



**ACE Consulting and
Mid-Atlantic Catholic Schools Consortium**

**Federal Access Initiative: IDEA Services to
Catholic School Students**

**April 19, 2010
www.midatlanticcsc.org**

I. INTRODUCTION TO THE PROJECT

The University of Notre Dame’s ACE Consulting Group (ACE) and the Mid-Atlantic Catholic Schools Consortium (MACSC) collaborated on a study to determine the level and quality of participation in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) for students attending Catholic schools in the six (arch)dioceses of MACSC. The participants included the Archdioceses of Baltimore and Washington, and the Dioceses of Arlington, Richmond, Wheeling-Charleston, and Wilmington. This report combines responses across all six (arch)dioceses. Each (arch)diocese will receive a similar report for their schools. Additionally, state-wide findings will be shared with the (arch)dioceses.

IDEA provides special education and related services to students found to have disabilities. For children placed by their parents in a private school—referred to under the law as “parentally-placed private school children”—these services are in the amount of the proportional share of the *federal* funds available. Public school children also receive services from state and local funding. None of the states or localities that are part of MACSC provides these additional services to private school students.

The response to the request for information in the study was excellent. More than 88 percent of the Catholic schools in the Consortium responded to the survey, providing a solid body of information from which to draw conclusions.

The survey was conducted online and was addressed to the school principal. However, the principal had the option to forward the survey to another staff member with more knowledge about the equitable participation of parentally-placed private school students in federal special education and related services. The report will refer to respondents as principals, with the understanding that in a small number of cases the respondent may have been another staff member.

Included in this report are:

- General information about MACSC schools,
- Explanation of the consultation process, fiscal issues, and program design under IDEA,
- Executive summary of the findings,
- Results of the study,
- Limitations to the study,
- Suggestions for additional research, and
- Recommendations for further action.

II. CATHOLIC EDUCATION IN THE MID-ATLANTIC

Catholic schools have served the Mid-Atlantic region longer than the United States has been a country. Catholic schools date back more than 365 years, to 1640, when it is believed that the Jesuits founded a school in St. Mary's City, Maryland. Almost 170 years later, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton and her dedicated followers opened St. Joseph's Free School in Emmitsburg, becoming the first free Catholic school for girls staffed by religious women in the United States. Mother Mary Elizabeth Lange made history in 1828, when she opened St. Frances Academy and educated black children when it was illegal to do so. Today Catholic schools continue to serve children and families in the Mid-Atlantic region with high-quality, values-based education.

For the 2008-09 school year, more than 111,000 students attended 320 schools in the (arch)dioceses of the Mid-Atlantic Catholic Schools Consortium. The schools reach from Maryland's border with Pennsylvania to Virginia's border with North Carolina and from the Atlantic seaboard in Delaware to the hills of West Virginia. Students' spiritual and moral development is a focus of the schools, and each year students dedicate thousands of service hours to their communities.

The (arch)dioceses provide millions of dollars in tuition assistance and scholarships each year so that Catholic schools are accessible and affordable for all families. Academic excellence abounds – 99 percent of Catholic high school students receive diplomas and 97 percent of Catholic school graduates go on to post-secondary education. The Catholic schools serve an increasingly diverse student body.

In 2006, the six Catholic school superintendents in the Mid-Atlantic region, with the support of their diocesan bishops, formed the Mid-Atlantic Catholic Schools Consortium. The Consortium is an innovative and strategic collaborative effort designed to support and sustain excellent, affordable and accessible Catholic schools as an essential ministry of the Church. Our mission is *“To make Catholic Schools the schools of choice for Catholic children and families, and all who may desire an education rooted in the Catholic tradition and Gospel values.”* For more information about the Consortium, please visit <http://www.midatlanticcsc.org>.

HOW PRIVATE SCHOOL STUDENTS RECEIVE EQUITABLE SERVICES UNDER IDEA

THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

The Consultation Process is the method by which public school officials meet with private school officials to design a program of services for eligible private school students. Both ESEA and IDEA have specific requirements for the topics that must be covered in the consultation process. At a minimum, consultation must address the following issues:

- How the public school district will identify the needs of eligible private school children;
- What services the public school district will offer to eligible private school children;
- The Child Find process and access to it;
- How and when the public school district will make decisions about the delivery of services;
- How, where, and by whom the public school district will provide services to eligible private school children;
- How the public school district will assess academically the services to private school children and how the district and private school officials will use the results of that assessment to improve program services;
- The size and scope of the equitable services that the public school district will provide to eligible private school children and the proportion of funds that the district will allocate for these services;
- The number of parentally-placed private school children with disabilities and the proportional share of funds generated by those students;
- Discussion of service delivery mechanisms which the public school district will use to provide services; and
- Thorough consideration and analysis of the views of the private school officials on whether the Local Education Agency (LEA) should contract with a third-party provider. If the public school district disagrees with the views of the private school officials on that issue, the district must provide those officials with the reasons, in writing, why it has chosen not to use a third-party contractor.

