PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TRAINING IN SPECIAL EDUCATION:
A CASE STUDY OF FAMILY-PROFESSIONAL COLLABORATION

BY

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A dissertation submitted to
The Graduate School of Education
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree
Doctor of Education
Graduate Program in Special Education
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May, 2011
This dissertation is dedicated to my parents who were my first teachers and instilled in me a love of learning and also empathy for those in need. I hope that I have instilled these qualities in my own children as well.

I also dedicate this work to my husband Frank and my children Annie, Kate, Beth, Frank and Paul. Your unconditional support of this endeavor was the guiding force that helped it to reach its conclusion.

Finally, this work is dedicated to all my students and their families who have provided me with the inspiration to persevere through life's challenges in pursuit of my dreams.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to first acknowledge my advisor, Dr. Stanley Vitello, for his encouragement, support and guidance over the past seven years. His wealth of knowledge, experience, and wonderful sense of humor helped me to stay focused on completing my doctoral program.

I also want to thank Dr. Lorraine McCune and Dr. Matthew Mayer for their time, effort and thoughtful feedback given throughout this dissertation process. Their extensive knowledge and experience enabled me to bring this work to its fullest potential.

I would also like to thank my friends and colleagues, Dr. Cynthia Bott and Ms. Jill Procaccino for sharing their knowledge and expertise. I am so glad that our paths crossed at Rutgers and hope that our friendship continues to strengthen in the future.

To Ruth Reinhard, Loretta Kennedy, and Jean Stack, the Executive Directors of the Harbor, Alpha and Gateway Schools, thank you for your extraordinary vision and commitment in providing outstanding educational programming for children with special needs. Thank you to my friend and colleague, Mrs. Maureen Banias, who spent countless hours reading and critiquing my work. I truly appreciate her support and guidance in this work and in sharing her expertise in the staff development program at the Harbor School.

Finally, I want to thank each and every Harbor School staff member, especially those who participated in this research process. Your commitment and dedication to the students and families of the Harbor School is evidenced on a daily basis as you continue to make a positive impact on the challenging lives of our students and their families.
Abstract

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) established a role for families in the educational planning process for their children. The concept of a collaborative partnership between families and professionals was strengthened and supported by additional amendments to this act in 1997. Partnerships between families who have children with special needs and the professionals who work with them reveal a complex scenario. Parents may feel that they are to blame for their child’s issues or simply feel vulnerable from the stress of raising their child, and professionals may feel inadequate or unprepared to meet the needs of the family. Despite legislation and research recognizing the benefits of collaboration as best educational practice in special education, collaborative partnerships are not always achieved. Barriers such as lack of training and knowledge, problematic professional attitudes and behaviors, and lack of experience may contribute to this policy-to-practice gap. Informed by previous research conducted in 2006 and 2007, which utilized the Family-Professional Partnership Scale (Summers, 2005), this dissertation study examined the professional perspective on the kinds of training needed to achieve a collaborative partnership with families of their students with disabilities.

This descriptive case study included a sample of the professional staff of a single private special education school. Participants included twelve classroom teachers, six speech therapists, three occupational therapists, and one physical therapist. Three forms of data were collected: surveys with the twenty-two participants, document review, and four focus groups involving all participants. Findings include a review of patterns
regarding the need for the staff development program as related to parent-professional partnership, what parent-professional partnership entails, and the benefits, challenges and future trends of staff development programming. As federal policy, research and best practice guidelines continue to support and promote the goal of a collaborative partnership between professionals and parents of children with disabilities; this research which focused on the perspective of professionals provides much-needed data to identify components of staff development programs which are needed to achieve this elusive goal.
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Chapter One

Introduction

The field of special education has experienced significant changes over the past thirty-five years that involve rethinking ways to deliver services and work with families of children with disabilities. Federal legislation passed in 1975, known today as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), established that families involved with educational service delivery systems are also expected to make the system work by holding it accountable (Judge, 1997; Osher & Osher, 2002; Turnbull, Blue-Banning, Turbiville & Park, 2000; Wang, Mannan, Poston, Turnbull, Summers, 2004). Other federal laws, such as The Elementary and Secondary Education Act, and Communities and Children’s Mental Health Systems Improvement Act, emphasize the importance of ensuring partnerships between families and professionals (Blue-Banning, Summers, Lord-Nelson, & Beegle, 2004; Dinnebeil & Hale, 1996; Kasahara & Turnbull, 2005; Summers, Hoffman, Marquis, Turnbull & Poston, 2005; Winton, 1995). As a result of these mandates for parent participation, schools and families have been working together in a variety of ways to design appropriate educational programs for children with disabilities (Ankenny, Wilkins & Spain, 2009; Bherring, 2002; Shapiro, Monzo, Rueda, Gomez & Blacher, 2004; Osher & Osher, 2002; Soodak & Erwin, 2000).

Despite legislation and the support of parents and professionals, the development of collaborative partnerships is not always achieved (Blue-Banning, Summers, Lord-Nelson & Beegle, 2004; Dinnebeil & Hale, 1996; Fylling & Sandvin, 1999; Hilton & Henderson, 1993; Keyes, 2002). Historically, controversy surrounding this partnership
may be attributed in part to the terminology and philosophy associated with the role of parents in the education of their child with special needs (Kaiser, Mahoney, Girolometto, MacDonald, Robinson, Safford & Spiker, 1990; Turnbull, Blue-Banning, Turbiville & Park, 2000; Winton & Sloop, 1999). A predominance of the research that chronicles the beginning of the relationship between families and professionals are found within the early childhood special education literature.

