

# **Jacob's Daughter, LLC**

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Providing Special Education Consulting Services

## **East Grand Rapids Public Schools Special Education Review**

Executive Summary

Prepared by Cindi Smith, PhD

January 2015

### ***Background of Study***

In response to parental concerns regarding the District's provision of special education, a review of District special education programming was undertaken by East Grand Rapids Public Schools (EGRPS). Dr. Cynthia Smith, as agent of Jacob's Daughter, LLC, was contracted by the District to conduct the review. The concerns that prompted the study were expressed in writing to Dr. Sara Shubel, Superintendent, and copied to each member of the EGRPS school board and were orally presented at the June, 2014, meeting of the EGRPS Board of Education meeting. Qualitative and quantitative data collection was designed to ensure input was solicited from all parents of students eligible for special education programs and/or services, as well as all special education staff and all building administrators. The review process included: 1) A review of public documentation pertaining to special education (MI School Data via the Center for Educational Performance and Information, Kent ISD Plan for the Delivery of Special Education Programs and Services, IDEA Public Reporting via MDE website); 2) A review of letters from parents received by the District in May of 2014 outlining concerns regarding special education; and 3) An analysis of data collected through: a) interviews of twelve randomly selected parents of students receiving special education, two from each District building and the Early Childhood Special Education Program (Note- The purpose of the interviews was to collect themes and issues for use in the formulation of parent survey questions.); b) an electronic survey distributed to all parents of students receiving special education; and c) focus groups comprised of all special education professional staff and building administrators.

### ***Review of District Documents***

Letters written by parents of students receiving special education services who had concerns about the provision of special education were provided to the consultant. Concerns expressed by the parent letters were not related to district compliance with federal regulations or state rules regarding the provision of special education programs and services. Indeed, a review of data collected and maintained by MDE through the Continuous Improvement Monitoring System (CIMS) and reported via public reporting on the MDE website; a review of the 2014 EGRPS Annual Special Education Report, including special education staffing levels; and data collected through parent interviews and employee focus groups did not reveal any reason for concern regarding district compliance with federal regulations or state rules. Hence, the focus of this review became the perception of the quality of, and satisfaction with, special education programming by parents of students in the district who receive special education services. Major concerns identified in the May, 2014, parent letters can be summarized as: 1) lack of, and/or poor communication between parents and district staff; 2) parent questioning as to whether they were valued, respected and welcomed members of their child's individualized education program (IEP) meetings; 3) insufficient professional development opportunities for special education personnel; 4) inappropriate allocation of district resources; and 5) limited programming options for high school students with IEPs, including vocational programming. These concerns, as well as others identified in the parent interviews, were used to develop the questions posed to parents of students with IEPs in the electronic survey. The review of District documents was completed in September, 2014.

### ***Parent Interviews***

Parent interviews were conducted in a private room at the East Grand Rapids branch of the Kent District Library. Interviews were conducted over a four day period in October, 2014. The interviews were guided by the following questions:

1. Please tell me about your overall experience with East Grand Rapids Public Schools as it relates to [child's name] and his/her special education programs and services.
2. Was [child's name]'s initial eligibility for special education made while an EGRPS student? If yes, what do you recall about that process?
3. Will you please describe what IEP meetings for [child's name] have been like?
4. How would you characterize communication between you and district personnel regarding [child's name]?
5. Are there any issues or concerns you feel the district should be aware of as it relates to the parents of children receiving special education programs and services?
6. Are there specific questions you feel should appear on the survey regarding special education programs and services at EGRPS that will go to all parents of students with IEPs?