In order for program services to be equitable and be delivered in a timely and effective manner, a high quality consultation process must be in place that addresses all of the issues above. A unilateral offer of services, particularly an offer just to participate in services onsite at the public school or only for one identified disability type, does not meet the requirements for consultation or the provision of equitable services.

FISCAL ISSUES

The public school district always remains the fiscal agent and the responsible party for program administration and implementation. Funds are not provided to private schools. Instead, the proportional share of funds is used for the provision of services to eligible private school students.

The proportional share of funds is determined by taking the number of parentally-placed private school children in relation to the total number (public and private) of children with disabilities.

PROGRAM DESIGN

Program design is part of the consultation process. In order for the program to be equitable, it is important that the program design be constructed and implemented in a way which ensures that the needs of the parentally-placed private school students are met. It is not sufficient for the district to provide a unilateral offer of services for parentally-placed private school students. Instead, the consultation process should discuss the needs of the private students to be served and result in a program designed around those needs.

IV. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Finding #1: Catholic schools in the Mid-Atlantic (arch)dioceses educate children with disabilities and provide services for them, independent of any state or federal support for special education services and benefits.

Through the evaluation process of the public school district—Child Find—Catholic school students are identified with disabilities under IDEA. 69 percent of the Catholic schools in the Mid-Atlantic educate students with speech or language impairments and 57 percent educate children with specific learning disabilities. Another 23 percent of the schools have children in their classrooms with other health impairments (such as ADD or ADHD), and 23 percent educate children with autism. Children with most other disabilities are also part of the classrooms of the Catholic schools in the Mid-Atlantic region.

These Catholic schools, while striving to receive the full benefits of IDEA for their students with disabilities, also provide an extensive array of services that are paid for by the school, diocese, parents, grants or other private funding. 59 percent of the Mid-Atlantic Catholic school respondents reported providing academic intervention services and 51 percent have resource rooms for children with disabilities. 48 percent provide in-class academic intervention services and 22 percent have a paraprofessional in the classroom to assist the students with disabilities.

Finding #2: In the Mid-Atlantic (arch)dioceses, Child Find is not consistently provided to Catholic school students who are suspected of having a disability. When Child Find is carried out, it is not always timely. It is not certain that Child Find is carried out in a way that accurately identifies Catholic school students with disabilities.

The public school district has the obligation to locate, identify, and evaluate any child suspected of having a disability. This process is called Child Find. Child Find is a civil right under IDEA—more than just a federal program service. Yet, only 14 percent indicated that this always happens.

Each state in the Mid-Atlantic has a timeline by which Child Find must be completed. 33 percent of respondents indicated that Child Find was always completed within the time required. Many reported that the Response to Intervention (RTI) process delayed Child Find, even though this is contrary to federal law.

Respondents were asked their level of agreement with the statement that Child Find accurately identifies children with disabilities. 42 percent agreed or strongly agreed that the Child Find process accurately identified children with disabilities, while 23 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Finding #3: Catholic school principals in the Mid-Atlantic (arch)dioceses do not always know the funding available to serve the group of parentally-placed private school children, and are not always aware of how the funds were generated.

A clear requirement for public school officials is to disclose the amount of proportional funding for parentally-placed private school students and how it was determined. However, when asked the funding for their students with disabilities, 76 percent did not know the amount. Additionally, only 15 percent were able to confirm that the count was done correctly. 60 percent did not know how the funding was determined. As a result, there is very low confidence that the proportional share of funding is actually reflective of the appropriate amount of funds that should be used to serve the group of parentally-placed private school children in Catholic schools in the Mid-Atlantic.

Finding #4: Of those Catholic schools whose students receive IDEA services, most are not receiving direct services for their students outside of speech/language therapy, and other service requirements are not being followed.

IDEA requires that a preference be given to providing services directly to students with disabilities, rather than providing consultative services to their teachers. 25 percent of the schools responding indicated that no direct services were offered. Of those whose students were receiving direct services, 89 percent of them were speech/language therapy. In fact, only 22 percent reported that all disability types were always considered during consultation to plan which services would be provided. Many principals commented that only the speech/language option is available; no other services are offered.

Another requirement of IDEA is that preference should be given to providing services on site at the private school. 50 percent of respondents reported that they never receive services on site at their school for children with disabilities.

Finding #5: The consultation process is not leading to high quality, equitable programs for Catholic school students in the Mid-Atlantic. Public school districts are not cooperative or knowledgeable about their responsibilities toward parentally-placed private school students.

More principals disagreed with the statement that the consultation process answered all of their questions; 34 percent strongly agreed or agreed and 39 percent strongly disagreed or disagreed. Respondents were asked if it was difficult to work with the public school district to obtain IDEA services for children with disabilities. 30 percent strongly agreed or agreed, and 42 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed.