Mahoney (1999) defined the term parent education as” part of the process of providing parents and caregivers of children with disabilities, specific knowledge and child rearing skills with the goal of promoting the development and competence of their children” (Mahoney, Kaiser, Girolometto, MacDonald, Robinson, Safford & Spiker, 1990, p.131). Concerns expressed about the lack of sensitivity in parent education approaches occurred as the term itself conveys a one-way flow of information from the professional who is considered the expert, to the parent who is the one who needs to be taught (Blue-Banning, Turnbull & Pereira, 2000; Davern, 1996, Lake & Billingsley, 2000; Turnbull, Blue-Banning, Turbiville & Park, 2000; Winton, 1999). Criticism of parent education included the burden imposed on parents to follow the program established by the professional, the implicit blaming of parents for their child’s disability, the role conflict for parents and the potential for cultural bias (Boscardin, Brown-Chidsey, & Gonzalez-Marinez, 2001; Dinnebeil, 1999; Kaiser, Mahoney, Girolometto, MacDonald, Robinson, Safford & Spiker, 1990; McCollum, 1999; Mahoney, 1999).

By the end of the 1980’s, a major change was occurring in the terminology and philosophy associated with service delivery and support of families of children with disabilities with the introduction of family-centered care (Brinker, 1992; Bruder, 2000;
Lord-Nelson, Summers & Turnbull, 2004; Mahoney & Bella, 1998; McWilliam, Tocci & Harbin, 1998; Trivette, Dunst, Boyd & Mamby, 1995). This approach was adapted from the health care field and refers to both a philosophy of care and a set of practices, which became the basis for Part C of IDEA regarding early intervention services (Bruder, 2000; Mahoney, 1997; Mahoney & Bella, 1998; Trivette, Dunst, Boyd & Mamby, 1995). Although the term family-centered indicates a focus on the family, the majority of services at this time were directed toward remediation of the child’s impairments. Informed by early intervention program evaluation and consideration of child development theories by Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Sameroff and Chandler (1975), the central purpose of the family-centered philosophy began to emerge as the need to acknowledge and support parents in their role as their child’s caregiver and primary influence on the child’s development.

During the 1990’s, family-centered special education became conceptualized around three principles (a) an emphasis on strengths rather than deficits as the focus of intervention, (b) empowering families to have the control to access resources, and (c) emphasizing collaborative partnership between families and practitioners (Brinker, 1992; Bruder, 2000; Dunst, 2000; Mahoney & Bella, 1998). The concept of partnership with families stressed the need for practitioners to provide emotional and educational support, and to view parents as active and equal partners who should participate in service delivery decision-making for their children (Lord-Nelson, Summers & Turnbull, 2004; Mahoney, Kaiser, Girolometto, MacDonald, Robinson, Safford & Spiker, 1999; Trivette, Dunst, Boyd & Mamby, 1995; Turnbull, Blue-Banning, Turbiville & Park, 2000; Turnbull, Friesen & Ramirez, 1998).
A review of the partnership literature indicates that both professionals and parents define collaborative partnership at least in part in terms of the quality of their interpersonal relationships with each other (Dinnebeil & Hale, 1996; Kelly & Barnard, 1999; Smith, Gartin Murdick & Hilton, 2006; Turnbull, Turnbull, Erwin & Soodak, 2006). Studies have shown however that one of the primary issues in the development of a partnership between families and educators is a failure to establish relationships based on trust, collaboration and empowerment. There are two critical steps that have been identified that will help to address this issue which are to gain a better understanding of the behaviors and skills professionals need for a supportive and helpful style that can assist to develop partnership with families; and by developing a means to measure and evaluate these behaviors and skills (Blue-Banning, Turnbull & Pereira, 2000; Judge, 1997; Luckner & Hanks, 2003; McWilliam, Tocci & Harbin, 1998; Park & Turnbull, 2001; Summers, Hoffman, Marquis, Turnbull & Poston, 2005).

As terminology and philosophy regarding family-professional partnership in special education have evolved, a policy- to- practice gap has emerged for many professionals who struggle to meet the complex needs of their student’s families (Blue-Banning, Turnbull & Pereira, 2000; Dinnebeil & Hale, 1996; Judge, 1997; Luckner & Hanks, 2003; Park & Turnbull, 2001; Soodak, Erwin, Winton, Brotherson, Turnbull, Hanson & Brault, 2002; Summers, Hoffman, Marquis, Turnbull & Poston, 2006). Despite the importance of partnerships, the limited evidence available on professionals’ perceptions of partnerships reveals that they do not always view families as equal partners. In some cases this may be attributed to barriers such as professional attitudes, lack of training and knowledge or experience (Bherring, 2002; Campbell & Halbert,
2002; Croll, 2001; Dinnebeil & Hale, 1996; Luckner & Hanks, 2003; McWilliam, Tocci & Harbin, 1998). Research focused on family-professional partnership from the professional perspective is needed to identify effective training programs to ameliorate the current policy-to-practice gap (Blue-Banning, Summers, Frankland, Lord-Nelson & Beegle, 2004; Kelly & Barnard, 1999; Lake & Billingsley, 2000; McWilliam, Tocci & Harbin, 1998; Summers, Hoffman, Marquis, Turnbull & Poston, 2005).