### ***Focus Groups***

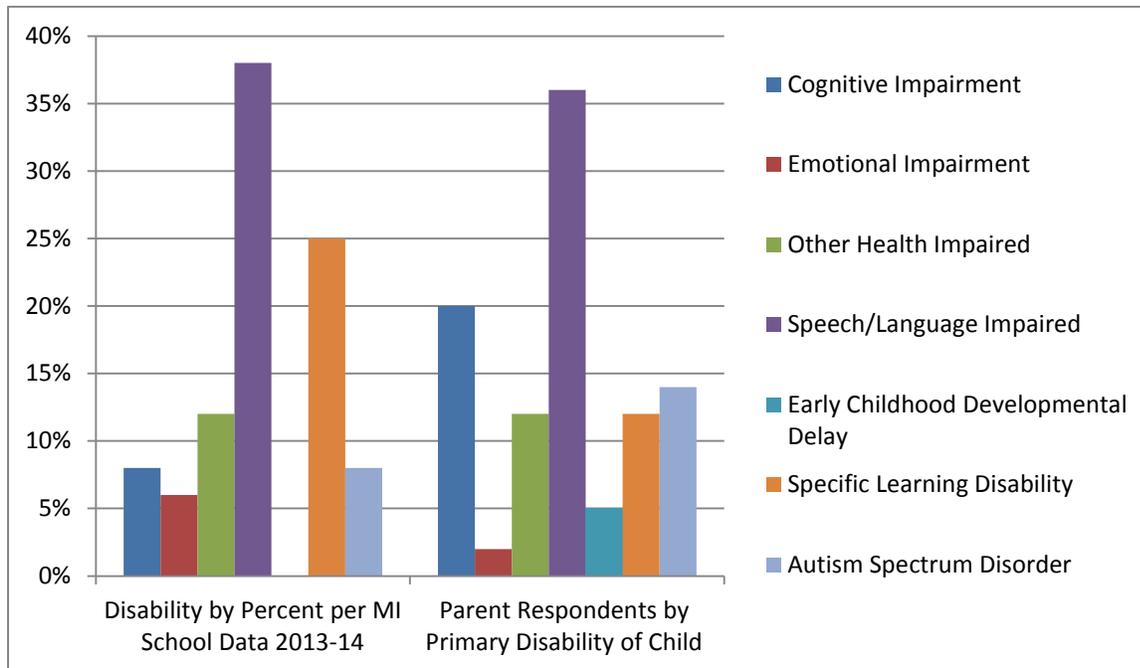
Meetings of the focus groups were held at the Woodcliff Administration Building board room in 45 minute sessions during November, 2014. Only the consultant and focus group members were in attendance. The following focus groups were assembled: High School Special Education Teachers; Middle School Special Education Teachers; Elementary & Early Childhood Special Education Teachers; Special Education Itinerant Staff; High School & Middle School Administrators; Elementary Administrators.

### ***The Parent Survey***

The parent survey was designed and distributed, and data obtained were analyzed, in consultation with the Grand Valley State University Statistical Consulting Center. The electronic survey was distributed through SurveyMonkey in November, 2014, to the 164 parents of students who currently have Individualized Education Programs and reside in the EGRPS district. This includes students who attend special education programs operated outside EGRPS but within Kent County for Kent County students. Parents who did not respond to the survey were sent an email reminder two weeks and four weeks after the original distribution and the survey remained open to parents until early January, 2015. The original distribution of the survey and the subsequent reminders were done by the GVSU Statistical Consulting Center and consequently, neither the consultant nor any District employee is aware of respondent identities. Sixty-eight parents responded to the survey, for a response rate of 41%.