The provision of services by a third party is a required topic of consultation. 50 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed that consultation allowed for the provision of services through a third party.

Finding #6: IDEA services for Catholic school students in the Mid-Atlantic were rated average in quality.

Overall, 3 percent of Catholic school principals whose students are currently receiving IDEA services rated the program as excellent, 19 percent rated it above average, 40 percent rated it as average, 16 percent rated it as below average, and 5 percent rated it as very poor. 43 percent agreed or strongly agreed that most IDEA services are provided off-site so evaluating the quality of them is not possible.

FINDINGS FOR THE MID-ATLANTIC CONSORTIUM CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

1. Catholic schools in the Mid-Atlantic (arch)dioceses educate children with disabilities and provide services for them independent of any state or federal support for special education services and benefits.

Through the Child Find process of the public school district, Catholic school students are identified with disabilities under IDEA. Attendance by students with these disabilities was reported by the following percentages of Catholic schools in MACSC:

| Disability | % of schools surveyed |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Speech or language impairment | 69% |
| Specific learning disability | 57% |
| Autism | 23% |
| Other health impairment | 23% |
| Developmental delays | 17% |
| Multiple disabilities | 15% |
| Hearing impairment | 14% |
| Emotional disturbance | 10% |
| Vision impairment | 11% |
| Mental retardation | 5% |
| Orthopedic impairment | 6% |
| Traumatic brain injury | 4% |
| Deaf-blindness | 1% |

MACSC schools provide the following services to students with disabilities that are paid for by the school, diocese, parents, grants, or other private funding.

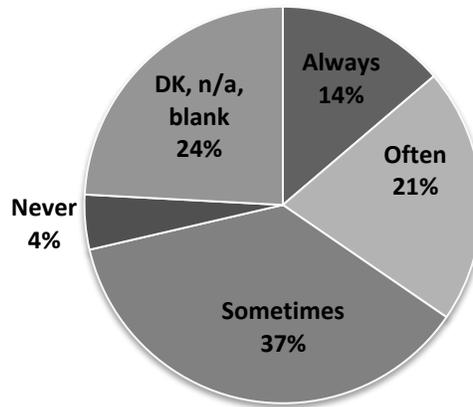
| Services provided by school, paid for by school, parents, diocese, grants, or other private funding | % of schools surveyed |
|--|------------------------------|
| Academic intervention services | 59% |
| Resource rooms | 51% |
| In-class academic intervention services | 48% |
| Assistive technology | 28% |
| Paraprofessional in the classroom | 22% |
| Speech/language therapy | 13% |
| Services for the hearing impaired | 3% |
| Services for the vision impaired | 3% |
| Occupational therapy | 3% |
| Physical therapy | 1% |

Other schools offered additional categories of services, including counseling, educational testing, resource teacher, tutoring, and team teaching.

2. In the Mid-Atlantic (arch)dioceses, Child Find is not consistently provided to Catholic school students who are suspected of having a disability. When Child Find is carried out, it is not always timely. It is not certain that Child Find is carried out in a way that accurately identifies Catholic school students with disabilities.

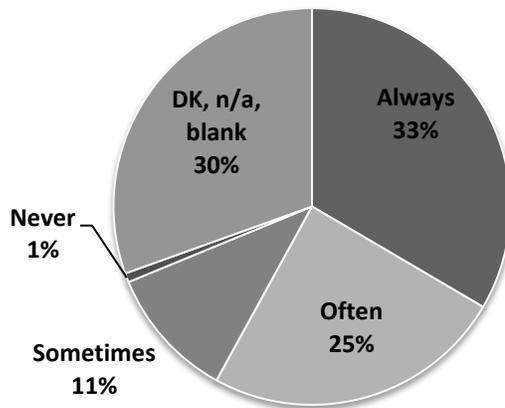
The public school district has the obligation to locate, identify, and evaluate any child suspected of having a disability, including students attending private schools. 14 percent of MACSC respondents indicated that this always occurs, 21 percent that it often occurs, 37 percent that it sometimes occurs, and 4 percent reported that this never occurs.

My public school district identified, located, and evaluated students suspected of having a disability.



When asked if the Child Find process was completed within the state timeline (which differs for each of the jurisdictions surveyed), 33 percent reported that Child Find is always completed within the state timeline, 25 percent responded that it is often completed within the timeline, 11 percent that it is sometimes completed within the timeline, and 1 percent reported that Child Find is never completed within the timeline.

The Child Find process is completed within the state timeline.



The timeline for consultation begins when the parents sign permission for the evaluation to be performed. When asked if Child Find begins immediately upon parent signature, 24 percent reported that this always occurs, 21 percent that it often occurs, 12 percent that it sometimes occurs, and 4 percent that it never occurs. As with most other indicators in this section, a high percentage was unable to answer this question.