Statement of the Problem

The concept of a collaborative partnership between professionals and families of children with special needs remains an elusive goal in spite of legislation and research that support this as best educational practice (Blue-Banning, Summers, Frankland, Lord-Nelson & Beegle, 2004; Dinnebeil & Hale, 1996; Fylling & Sandvin, 1999; Keyes, 2002). Limited research conducted from the professional perspective in the area of partnership reveals that practitioners may or may not be aware of barriers that hinder collaboration (Bherring, 2002; Campbell & Halbert, 2002; Croll, 2001; Hilton & Henderson, 1993; Lee, Ostrosky, Bennett & Fowler, 2003). Most of the teacher barriers were related to a lack of understanding or training (Dinnebeil, 1999; Lord-Nelson, Summers & Turnbull, 2004; Summers, Hoffman, Marquis, Turnbull, Poston & Lord-Nelson, 2005; Winton & DiVenne, 1995).

In an effort to gain a better understanding of the components of interpersonal partnership, researchers at the University of Kansas identified indicators of behavior that facilitate collaborative partnership. These indicators were organized into the following themes: communication, commitment, equality, skills, trust and respect (Blue-Banning, Summers, Frankland, Lord-Nelson & Beegle, 2004). A follow up study resulted in the
development of the Family-Professional Partnership Scale based on families’ perceptions of the skills and attitudes professionals need for them to achieve partnership with families (Summers, Hoffman, Marquis, Turnbull, Poston & Lord-Nelson, 2005).

The development and subsequent use of this tool may be an important first step to “enhance program and personnel evaluation and identify specific skill or attitude needs for professional development” (Summers, Hoffman, Marquis, Turnbull, Poston & Lord-Nelson, 2005, p.68). This instrument may also be useful as a resource to gain information regarding the effect of family-professional partnership on parent and child outcomes.

As federal policy, research, and best practice guidelines continue to support and promote the goal of a collaborative partnership between professionals and parents of children with disabilities, it is critical that research focused on the perspectives of professionals be conducted to identify components of staff development programs, which are needed to achieve this elusive goal.

**Research Question**

The purpose of this descriptive case study is to examine and describe from the perspective of the professional, the kinds of training needed to achieve a collaborative partnership with the families of their students with disabilities. The research question to be answered is: What components and structures of staff development programs are considered essential by professionals in special education for developing and maintaining collaborative partnerships with their students’ families?

**Significance of the Study**

This research is important for two reasons. First, this study will generate additional data from the perspective of the professional on family-professional
collaborative partnership. Second, describing the components and structures of staff development programs will provide knowledge to school administrators regarding effective practices and guidelines in creating and maintaining collaborative partnership between families and professionals in the field of special education.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

The importance of collaborative partnership between professionals and families in the field of special education is supported by policy, research and practice guidelines. The dynamic nature of this relationship is evidenced through the ongoing evolution of philosophy and terminology that is documented in the literature.

Parent Involvement

In 1975, Congress passed Public Law 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act. This law, which was reauthorized in 1990, as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and most recently reauthorized in 2004, mandated collaboration between schools and families in educating children with disabilities. Prior to the passage of this act, school personnel often made educational decisions based solely on the school’s view of the student’s needs, and in many situations, without informing parents of their actions (Lytle & Bordin, 2001; Osher & Osher, 2002; Smith, Gartin, Murdick & Hilton, 2006; Turnbull, Turnbull, Erwin & Soodak, 2006). This federal legislation provides a legal basis for parental involvement in the educational process of their child with disabilities. This planning includes the referral and evaluation process, program planning, and placement decisions (Lytle & Bordin, 2001; Osher & Osher, 2002; Smith, Gartin, Murdick & Hilton, 2006). Initial efforts to involve parents in early intervention were dominated by a clinically oriented educational and therapeutic service model (Brinker, 1992; Ketelaar, Vermeer, Helders & Hart, 1998; Mahoney & Filer, 1996; Mahoney, Kaiser, Girolometto, MacDonald, Robinson, Safford & Spiker, 1990).
A review of studies from 1980-96 examining parental involvement in intervention programs for children with cerebral palsy revealed several components that distinguished programs with positive parental effects from programs with limited parental effects. This comparative review included seven studies meeting the criteria of children aged five years and younger with cerebral palsy and studied the effects on outcomes for children and families. These identified components included the degree to which parents were involved in decision making, and the degree to which parents’ problem solving skills and independence were promoted (Katelaar, Vermeer, Helders & Hart, 1998).

Parent participation in the education of their young children with disabilities is influenced by a number of factors, including parents’ perceptions of the quality of their interactions with school personnel (Lord-Nelson, Summers & Turnbull, 2004; Park & Turnbull, 2002; Soodak & Erwin, 2000). In a qualitative study that looked at quality indicators of professionals who work with children with problem behavior, researchers analyzed transcripts from 16 focus groups with 69 families of children with disabilities to examine characteristics most important for professionals who work with children with challenging behavior. Parents perceived that professionals who demonstrate interpersonal and communication skills that reflect trust and respect, such as follow through behavior and a positive attitude toward children help to foster a collaborative partnership (Park & Turnbull, 2002).

Studies focusing on parents’ perceptions of factors that shape their participation in their child’s inclusive education revealed a complex scenario that involved commitment and understanding issue. Research focused on the issue of boundaries between parents and professionals in special education analyzed data from 34 focus groups and 32 individual
interviews of 137 family members and 53 professionals. This research, which was part of a larger study, utilized a protocol guide for both the focus groups and individual interviews. Three researchers worked in teams utilizing a software program Ethnograph to assist in category reduction. Validity for this study was established through use of member checking as the participants reviewed the transcripts and triangulation with incorporating multiple informants. Three themes that emerged from the data analysis in this study included the professional being reliable and available for parents, professionals going beyond their job description, and for professionals to be supportive beyond their role as a teacher in their relationship with their student’s families (Lord-Nelson, Summers & Turnbull, 2004).