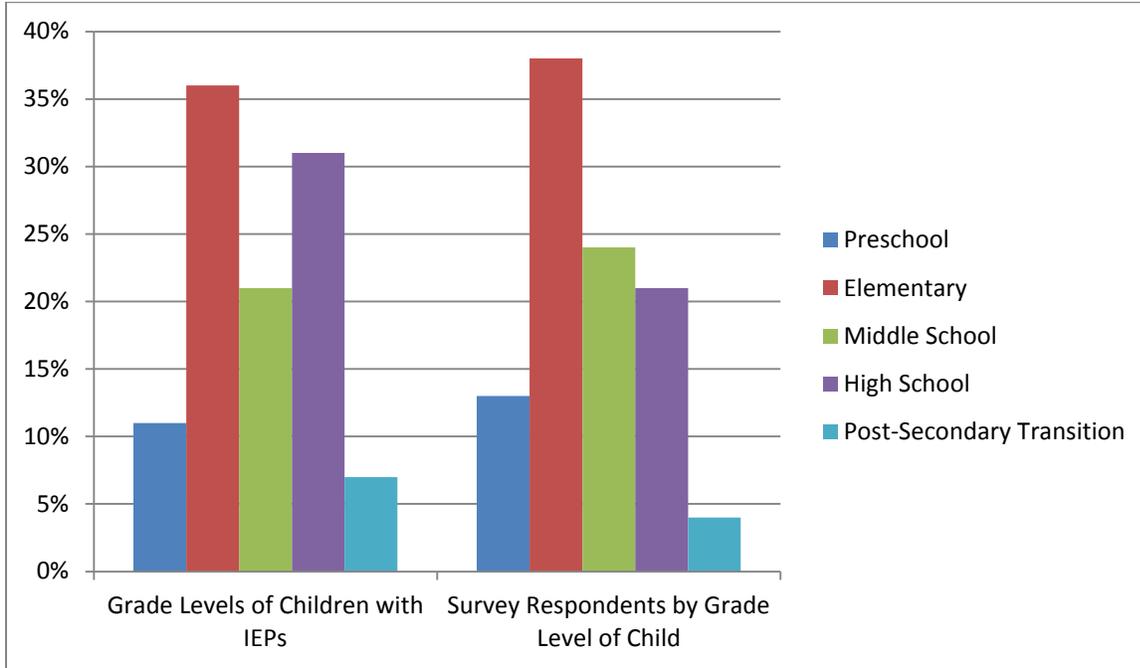
### **Presentation of Parent Survey Results**

Parents of students with cognitive impairments and autism spectrum disorder completed the survey at a higher percentage than these two disabilities are represented in the district's population of students with disabilities. Parents of students with other health impairments and speech-language impairments completed the survey at an approximately equal percentage that these two disabilities are represented in the district's population of students with disabilities. Parents of students with emotional impairments and learning disabilities are underrepresented in the survey.



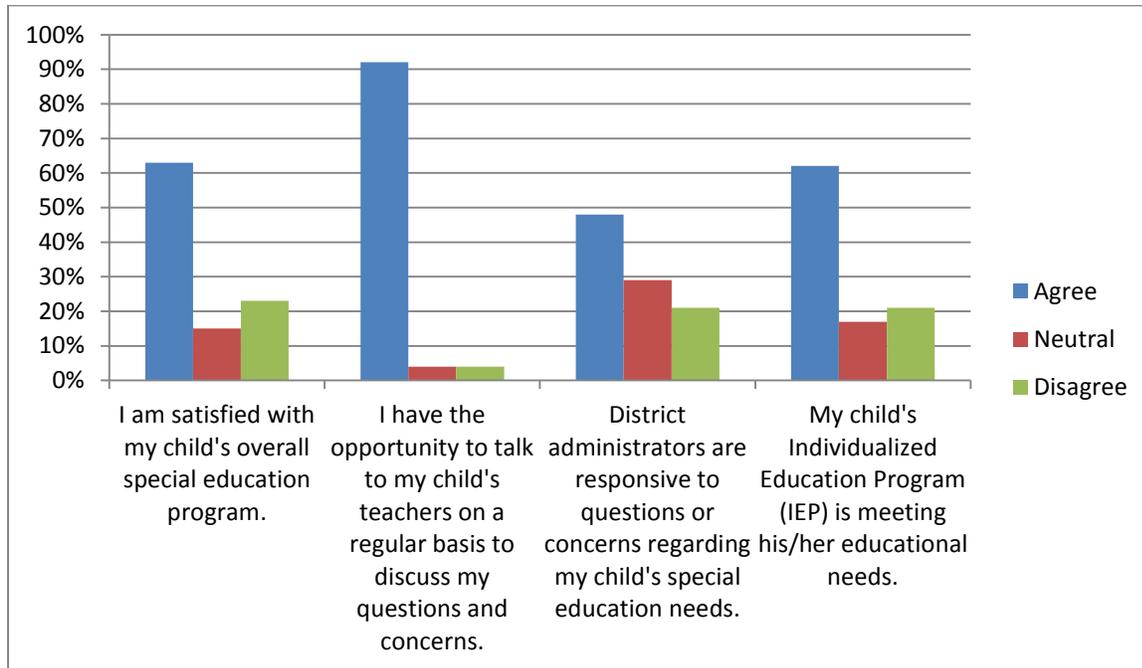
	Cognitive Impairment	Emotional Impairment	Other Health Impaired	Speech-Language Impaired	Early Childhood Developmental Delay	Specific Learning Disability	Autism Spectrum Disorder
Disability per MI School Data	8%	6%	12%	38%	Not Reported	25%	8%
Parent Respondents by Primary Disability	18%	2%	12%	36%	5%	12%	14%