The Response to Intervention (RTI) process can be helpful in identifying students with specific learning disabilities. However, the law does not require the private schools to conduct this process, and the RTI process cannot delay the Child Find. However, 13 percent of respondents indicated that RTI must be completed before a Child Find evaluation can be requested. 11 percent reported that this often occurs, 8 percent that it sometimes occurs, and 12 percent that it never occurs. 57 percent did not know, responded that the question did not apply, or left this answer blank, indicating that there is more education and communication needed regarding RTI.

Only 52 percent responded that they always know the process for Child Find, which can indicate that the public school district has not been forthcoming about the process details and that the Catholic school principals need more training and a better understanding of Child Find.

A great number of principals asked for more assistance in understanding Child Find and IDEA services for their students. When asked what help or assistance was needed, one respondent wrote, "Assistance with the chain of command in my district for making referrals, as these are never followed through on and when I've called to inquire about the status, no one seems to know who or what I am talking about, even when I am able to provide sufficient documentation of who, when, and regarding what topic I talked with someone about."

The same sentiment was expressed by another principal when writing, “This is an almost impossible endeavor when working with the (LEA). No one returns calls, nothing is ever scheduled, and every time you call the district office you are referred to a school. They never call you back or their voice mails are full and you are not able to leave messages.”

Another principal wrote, “It would be helpful if there was a clear and consistent understanding of the process within the district and then communicated to the officials/principals/teachers so that the parents and children get the necessary evaluation services. I have spoken to three different groups within the district and they don’t understand their role or the process—so we are getting the door closed on us.”

IDEA requires that the Child Find process and access to it be a part of the consultation process. 32 percent responded that this always occurs, 16 percent that it often occurs, 19 percent that it sometimes occurs, and 6 percent that it never occurs. 28 percent left this item blank, presumably because they are not involved in the timely and meaningful consultation required by law.

Many parents, for any number of reasons, seek private testing to determine if their children have disabilities. 15 percent of the school responded that this always occurs in their school, 29 percent that it often occurs, 28 percent that it sometimes occurs, and 4 percent reported that they never have parents seeking private testing to determine a disability.

The survey also asked if any students who were privately tested and found to have a disability, then went through Child Find and were found not to have a disability. 5 percent indicated that this always occurs, 16 percent that it often occurs, 33 percent that it sometimes occurs, and 10 percent that it never occurs.

Respondents were also asked their agreement or disagreement on the statement that the Child Find evaluation accurately identifies students with disabilities. 6 percent strongly agreed that the Child Find process accurately identified students with disabilities, 36 percent agreed, 19 percent disagreed, and 7 percent strongly disagreed. One principal wrote, “How do you deal with public schools that insist that the problem is only ‘that we expect too much’ and they are already strained to provide services to students in their schools?”

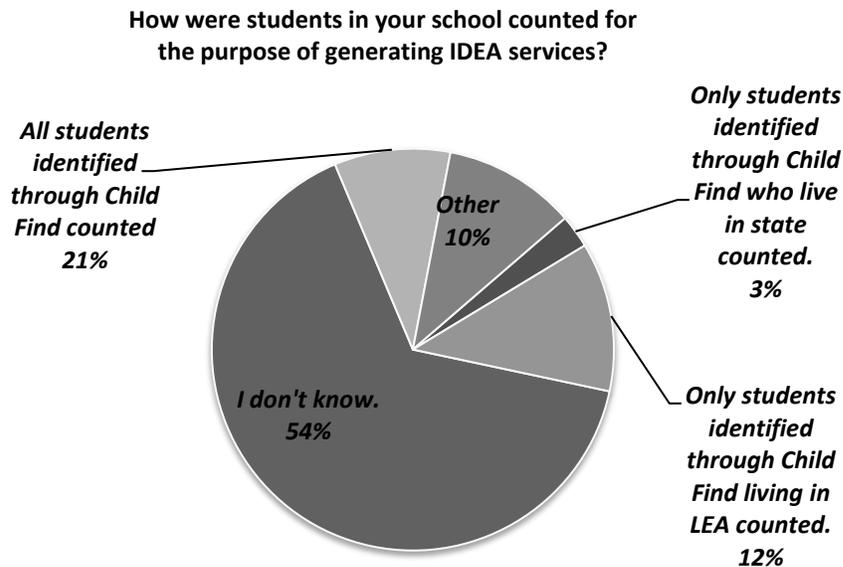
One principal summed up the difficulties when writing, “Many of our students have disabilities that are considered “sub-threshold” to qualify for IDEA services. Those that do qualify often receive a service plan that includes accommodations, which we are already providing, so not much appears to be gained via the process.” Another wrote, “Some (public) schools feel they should not have to service our children. A uniform policy would be appreciated.”

3. Catholic school principals in the Mid-Atlantic (arch)dioceses do not always know the funding available to serve the group of parentally-placed private school children, and are not always aware of how the funds were generated.

A clear requirement for public school officials is to disclose the amount of proportional funding and how it was determined. When asked for the amount of funding generated by their students with disabilities, 76 percent of principals reported that they do not know the amount. Of those currently receiving services for their students with disabilities, 74 percent did not know the proportional share of funding available.