In a study that explored the perceptions of ten parents of their young children with severe disabilities to understand the factors that shape their participation in their inclusive education, researchers developed a protocol with open-ended questions to assist participants in sharing their stories. Two researchers worked together to analyze the data to develop codes and themes through constant comparison analysis. Findings indicated that parent involvement is influenced by a number of factors including the school’s beliefs about inclusion, being receptive to parents’ input, and willingness to change. Validity measures used in this research included member checking and inclusion of multiple informants (Soodak & Erwin, 2000).

The rapidly changing demographics of the United States, and the increasing number of children from cultural and minority groups served under IDEA have contributed to additional challenges for these already marginalized parents to participate in the education of their children with disabilities (Boscardin, Brown-Chidsey,
Studies focusing on the participation of parents from culturally diverse backgrounds indicate a need for professionals to gain a better understanding and respect for the uniqueness of all families (Harry, 1992; Lee, Ostrosky, Bennett & Fowler, 2003; Park & Turnbull, 2001; Shapiro, Monzo, Rueda, Gomez & Blacher, 2004). Researchers investigating the perspectives of ten Korean American parents of children with disabilities utilized an exploratory approach to gain insight to their perception of partnership with the professionals who worked with their children. Procedures included in-depth phone interviews in the parent’s native language and interview guide developed by the researchers to facilitate and encourage parents to speak up regarding their experiences. A constant comparison method of data analysis was utilized in addition to Hangulpro 96 a computer software program for Korean language word processing to ensure correct translation. Follow-up phone calls were made to clarify questions and probe for further information as needed. In addition participants were given copies of transcripts to ensure validity. Four themes emerged from the analysis including cultural and linguistic factors, interpersonal factors, and structural factors which are each separate and interact together to impact on this partnership (Park & Turnbull, 2001).

Another study examined the beliefs of low-income, Latin mothers of young adults with developmental disabilities about their relationship with the educational and service delivery systems. Researchers conducted three focus groups with a total of 16 mothers who had children with disabilities between 14-25 years of age. Focus group protocols included open-ended questions which were designed to elicit diverse opinions. A
A debriefing session was held to identify initial categories and themes with the study participants in order to ensure validity of their responses. A content analysis method was utilized and all transcripts were reviewed by different researchers. Primary concerns identified by these mothers included inadequate communication, limited effort in providing services, overall negative attitude and treatment (Shapiro, Monzo, Rueda, Gomez & Blacher, 2004).

Parent involvement in the education of their child with disabilities can be impacted by family demographics including income, education, social support, well being (stress and depression), marital adjustment, family functioning and coping (Gavidia-Payne & Stoneman, 1997; Hanline & Daley, 1992; Innocenti & Kwisun, 1992; Lessenberry & Rehfeldt, 2004; Park, Turnbull & Turnbull, 2002; Trivette & Dunst, 1992). One study that examined the combined influence and predictive ability of family characteristics in maternal and paternal involvement in early intervention supports the contention that parents who enjoyed greater financial security, and who were more educated tended to be more involved with their child’s program. Researchers in this study asked 80 two-parent families to complete a battery of self-report questionnaires related to a variety of constructs such as family functioning, marital adjustment and coping. Structural equation modeling was used to test the predictability of family variables. In addition, those who consistently employed a variety of coping strategies, which enabled them to better deal with stress, were more involved in their child’s education (Gavidia-Payne & Stoneman, 1997).

Mothers of children aged 3 years and younger participated in another study examining the relationship between maternal perceptions of family coping strategies and
family strengths in Hispanic, African-American and Caucasian families of young children with and without disabilities. Two surveys, the Family Crisis Oriented Personal Evaluation Scale (F-COPES) (Olson, et al, 1985) and the Family Strengths Questionnaire (Olson et al, 1985) were completed by 206 participants in Florida and California. Data analysis was conducted utilizing the SPSS Version 9.0 computer software program. Entry data was verified by checking a random 25% of participants from each group. No errors were found. Overall the findings of this study suggest that various family coping strategies are predictive of family strengths. In addition, different ethnic groups in this study tended to have their own way of coping with life’s challenges. This study provides empirical data to assist professionals to better understand the coping strategies of families and the need to provide services in a manner that promotes family strengths (Hanline & Daley, 1992).

Early efforts to involve parents in the education of their children with disabilities was dominated by a professionally-driven model of service delivery which often made educational decisions based on only the school’s view of the student’s needs. Parents’ perceptions of factors that shape their participation in their child’s education reveal a complex scenario primarily influenced by the quality of their relationship with their child’s service providers.

Parent Education

The evolution of the role of parents in the education of their child with disabilities is reflected in the literature within the term parent education. Parent education as defined by Mahoney (1999), is the” process of providing parents and other primary caregivers with specific knowledge and child rearing skills” (Mahoney, Kaiser, Girolometto,
MacDonald, Robinson, Safford & Spiker, 1999, p.131) to help them focus on maximizing their child’s overall development. Controversy surrounding this definition is reflected in the notion that parents who are raising children with disabilities need to be taught how to raise them by the experts or professionals in the field (Dinnebeil, 1999; Dunst, 1999; McCollum, 1999; Turnbull, Blue-Banning, Turbiville & Park, 2000; Winton, Sloop & Rodriguez, 1999).