The percent of students receiving special education services by grade level is approximately equal to the percent of parents of students receiving special education services by grade level completing the survey, with the exception of the High School which is underrepresented in survey respondents.

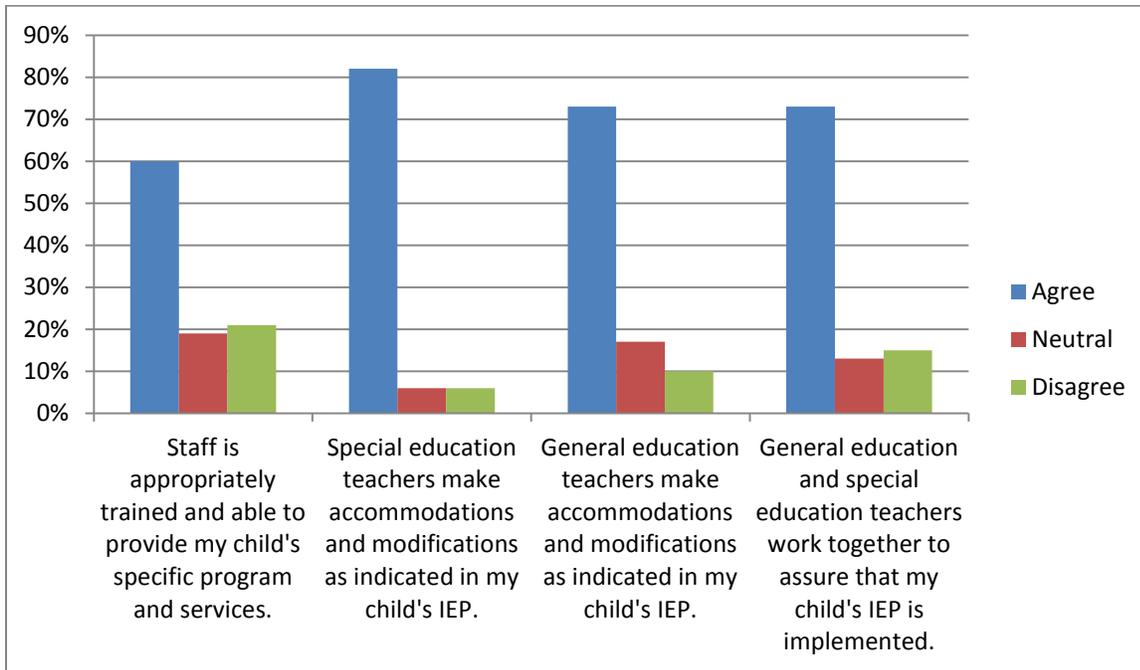


	Preschool	Elementary	Middle School	High School	Post-Secondary Transition
Grade Levels of Record Per District Record	11%	36%	21%	31%	7%
Survey Respondents by Grade Level	13%	38%	24%	21%	4%

More parents responding to the survey are satisfied than unsatisfied with the District's provision of their child's special education programming, as evidenced by their agreement or disagreement with eight statements.