When asked what additional help or training is needed, one principal wrote, “More information from the local public schools about where and how the money is spent and what services are available.”

One of the changes made in IDEA 2004 was that the public school district where the private school is located became responsible for all Child Find, child count, and provision of services to the group of parentally-placed private school children. The public school district is responsible for counting all children with disabilities attending private schools within their district, regardless of where the children reside. 21 percent of those schools receiving services for their students were able to confirm that the count was based on all the children with disabilities in their schools. 12 percent indicated that only students residing in the district where the school was located were counted and 3 percent indicated that only students living in the state were counted for the purpose of generating funds.



60 percent of respondents did not know how the funding level was determined. Of those currently receiving IDEA services for their students, 54 percent did not know how the funding was calculated.

An accurate child count determines the proportional share of funds, and so it is important that the public school district consult with private school officials on the number of children with disabilities attending the private school. Since 37 percent of Catholic school principals indicated that the public school district does not ask for the count, and 28 percent indicated that they only give the count to the (arch)diocese, there is very low confidence that whatever count is being used to determine a proportional share is reflective of the true numbers of children with disabilities attending Catholic schools in the Mid-Atlantic.

Part of this confusion may come from the system that some public school districts in the Mid-Atlantic use for identifying and serving students and consulting with principals. While the intent of changing from district of residence to location of the private school was an attempt to simplify the process—each private school principal would work with a single individual in the public school district and each public school district would have a finite group of principals to work with, regardless of where resident children attended private school—some districts are requiring the Catholic school principals to go to individual public school principals throughout the district, depending on the home school location for the child.

One principal writes, “Over the years we have met with several different home schools (within the LEA). There is great variability in how the school-based professionals interpret and apply IDEA.” Another principal also explained this difficulty. “Referrals for all other students (5 and older) go the child’s home school (residence determines this) and some schools are very cooperative and others are less so.” Another comment reads, “The amount of IDEA services offered is inconsistent in our district. Some schools offer more service than others; a child from one home school may receive significantly reduced services than a similar child from a different home school.”

4. Of those Catholic schools whose students receive IDEA services, most are not receiving direct services for their students outside of speech/language therapy, and other service requirements are not being followed.

IDEA requires that preference be given to providing services directly to students. When asked about direct services, 25 percent of schools reported that no direct services were offered. Of those currently receiving services, 81 percent of the schools reported that the direct services received are speech/language therapy. In addition, 23 percent receive academic intervention services, 18 percent receive occupational therapy, 10 percent receive services for resource rooms, 11 percent receive services for children who are hearing impaired, 10 percent receive services for vision impairment, 6 percent receive assistive technology, 5 percent receive in-class academic intervention services for their students, 3 percent receive physical therapy, and 1 percent receive the services of a paraprofessional in the classroom.

In describing this situation, one principal writes, “Most of the public schools are doing only consultation now and we are writing our own plans.” Another comment reads, “Direct services are never offered, even for those who meet IDEA eligibility.” Another wrote, “We have always been told that the public school system only has monies for speech therapy and not any other services.”

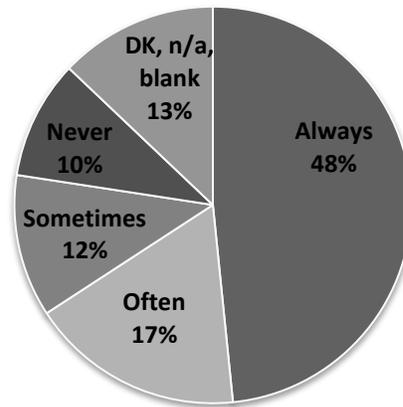
The lack of direct services is a more serious problem in some states than in others. For example, in Washington, DC, 75 percent of the Catholic schools reported that no direct services were received.

The study also asked principals about the indirect services received. These are consultation services to teachers and principals at the private school with no direct services provided to the child. Of those schools currently receiving services for their students with disabilities, 25 percent reported that they receive indirect services for academic intervention services, 21 percent for speech/language therapy, 10 percent for occupational therapy, 8 percent for in-class academic intervention services, 8 percent for services for vision impairment, 7 percent for students with hearing impairment, 4 percent for resource rooms, 2 percent for assistive technology, and 1 percent for physical therapy.

IDEA 2004 requires that preference be given to providing services on site at the private school. Of those receiving services from IDEA, 16 percent responded that they always receive services on site at the Catholic school. 10 percent responded that they often receive services on site and 16 percent responded that they sometimes receive services on site. 50 percent responded that they never receive services on site at the Catholic school for their children with disabilities. One principal writes, “I feel that students with the same or similar disabilities could be serviced at the private school rather than have three students serviced at three different schools. It would be a better use of resources.” Another principal writes, “My experience is that services are only provided during the school day at predetermined times at the home school, which is typically not convenient to my students so they do not accept the services.”