One study that focused on the role of parents in special education based on how teachers described and perceived their relation to parents, and how parents experience their relation to the school, placed parents in a relationship where they were expected to assume the subordinate role. This research utilized a grounded theory approach in analyzing interviews with 26 classroom teachers and special education coordinators and 14 parents. A typology of two different roles of parents in special education was formulated through a constant comparison analysis in development of codes, themes, and refinement of categories (Fylling & Sandvin, 1999).

Another study assessed the type and scope of services provided to families participating in early intervention programs and examined whether these services were responsive to the families needs. Researchers administered the Family Focused Intervention Scale (FFIS) (Mahoney, O’Sullivan& Dennebaum, 1990) and the Family Environment Scale (FES) (Moos & Moos, 1986) to 357 mothers of children with disabilities. In addition, data from 20 close-ended items regarding child and family characteristics likely to affect family participation in social service systems were analyzed. Manova testing was conducted to examine the relationship between the early intervention service delivery and the types of services families reported receiving.
Results from the Manova were highly significant indicating that the family’s needs for services were significantly higher than the level of services they reported currently receiving (Mahoney & Flier, 1996).

According to Dunst (1991), family-oriented human service programs can be classified according to program types or models that are professionally driven, family allied, family focused or family centered. This framework served to highlight the amount of “help-giving” (Trivette, 1995, p.237) parents would receive from professionals in support of their child with disabilities (Trivette, Dunst, & Mamby, 1995). A study investigating the sources of variations in parents’ assessments of how professionals implemented these help-giving practices revealed that program characteristics, not family characteristics, were highly related to the degree to which parents indicated they had control over needed services, resources and supports. Participants in this study included 280 parents in two states who had children with disabilities between the ages of birth and 5 years. These parents completed two questionnaires, the Help giving Practices Scale (Dunst, Trivette & Mamby, 1995) and the Personal Control Appraisal Scale (Affleck, Tennen & Rowe, 1991) in addition, each respondent was asked how frequently a target help giver intervened or worked with the parent on average during the previous six months. Psychometric evaluation of the Help giving Practices Scale found that all items had similar means, standard deviations, and data ranges, indicating the scale items behave in a manner that legitimizes the calculation of a summated score. The Personal Control Scale is a single item scale that correlates substantively (r= .70) with a multiple item measure of perceived control in obtaining specific kinds of resources and supports from a target program. (Trivette, Dunst, Boyd & Mamby, 1995).
By the end of the 1980’s, a significant paradigm shift occurred as terminology and philosophy regarding service delivery and support of families of children with disabilities was taking place. The emphasis on parent involvement in the education of their children with disabilities continued to evolve informed by evaluation of early intervention program practices and child development theory (Gavidia-Payne & Stoneman, 1997; Keyes, 2002; Bruder, 2000). Child development theories began to view children’s development from the context of parent, family and socio-cultural influences (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Sameroff & Chandler, 1975). This literature reflected a growing realization that the manner in which parents interacted with their children played a critical role in early development (Keyes, 2002; Gavidia-Payne & Stoneman, 1997; Mahoney & Bella, 1998; Mahoney & Wheeden, 1997; Turnbull, Blue-Banning, Turbiville & Park, 2000). The evaluation of some Head Start model demonstration programs indicated that positive intervention effects were more likely to occur when these programs made concentrated efforts to work directly with parents (Bruder, 2000; Mahoney & Bella, 1998; Trivette, Dunst, Boyd & Mamby, 1995).

The combination of child development theories, evaluation of early intervention programs, and goal of federal policy to maintain children in normalized settings, collectively contributed to the shift toward a family-centered philosophy responsive to the needs and priorities of families in the education of their children with disabilities (Bruder, 2000; Ketelaar, Vermeer, Holders & Hart, 1998; Mahoney & Bella, 1998; Mahoney & Wheeden, 1997; Turnbull, Blue-Banning, Turbiville & Park, 2000).

Controversy surrounding the definition and philosophy of parent education is reflected in the notion that parents who are raising children with disabilities need to be
taught how to raise them by professionals who are considered the experts. This relationship between parents and professionals placed parents in a subordinate position with minimal decision making regarding their child’s educational program and service delivery.

**Family-Centered Philosophy**

The term family-centered was first used in the health care field in the mid 1960’s as part of efforts to improve both obstetric and nursing practices. The Association for the Care of Children’s Health defined principles of meeting the whole family’s needs, not just those of the child, as a means for making care more accessible and effective for families and children (Mahoney, Kaiser, Girolometto, MacDonald, Robinson, Safford & Spiker, 1999). The term was introduced to the early intervention field in 1975 to foster increased parental involvement in their child’s early education (Brinker, 1992; Bruder, 2000; Mahoney & Bella, 1998; Trivette, Dunst, Boyd & Mamby, 1995). As service delivery systems began to focus on a family-centered philosophy, key principles emerged, including” respect for families’ priorities and decisions, and assisting families in achieving their identified goals” (Wang, Mannan, Poston, Turnbull & Summers, 2004, p.145). The design of these service delivery systems also evolved to enhance the ability of the child with disabilities and their families to function within their own home and community environment.

A study examining the type and scope of services provided to families participating in early intervention programs for childhood special education revealed that overall that programs seemed to be working directly with parents addressing a diverse array of child and family issues. However, the predominant focus of services was for the
development and functioning of the child (Mahoney & Flier, 1996). Research assessing the impact of early intervention services on 47 children and their families during a 12 month period, examined the child’s developmental functioning, mothers’ styles of interacting with their children, family functioning, and maternal stress both at the beginning and end of the study. At the midpoint of the study, mothers completed the Family-Focused Intervention Scale (Mahoney et al, 1990), which was used to classify the family-centered orientation of their services. Repeated measures of multivariate analyses were used to examine the statistical significance of overall intervention effects observed for the sample. Results of this study found considerable variability in the extent to which these programs emphasized family-centered components. Approximately 45% of families reported receiving a comprehensive array of family services, but a substantial portion of the sample reported considerable discrepancies between the type of services they were receiving and the type of services they believed were important for them and their children (Mahoney & Bella, 1998).