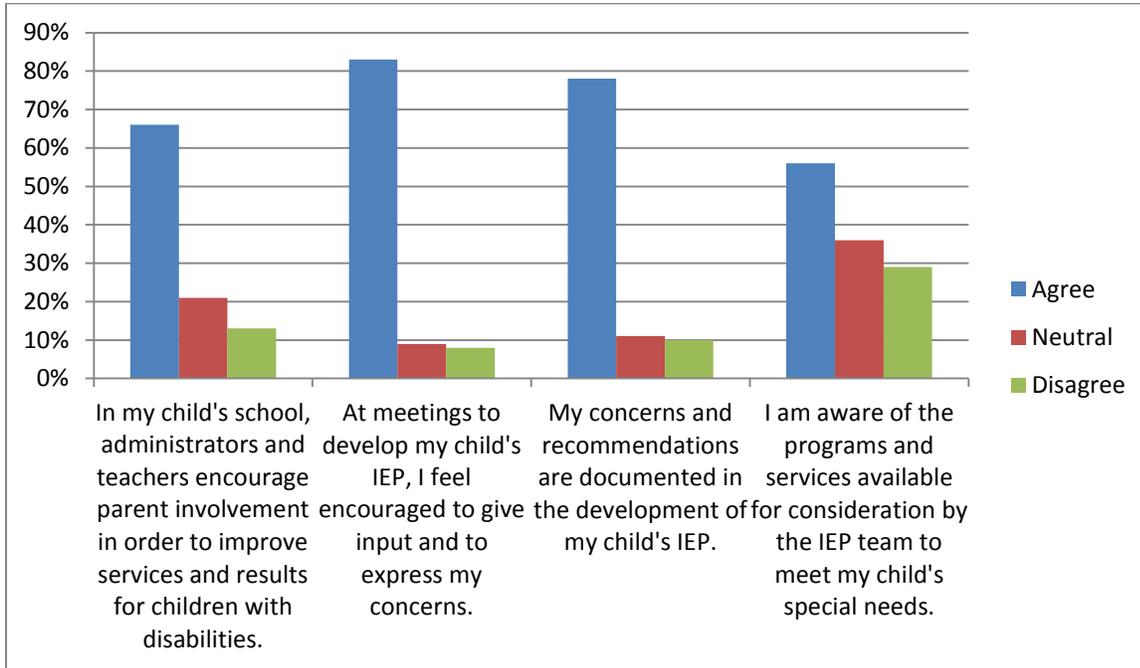


	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
I am satisfied with my child's overall special education program.	63%	15%	23%
I have the opportunity to talk to my child's teachers on a regular basis to discuss my questions and concerns	92%	4%	4%
District administrators are responsive to questions or concerns regarding my child's special education needs.	48%	29%	21%
My child's Individualized Education Program (IEP) is meeting his/her educational needs.	62%	17%	21%