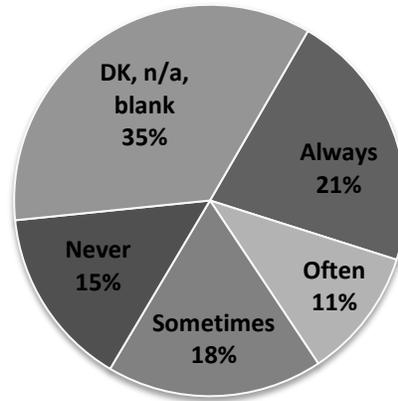
Students who are chosen to receive IDEA services are required to receive an individual Services Plan. This Services Plan contains the interventions and services that will be provided to a child with a disability through IDEA funds. 48 percent of the Catholic schools with participating children indicated that they always receive an individual Services Plan for their students receiving services. 17 percent indicated that this often occurs, 12 percent reported that it sometimes occurs, and 10 percent that it never occurs. In lieu of individual Services Plans, 6 percent of the Catholic schools with students participating indicated that they always receive a single service plan for all of the students with disabilities. 4 percent reported that this often occurs and 6 percent that it sometimes occurs.

Each student who receives IDEA services also receives an individual Services Plan.



In order to determine which services will be provided, if there are not enough funds to provide all the services needed to the group of parentally-placed private school children with disabilities, the public school district must consider all disability types during the consultation process and consult on which children will and will not be served with IDEA funds. Only 21 percent reported that all disability types are always considered during consultation. 11 percent said that this often occurs, 18 percent that it sometimes occurs, and 15 percent that it never occurs. 35 percent were unable to answer this question. 27 percent of respondents were unable to answer other questions about the consultation process, indicating that it does not consistently occur.

**Services for all disability types
are considered during consultation.**



One principal wrote, “It would be great to have someone from the county give an honest answer about whom they expect to service from private schools.”

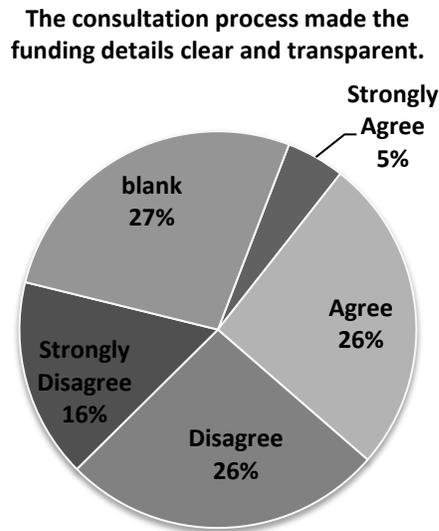
To add to the confusion in determining who will receive services, one principal explains that, “The LEA provides services based on teacher/therapist availability as opposed to the team’s assessment of the amount of services necessary to ensure the child makes progress toward goals and objectives.”

When specifically asked about whether or not a private school representative was always included in meetings to design, review, and revise Services Plans for children designated to receive IDEA services, 15 percent strongly agreed, 34 percent agreed, 18 percent disagreed, and 7 percent strongly disagreed.

5. The consultation process is not leading to high quality, equitable programs for Catholic school students in the Mid-Atlantic. Public school districts are not cooperative or knowledgeable about their responsibilities toward parentally-placed private school students.

6 percent of respondents are represented by their (arch)diocese during the consultation process. Of the remaining respondents, 21 percent did not attend any consultation meetings, 16 percent attended one meeting, 15 percent attended two meetings, 6 percent attended three meetings, and 24 percent attended more than three meetings. Comments from respondents indicate, however, that there may have been confusion between the consultation process itself and participation in Child Study Team meetings to formulate a Services Plan.

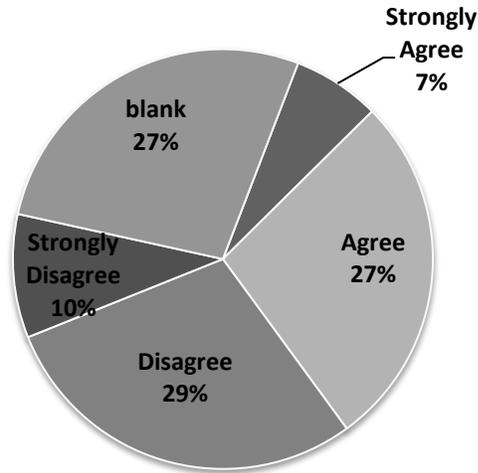
When asked if the consultation process was begun before IDEA programs were designed, 43 percent agreed or strongly agreed and 29 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed. When asked if funding details were made clear and transparent during the consultation process, 31 percent agreed or strongly agreed and 42 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed.