Concerns regarding the implementation of a family-centered model of program delivery have focused on defining family and understanding family dynamics from both the family and professional perspective (Brinker, 1992; Mahoney & Bella, 1998; Mahoney, Kaiser, Girolometto, MacDonald, Robinson, Safford & Spiker, 1990).

Research conducted in an effort to gain information from the perspective of the professional in terms of “three wishes they would make to change early intervention so that children and families would receive quality education” (Campbell & Halbert, 2002, p.213) revealed a conflict with accepted best practice of family-centered model of service delivery. The perspectives of 241 early intervention service coordinators and multiple
discipline service providers completed a survey regarding the role of families in early intervention practices. Data was analyzed utilizing constant comparison method to reduce data and use of two reviewers to compare categories of codes which were formed into themes. A third reviewer then reviewed all data and rater reliability quotient was calculated at .889. The data was then summarized quantitatively by discipline. Statements made by the professionals in this study reflected their limited understanding of family-centered approaches or discontinuity between what professionals expected to have happen in their interactions with families and what actually occurred. The professionals in this study believed that quality service delivery depended on parents changing their expectations (Campbell & Halbert, 2002).

Another study examined family-centered practice in terms of service provider’s philosophies and behaviors revealed five themes related to interaction with families, and two themes related to knowledge of children and communication. This case study which was part of a larger study included six service providers who were purposely selected for the research based on family-centered philosophy, beliefs and practices. Interview protocols were utilized and transcripts were analyzed using a constant comparison method. Validity was established using member checking and multiple informants. Themes which were identified through analysis in order of frequency were: family orientation, positiveness, sensitivity, responsiveness, friendliness and child and community skills (McWilliam, Tocci, & Harbin, 1998).

Informed by evaluation of early intervention program practices and child development theory a significant paradigm shift occurred in the 1980’s with regard to service delivery and support of families of children with disabilities. Concerns regarding
the implementation of this model of program have focused on the need to define family and understanding family dynamics from both the family and professional perspective.

*Collaborative Partnership: The Family Perspective*

In the field of special education, the term family-centered describes recommended practices characterized by an emphasis on family strengths, encouraging family choice and control over decisions about services, and collaborative relationships between parents and professionals (Blue-Banning, Summers, Frankland, Lord-Nelson, & Beegle, 2004; Bruder, 2000; Osher & Osher, 2002; Summers, Hoffman, Marquis, Turnbull & Poston, 2005). The term partnership can be defined as a relationship between a parent and one or more service providers who work collaboratively following established roles pursuing a common goal (Dunst & Paget, 1991).

A study examining the meaning of family-professional partnership from the perspective of the family identified four themes that represent family preferences and expectations for these partnerships. This study examined the perspectives of 30 Japanese mothers of children with disabilities who participated in focus groups and individual interviews during the data collection process. Interview guides were used for the focus groups and individual interviews. A constant comparison method was implemented to reduce the data and establish categories. Validity was established through member checks and multiple informants. Emerging themes included: the notion of respect in the quality of the child-professional relationship, the concept of a needs-driven professional service delivery and care, the importance of equality, interdependence, empathy, commitment, trustworthiness and communication in the relationship, and the need to stress advocacy and empowerment (Kasahara & Turnbull, 2005).
Using qualitative inquiry, researchers investigating indicators of professional behavior that facilitate collaborative partnership conducted 33 focus groups with 137 adult family members of children with and without disabilities, 53 service providers and administrators. In addition, individual interviews were conducted with 18 non-English speaking parents and 14 of their service providers. Interview guides were used for the focus groups and individual interviews. Two rounds of focus groups were conducted; the first to identify primary components of partnership and the second to verify member responses and clarify unresolved questions. Two researchers conducted each focus group which was transcribed verbatim. Qualitative analysis was conducted utilizing Ethnograph a computer software program. Six broad themes or indicators of partnership that were identified from 39 categories included: communication, commitment, equality, skills, trust and respect. Trustworthiness was established by incorporating multiple data sources, verbatim transcripts, coding checks, and member checks (Blue-Banning, Summers, Frankland, Lord-Nelson, Beegle, 2004).

Collaborative partnerships characterized by factors such as trust, respect, communication, shared vision, and cultural sensitivity were identified as critical for effective partnerships with families in decision-making about inclusion (Soodak & Erwin, 2000) and serving children with problem behaviors (Park & Turnbull, 2002).

One of the key components of a collaborative partnership is to focus on the strengths of the family (Lytle & Bordin, 2001; Salend & Duhaney, 2002; Santelli, 1995; Turnbull, Blue-Banning, Turbiville & Park, 2000). Professionals and community providers need to recognize that parents have expertise and should be considered a vital resource in the collaborative partnership (Soodak & Erwin, 2000; Osher & Osher, 2002;
Turnbull, Turnbull, Erwin & Soodak, 2006). Key partners who are connected on some level with the family “are potential providers and recipients of education, resources, and supports in a mutually reciprocal fashion” (Turnbull, Blue-Banning, Turbiville & Park 2000, and p.171). Because families work in different ways and have different resources available, they achieve different degrees of success at meeting the needs of each family member, especially when that member is a child with disabilities (Osher & Osher, 2000).