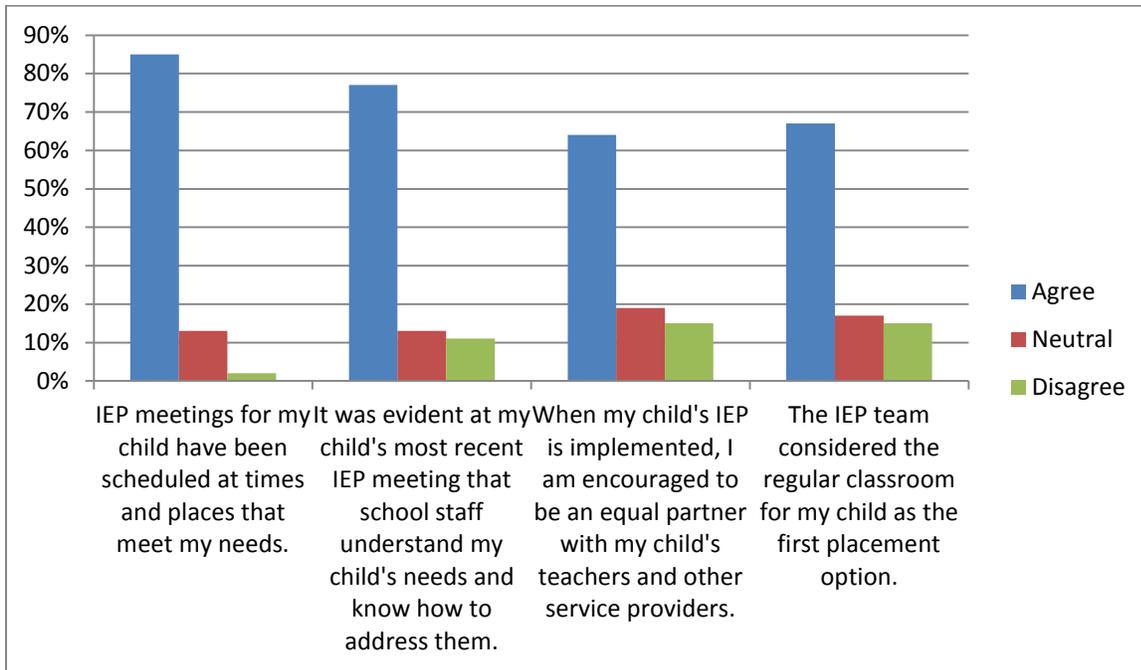


	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Staff is appropriately trained and able to provide my child's specific program and services.	60%	19%	21%
Special education teachers make accommodations and modifications as indicated in my child's IEP.	82%	13%	6%
General education teachers make accommodations and modifications as indicated in my child's IEP.	73%	17%	10%
General education and special education teachers work together to assure that my child's IEP is implemented.	73%	13%	15%

More parents responding to the survey are satisfied than unsatisfied with the District’s development and implementation of their child’s IEP, including their participation in the process, as evidenced by their agreement or disagreement with eight statements.

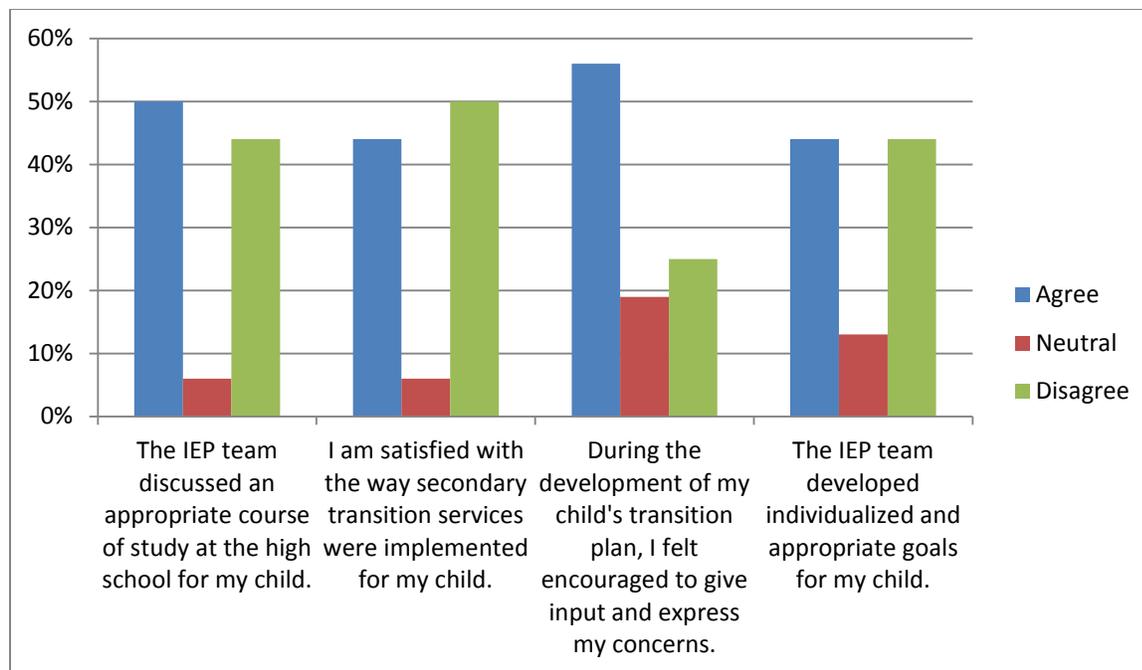


	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
In my child’s school, administrators and teachers encourage parent involvement in order to improve services and results for children with disabilities.	66%	21%	13%
At meetings to develop my child’s IEP, I feel encouraged to give input and to express my concerns.	83%	9%	8%
My concerns and recommendations are documented in the development of my child’s IEP.	78%	11%	10%
I am aware of the programs and services available for consideration by the IEP team to meet my child’s special needs.	56%	36%	29%