The foundation for program design is the needs of the children to be served. Respondents were asked if the consultation process provided an opportunity to discuss students' needs. 56 percent agreed or strongly agreed and 19 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed. Similarly, respondents were asked if the consultation process provided an opportunity for the principal to voice concerns regarding IDEA and the Catholic school. 45 percent agreed or strongly agreed that it did so, and 29 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed.

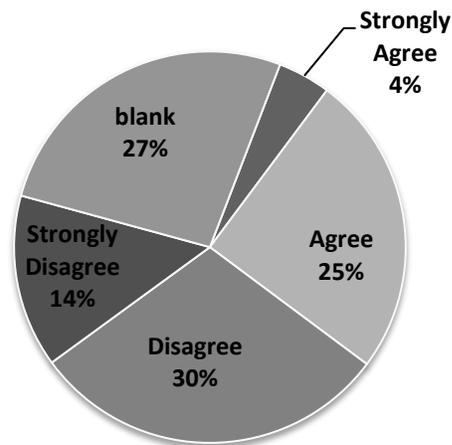
7 percent strongly agreed that the consultation process answered all questions. 27 percent agreed with the statement, 29 percent disagreed, and 10 percent strongly disagreed.

The consultation process answered all my questions.



When asked if public and private school officials collaborated to design the IDEA program, 4 percent strongly agreed, 25 percent agreed, 30 percent disagreed, and 14 percent strongly disagreed.

Public and private school officials collaborated to design IDEA programs.



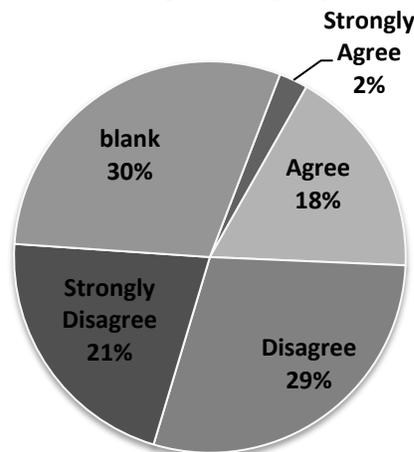
IDEA consultation should take place during the design, development, and implementation of the program of services. 7 percent strongly agreed that consultation continued during IDEA program implementation, 33 percent agreed, 24 percent disagreed and 8 percent strongly disagreed.

Respondents were asked if it was difficult to work with the public school district to obtain IDEA services for their students with disabilities. 9 percent strongly agreed, 21 percent agreed, 29 percent disagreed, and 13 percent strongly disagreed.

One principal wrote, “The bottom line is the local LEA does not use the same criteria as we do to determine which children need services. They refuse to test students and undermine the programs at the local Catholic Schools as the reason for the child’s problems without testing for any disability. The meetings feel more like a challenge to our expertise than collaboration to help a child and family in need of educational support.” Another wrote, “It always seems to be hurdles to jump over and sometimes schools give up because it is so hard and time consuming to secure (IDEA services).”

One of the changes in IDEA 2004 was to make specific that third party providers can be contracted by the public school district to provide the services to parentally-placed private school students. This is a required topic for consultation. Only 2 percent strongly agreed that consultation allowed for provision of services through a third party. 18 percent agreed, 29 percent disagreed, and 21 percent strongly disagreed.

The consultation allowed for the provision of services through a third party.



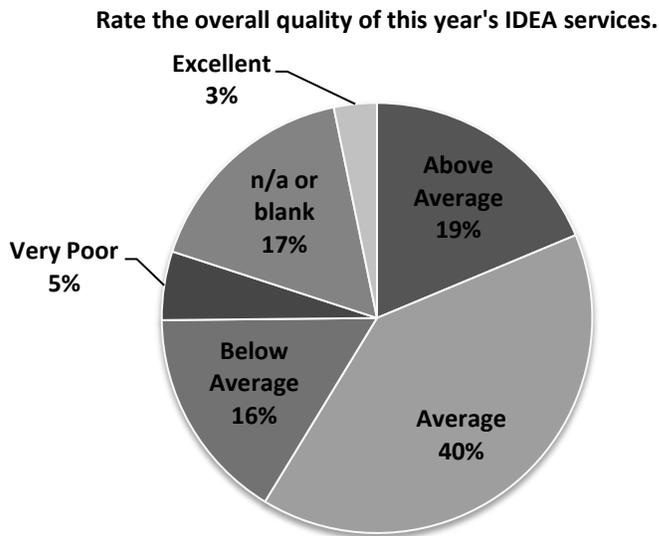
When asked if the public school provided a response to request for specific services, 11 percent strongly agreed, 30 percent agreed, 22 percent disagreed, and 8 percent strongly disagreed.

Comments from principals indicated that the process is not always collaborative. One wrote, “Several schools treat us in a condescending manner. On one occasion, we actually heard the assistant principal give a big sigh and say, ‘What do those people want?’ when we were outside the room. I am a state-licensed special education teacher with a Masters in Special Education. I do not take children for consultation unless I am convinced there is some sort of disability present.” Another wrote, “It often seems that students who are evaluated as ‘not in need of services’. We often wonder if this is a budgetary response.”

