnicity, grade level, and eligibility category (i.e., learning disability). One campus (a total of 5 surveys, bringing the total surveys in this report to 18,658) was removed from the database after mailing, on approval from TEA, due to student withdrawals resulting in that campus dropping below the required number for participation.

Survey Distribution. Beginning in April 2014, each parent or guardian received an envelope with the selected child’s name, a letter of instruction, the survey, and a return (postage-paid) envelope. A web component was provided for parents to complete the survey via web, if they chose. For questions, phone numbers were provided for Region 9, TEA, and NuStats. Technical support was provided in both English and Spanish. Districts were given leeway in their method of distributing the surveys to the parents; however, parents were asked to return the surveys by May 23, 2014. This deadline was extended until June 16, 2014.

Principal Survey

In addition to the parent survey, 2,453 surveys were mailed to principals of campuses included in the sample. These surveys were shipped to each campus with the parent survey packets, and principals were asked to return the survey by May 23, 2014. The principal’s survey questions focused on items that parallel the parent survey. This deadline was extended until June 16, 2014.
Findings

Parent Survey Overall Findings – Quantitative

A total of 3,475 completed parent surveys were returned with 2,903 returned via mail, and 572 through web (a return rate of 19 percent). Of these, 2,922 English and 553 Spanish-language surveys were completed in time to be included in the quantitative analyses. Roughly 2,400 parents also provided responses to the open-ended questions.

A total of 23 questions from the parent survey were divided into four topic-specific categories and examined. Previous years’ results were shown as grouped into five topic-specific categories; however the four current categories more closely reflect the grouping of the questions on the parent questionnaire. An additional column has been added in order to make comparisons to prior years’ results more clear. Grouping the three types of responses (Always-Never, Yes-No, and Agree-Disagree), Table 1 presents a summary of responses within these categories. For each category, responses were overall positive. The percentages of responses in the least positive category were higher this year with only School Environment Issues falling under 5 percent. The response patterns for this year’s survey were very similar to findings from the previous years. This consistency argues for both the reliability and validity of findings.

Table 1: Summary by Category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prior Category</th>
<th>2014 Category</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Negative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Always</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Never</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General School Issues</td>
<td>School Environment Issues</td>
<td>77.5%</td>
<td>18.4%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Issues</td>
<td>Communication Issues</td>
<td>73.9%</td>
<td>26.1%</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information and Understanding</td>
<td>ARD/IEP Participation</td>
<td>85.8%</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IEP and ARD Teacher Issues</td>
<td>Results/Progress</td>
<td>77.5%</td>
<td>17.0%</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Note that percentages may not total 100 due to rounding.

Parent Survey Overall Findings - Qualitative

Although the respondents generally responded positively to questions regarding their interactions with the school (as seen in the summary ratings in Table 1), there were items for which the ratings were less positive (parental actions are not included for this consideration). Below are selected areas for which at least 15 percent of the ratings fell into the Negative category, along with the survey category in which it is found:

‘The school provides me information on my child’s disability’; Communication Category. (This issue was also identified in spring 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2013.) Of note, the highest negative rating was received from parents of students with Other Health Impairments, with a negative rating of 35.2% (see Table 20).
‘The school provides planning for life after high school, including services to help my child reach his or her goals’; ARD/IEP Participation Category. (This issue was also identified in spring 2008, 2009, 2010 2011, 2012 and 2013.) Of note, this question was to have been answered by parents of students age 14 and up. The negative response rate for parents of elementary and middle school students was significantly higher (22.1 and 22.7 percent, respectively) than for parents of high school students (16.7 percent).

‘The school provides information on agencies that can assist my child in planning for life after high school’; ARD/IEP Participation Category. (This issue was also identified in spring 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2013.) Of note, this question was to have been answered by parents of students age 14 and up. The negative response rate for parents of elementary and middle school students was significantly higher (22.1 and 22.7 percent, respectively) than for parents of high school students (16.7 percent).

Two of these items center on transition issues and on the information and coordination provided regarding outside agencies and support. The other item regarding information about a child’s disability likely reflects providing understandable and useful information.

Given the revision of the categories, it is slightly more challenging to make a comparison, however, generally within each of the categories in Table 1, findings from respondents in the spring 2014 survey were similar to the spring 2013. This year, Communication Issues was the lowest-rated area. These low ratings were driven primarily by negative responses to the ‘school provides me information on my child’s disability’ question noted above.

Overall, parent open-ended responses parallel the responses received in the structured survey. Parents who responded to the survey were overall satisfied with the services received by their child’s school. The following is a list of the overall findings from parent open-ended responses.

- **Overall satisfaction** – The majority of respondents expressed being satisfied with the special education services provided by schools.
- **More information and training** – Parents noted that they need help understanding their child’s disability. They asked for the school to provide more specific and relevant information.
- **Communication improvements** – While overall satisfied, parents noted concern with communication between parents and the special education staff (or communication between the special education setting and the general education setting). Parents want to be kept informed and want to know how to contribute to the academic progress of their children.

**Principal Survey Overall Findings – Quantitative**

Of the 2,453 principal surveys that were distributed, 660 completed surveys were returned via mail, and 267 through web, representing a 38 percent return rate. Overall, results from 2014 were similar to previous years’ results, however, in general, principals report slight improvements in a number of specific areas: School has a written campus-level parent involvement plan (5 percent increase); Services provided for parents to encourage parental involvement – increases in all categories except ‘Opportunities to be involved in site-based management’; School provided training workshops (10 percent); School holds annual meeting to inform parents of special education students (6 percent). This indicates positive changes are being implemented.
Principal Survey Overall Findings - Qualitative

Overall, the qualitative findings of the principal survey for 2014 are very similar to those of previous years. The most important issues identified by principals center mainly on communication, be it via telephone, email, written notes or face-to-face meetings. The majority of principals reported their campuses have made efforts to offer parent conference meeting times in the evening, as well as offering assistance to aid parents in the ability to attend school functions. Examples of this are babysitting services and transportation services. As in previous years, the majority of principals report that parents attendance of PTO/PTA and other parent organizations as issues of importance.