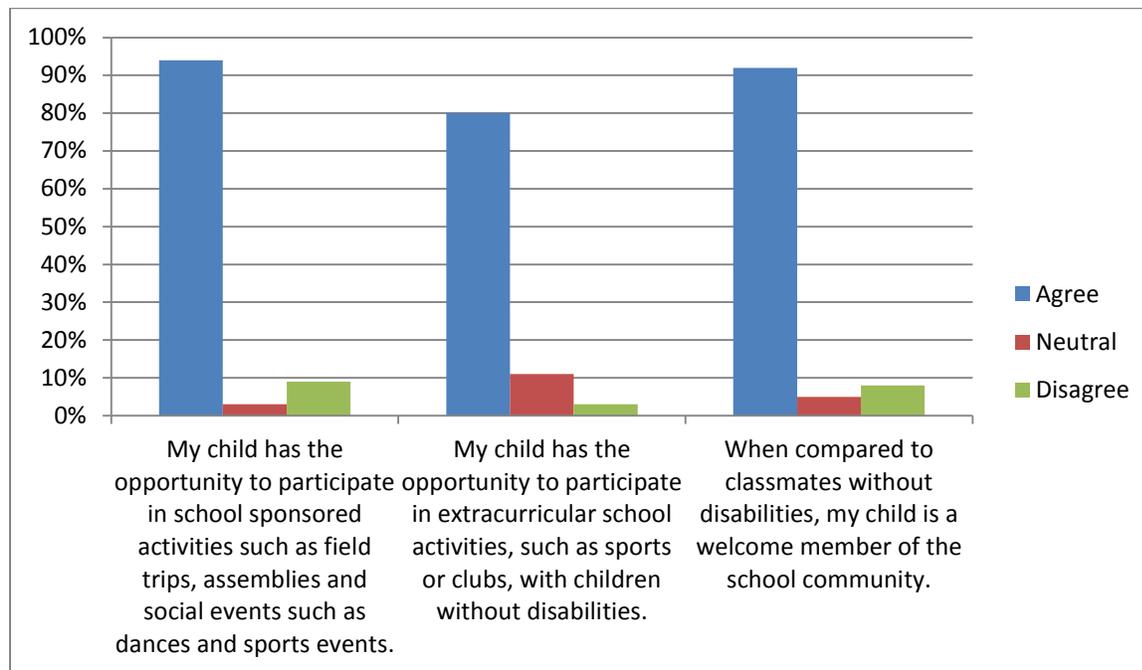
	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
IEP meetings for my child have been scheduled at times and places that met my needs.	85%	13%	2%
It was evident at my child's most recent IEP meeting that school staff understand my child's needs and know how to address them.	77%	13%	11%
When my child's IEP is implemented, I am encouraged to be an equal partner with my child's teachers and other service providers.	64%	19%	15%
The IEP team considered the regular classroom for my child as the first placement option.	67%	17%	15%

Parents of secondary students who responded in a section of the survey available only to parents who indicated their child was at the High School or Post-secondary Transition level disagreed or were neutral, or only agreed by a narrow margin, to four statements regarding their satisfaction with secondary programming, including transition, for their children.