One principal commented on the process by writing, “‘Meaningful consultation’ is a buzz word with no meaning for the persons being consulted. With the school district being the ‘fiscal decision maker,’ changes in the programs do not happen. We are told, this is how we do it, if you fit in—great—if not, no services.”

6. IDEA services for Catholic school students in the Mid-Atlantic were rated average in quality.

Overall, 3 percent of Catholic school principals whose students are currently receiving IDEA services rated the program as excellent, 19 percent rated it above average, 40 percent rated it as average, 16 percent rated it as below average, and 5 percent rated it as very poor.



The questionnaire asked if the IDEA services met the needs of the students. Of those principals currently receiving services for their students with disabilities, 5 percent strongly agreed, 40 percent agreed, 32 percent disagreed, and 12 percent strongly disagreed. Similarly, the questionnaire asked if the IDEA services met the needs of the teachers. 3 percent with participating students strongly agreed, 34 percent agreed, 35 percent disagreed, and 14 percent strongly disagreed. 6 percent strongly agreed that the services were of high quality, 36 percent agreed that they were, 25 percent disagreed, and 6 percent strongly disagreed.

Of those schools with current IDEA services, 14 percent strongly agreed that the personnel were appropriately qualified and 52 percent agreed. Only 7 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed. 7 percent with participating students strongly agreed that the materials accompanying the services were of high quality. 32 percent agreed with that statement, 15 percent disagreed, and 5 percent strongly disagreed.

43 percent of the schools receiving IDEA services, indicated that they agreed or strongly agreed that it was not possible for them to rate the quality of all of the services because they are provided off-site and therefore evaluating quality is not possible for them.

Recommendations for Action

Participating (arch)dioceses have received specific recommendations reflective of the particular responses by their schools. The recommendations that follow apply to a broader audience.

1. ACE Consulting should continue to study the extent of participation in other (arch)dioceses or groups of schools to build upon this body of evidence in order to draw broader conclusions. Having factual information will provide a starting point for the improvement of the law and in its implementation.
2. This study and others like it should be shared with federal administration personnel and members of Congress to inform policymakers and implementers of the experience of Catholic and other private school principals in attempting to obtain special education and related services for their students under IDEA.
3. MACSC, ACE Consulting and other advocates should support the (arch)dioceses in their work on the state level to resolve state-wide findings and to correct issues relating to implementation, particularly when Catholic school principals must work with individual public schools to obtain services for their group of students with disabilities.
4. (Arch)diocesan leadership, with the assistance of MACSC and ACE Consulting and others, should create and build a collaborative process, true to the requirements of IDEA consultation, to ensure that parentally-placed private school children have an equal opportunity to benefit from program services, and to ensure that Child Find is always available for private school children suspected of having a disability, as is their civil right.
5. Those responsible for working to obtain IDEA services for children with disabilities in the Mid-Atlantic should continue to make program quality a high priority, not allowing the importance of a high quality program to get lost in the procedural hurdles of participation.

Limitations of the Study

1. This study was conducted for the 2008-09 school year. It does not reflect any changes in (arch)diocesan or district practices since that time period.
2. This study included the responses of Catholic school principals in the six (arch)dioceses of the Mid-Atlantic region. The ability to generalize to other regions and other non-public schools may be limited.
3. Even though the terms were defined within the survey instrument, some respondents still could not answer the questions because they were not familiar enough with IDEA. As a result, some questions had high percentages of respondents who chose “do not know” for a response.
4. The construction of the questions asking about direct services, indirect services, and special education services provided by the school may have been confusing to some respondents who were not sure of the terminology. They could name services received, but were not always sure how to categorize them. This has been corrected for future studies.

Recommendations for Future Research on this Topic

1. This study should be replicated to ensure that: 1) the results found in 2008-09 are reliable over time; 2) and/or, to gauge the level of improvement in access to these federal programs once actions have been taken and strategies implemented.
2. The use of an online survey made the process of participation easy for Catholic school principals, which contributed to the high response rate. Future studies could benefit from this technology.
3. This study focused on the perceptions and experience of Catholic principals. A parallel study of (arch) diocesan central office activity and experience may also provide additional helpful information. A related area of study would be to assess the human resources impact that is entailed by compliance with these federal programs, both at the school and diocesan levels.
4. A study of other non-public school administrators would also extend the awareness of the experiences of the entire non-public school community. These other non-public officials may already have effective strategies in place and they should be engaged in an ecumenical spirit, to better the education of all children in the region.
5. A study on the impact on human resources and the amount of time required to participate in the consultation and application process could suggest new strategies for increased efficiency.
6. Focusing on more than just participation rates provided a wealth of information about the programs as they are actually provided to Catholic school students. Funding, consultation, timing, and quality are essential elements in determining if the participation is equitable and would be important topics for inclusion in future research studies.