When developing an intervention plan for a child with special needs, there is a clear need to assess the child, but also gain a genuine sensitivity to the child’s family in order to select the most effective interventions, provide the most appropriate supports and services, and increase the well being of both the child and family (Lessenberry & Rehfeldt, 2000; Park, Park & Turnbull, 2000; Park & Turnbull, 2002; Soodak & Erwin, 2000; Turnbull, Blue-Banning, Turbiville & Park, 2000; Wang, Mannan, Poston, Turnbull & Summers, 2004).

A study exploring parent’s perceptions of advocacy and the impact of these efforts on their family quality of life highlighted advocacy as both an obligation and a means of improving services for their child with disabilities. This qualitative research conducted as part of a larger study included the perspectives of 104 family members who participated in focus groups and individual interviews at 3 different sites. Data analysis methods included a constant comparison analysis which generated codes, sub categories, and themes. Computer analysis using Ethnograph 5.0 and multiple researchers were incorporated to establish credibility and dependability (Wang, Mannan, Poston, Turnbull & Summers, 2004).
Parent’s perspectives on their role as advocates for their child with disabilities included a need to maintain a balance in their family lives, to be informed of their child’s daily activities, for acceptance and harmony with service providers, and to accept the “ongoing and forever struggle” (Soodak & Erwin, 2000, p.36) to help their child (Osher & Osher, 2002; Park, Park & Turnbull, 2001; Soodak & Erwin, 2000; Wang, Mannan, Poston, Turnbull & Summers, 2004). By serving as reliable allies in the quest to enhance and improve services, professionals may take much of the stress out of the process from families and provide opportunities for them to learn the benefit of being advocates for their child. Advocacy can and should be a collaborative undertaking between families and professionals (Ankeny, Wilkins, & Spain, 2009; Judge, 1997; Osher & Osher, 2002; Oark & Turnbull, 2002; Wang, Mannan, Poston, Turnbull & Summers, 2004).

Studies focusing on family-professional partnership consistently identified the importance of communication for the development of positive partnerships (Blue-Banning, Summers, Frankland, Lord-Nelson & Beegle, 2004; Keyes, 2002; Lytle & Bordin, 2001; Shapiro, Monzo, Rueda, Gomez & Blacher, 2004). Interviews conducted with families focused on the quality of home-school relationships with families of students with disabilities, who were fully mainstreamed, emphasized the need for consistent communication. These families dealt with both the general and special education bureaucracies, and appreciated efforts by professionals to keep in mind the importance of clear and consistent communication practices (Davern 1996; Salend & Duhaney, 2002; Shapiro, Monzo, Rueda, Gomez & Blacher, 2004; Soodak & Erwin, 2000).
Professionals need to be aware of personal biases and attitudes that may interfere with communicating positively with parents. Becoming proficient at open communication involves being aware of other stressors that the family may be experiencing and to always remain supportive and empathetic to the needs of the family (Kasahara & Turnbull, 2005; Lessenberry & Rehfeldt, 2000; Lord-Nelson, Summers & Turnbull, 2004; Montgomery, 2005). Interviews with parents of high school students with disabilities defined open communication as being listened to, being able to express their dreams and concerns for their children, and feeling confident that their child’s Individual Education Plan (IEP) was being developed based on their child’s needs and interests (Felber, 1997; Lee, Ostorsky, Bennett & Fowler, 2003; Salembier, 1998; Salend, 2000; Summers, Hoffman, Marquis, Turnbull & Poston, 2005).

A survey study examining the extent to which early intervention service providers considered cultural factors important and the extent to which their practice reflected recommendations in the literature revealed that lack of time, training and material impacted on their ability to implement culturally-appropriate practices. This descriptive study surveyed 123 early intervention service providers utilizing a four part instrument developed through research of the culturally-appropriate practice literature. The development of the survey included input from researchers and professionals in the field and pilot testing resulting in several revisions to insure validity. The Cronbach’s alpha were calculated to examine internal consistency reliability of scores for the 20 items comprising importance and implementation and were .93 and .89 respectively.

A key component to a collaborative partnership between parents and professionals in the field of special education is to focus on the strengths of the family.
Intervention plans developed for a child with special needs must be sensitive to the needs of the child’s family in order to select the most effective and appropriate supports and services to increase the well being of the child and family.

**Collaborative Partnership: The Professional Perspective**

Federal legislation governing education known as No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001, has had a significant impact on professionals working in the field of special education. NCLB requires special education students to meet adequate yearly progress and achieve 100 percent proficiency in reading and math by the year 2014 (“NCLB Accountability”, 2004). A study examining the perceptions of a national sample of 610 teachers of students who are deaf or hard of hearing that assessed their level of job satisfaction revealed that paperwork, state assessment tests, and lack of family involvement, were the least satisfying aspects of their jobs. A three part questionnaire was developed with input from researchers and university professors resulting in a four point Likert scale for 59 statements related to the dimensions of the research question. Reliability was established with 10 % of the surveys being assessed for researcher fidelity with data entry resulting in 100% reliability. Internal consistency with items addressing job satisfaction was evaluated using Cronbach’s alpha = .934. Validity was established with use of multiple informants. The perception of these teachers of apathy on the part of the parents may be due to factors such as logistics of work and family, transportation, previous negative experience in working with school personnel and cultural or ethnic differences (Luckner & Hawks, 2003).