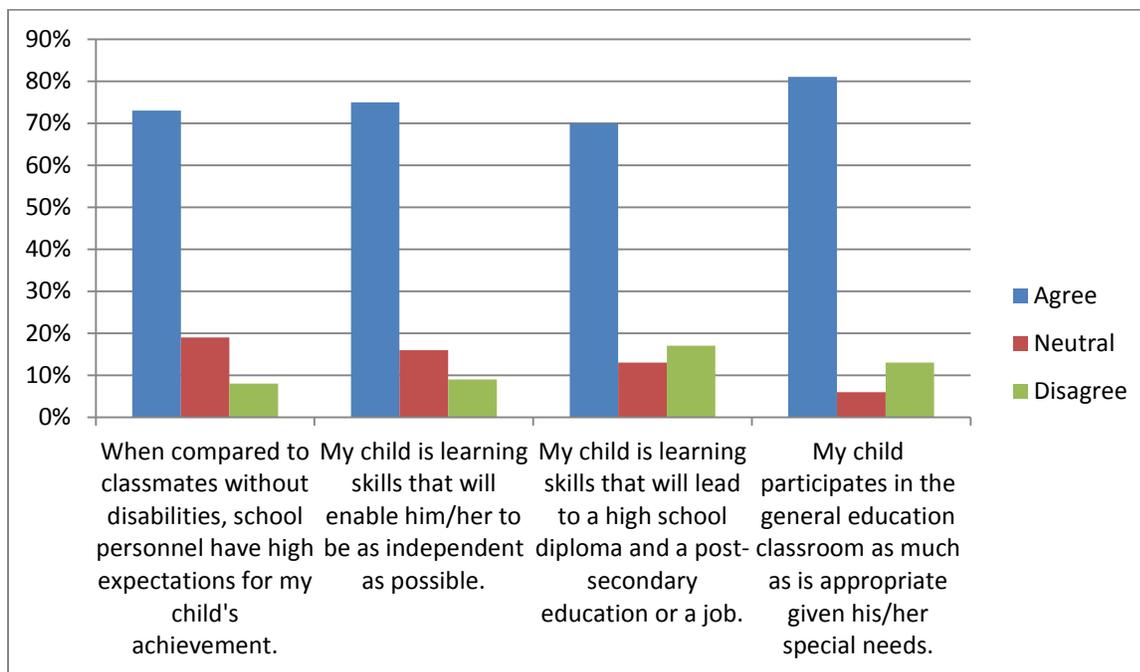


	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
The IEP team discussed an appropriate course of study at the high school for my child.	50%	6%	44%
I am satisfied with the way secondary transition services were implemented for my child.	44%	6%	50%
During the development of my child's transition plan, I felt encouraged to give input and express my concerns.	56%	19%	25%
The IEP team developed individualized and appropriate goals for my child.	44%	12%	44%

More parents responding to the survey are satisfied than unsatisfied that their child has equal opportunity to participate in school district activities and to benefit from educational opportunities as students without disabilities, as evidenced by their agreement or disagreement with eight statements.



	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
My child has the opportunity to participate in school sponsored activities such as field trips, assemblies and social events such as dances and sports events.	94%	3%	3%
My child has the opportunity to participate in extracurricular school activities, such as sports or clubs, with children without disabilities.	80%	11%	9%
When compared to classmates without disabilities, my child is a welcome member of the school community.	92%	5%	3%



	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
When compared to classmates without disabilities, school personnel have high expectations for my child's achievement.	73%	19%	8%
My child is learning skills that will enable him/her to be as independent as possible.	75%	16%	9%
My child is learning skills that will lead to a high school diploma and a post-secondary education or a job.	70%	13%	17%
My child participates in the general education classroom as much as is appropriate given his/her special needs.	81%	6%	13%

Thirty-four (50%) of the 68 parents who completed the survey wrote comments at the end of the survey. The comments are summarized below in order of the number of times a similar comment was made by multiple parents.

<b>Generalization of Specific Comments</b>	<b># of Occurrences</b>
Good experience with special education programs and staff with no concerns at all	8
Unhappy with administration/special education director	8
Happy with special education instructional staff	5
Different District attitude (spending, pride, push for excellence) toward special education than general education students	5
Have to discover what program and services are available myself and then request them	4
District does only the minimum required by law; doesn't want to spend money on special education students	4
Inadequate high school/transition services/post-secondary programming	3
Unhappy in the past but happy now	3
Have to ask for ways to enhance learning outside school	3
Happy but have heard others are not	2
Inadequate communication from special education provider	2
Insufficient number of staff to meet student needs	1
Special education teachers do not know enough about dyslexia	1
Unhappy with special education instructional staff	1