Studies have shown that one of the primary issues in the development of a partnership between families and educators is a failure to establish relationships based on
trust, collaboration and empowerment. Lack of development in both research and personnel preparation makes it difficult to implement collaborative partnerships because professionals do not always know, in specific terms, what is expected of them (Blue-Banning, Summers, Frankland, Lord-Nelson & Beegle, 2004; Campbell & Halbert, 2002; Dinnebail & Hale, 1996; McWilliam, Tocci & Harbin, 1998; Soodak, Erwin, Winton, Brotherson, Turnbull, Hanson & Brault, 2002).

A qualitative analysis study conducted with 397 parents and 226 service coordinators of early intervention services identified the importance of interpersonal skills and communication skills as two of the variables that enhance or interfere with collaboration. Participants rated characteristics that helped or interfered with collaboration based on a 5 point Likert scale. Additionally they answered four open-ended questions regarding other variables that affect collaboration. Field testing for the questionnaire was conducted with 25 participants and follow up focus groups which resulted in a revision of the instructions and several question items. Constant comparison analysis was utilized for the open ended question data analysis. Intercoder reliability analysis indicated 84% agreement for the primary coders. The development of skills in these areas are crucial and should be included in personnel preparation and staff development programming for professionals working in the field of special education (Dinnebeil & Hale, 1996).

A study that examined family-centered practice in terms of service providers’ philosophies and behaviors highlighted the need for innovative approaches to staff development beyond the typical conference presentation and lecture-style workshop in
order to focus on sensitivity training to better perceive parents’ preferences and reactions (McWilliam, Tocci & Harbin, 1998).

Factors that escalate and de-escalate parent-school conflict from the perspectives of 22 parents of children with disabilities who participated in special education appeals process, 16 school administrators, and 6 mediators identified eight categories of factors that escalate parent-school conflict in special education. Individual interviews were conducted by phone following an interview guide. This interview guide was field tested and revised for content and sequence through clarifying and probing questions. Three levels of coding analysis were utilized including open, axial and selective to form a general description and analytic description of the research. Emerging patterns were checked against the data to ensure validity. Inter-rater reliability for the independent coder was 91% based on coding 25 % of the interviews. These factors, including discrepant views of a child or child’s needs, knowledge, service delivery, reciprocal power, constraints, valuation, communication and trust, provide a framework of factors that are highly interactive and dynamic (Lake & Billingsley, 2000).

Research indicates that both professionals and parents define collaborative partnerships at least in part in terms of the quality of their interpersonal relationships with one another (Blue-Banning, Summers, Frankland, Lord-Nelson, Beegle, 2004; Osher & Osher, 2002; Soodak & Erwin, 2000; Summers, Hoffman, Marquis, Turnbull & Poston, 2005; Turnbull, Blue-Banning, Turbiville, & Park, 2000). One problem in monitoring the quality of family-professional partnership has been the lack of a psychometrically acceptable and sufficiently general instrument with which to measure them. The development of the Family-Professional Partnership Scale has provided a means to assess
parents’ perceptions of the importance of and their satisfaction with family-professional partnership. Indicators were constructed from qualitative research on families with children with and without disabilities. A pilot instrument that assessed ten items on the importance of the item for a partnership with a professional was tested with six parents and service providers to provide initial feedback. A follow up field test was conducted with 291 parents who rated 60 items for importance resulting in a mean importance range from 3.89-4.89.

Exploratory factor analysis resulted in a reconfiguration of the six domains of partnership into two sub scales, child- focused relationship and family-focused relationship. Confirmatory analysis of the two sub scales revealed Cronbach alpha for child-focused factors= .92 and family focused factors= .91 demonstrating a sufficiently unidimensional, internally consistent and strongly correlated scales which could be used as a single measure. A second in Cronbach alpha for importance= .93 and satisfaction= .96 established psychometric properties of field test with 205 participants using the 18 item partnership scale with items rating importance and satisfaction resulted the reduced scale. The researchers who developed this instrument have recommended its possible use with professionals as a basis for both pre-service and in-service training on family-professional partnerships (Summers, Hoffman, Marquis, Turnbull, Poston &Lord-Nelson, 2005).

There is currently a significant trend in the field of special education to focus on resolving disputes as early as possible. Preventive strategies such as parent-professional partnerships, peer mediation, and ongoing staff development are effective in encouraging cooperative school community cultures (Blue-Banning, Summers, Frankland, Lord-

Research indicates that parents and professionals both define collaborative partnerships in terms of the quality of their interpersonal relationships with one another. Lack of development in both research and personnel preparation makes it difficult to implement collaborative partnerships because professionals do not always know, in specific terms, what is expected of them.

Staff Development

Congress enacted the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation in 2001, which mandated the development of curriculum frameworks and delineated specific achievement on standardized tests for all students. This standards movement has also created a heightened interest in the professional development of teachers who have a direct impact on these students (Hirsch, 2005; Kelleher, 2003; Morris, Chrispeels & Burke, 2003).

In 1957, the National Society for the Study of Education published a comprehensive book called In-service Education for Teachers, Supervisors and Administrators which challenged previous beliefs about teacher in-service education. This ground breaking work proposed that school administrators and teaching staff collaborate together in providing in-service education (Darling-Hammond, 1995). This paradigm shift provided a basis for viewing teachers as both learners and teachers who, just like their students, learn by,” doing, reading and reflecting” (Darling-Hammond, 1995, p. 597).
This shift from a top-down training approach where teachers are told that understanding of teaching and learning are more important than their own, now embraced the knowledge that the teachers gained from working with their students. Traditional professional development activities consisting of teacher workshops and faculty meetings with guest speakers were becoming criticized as having no observable effect on the education of their students. This type of in-service program rarely provided teachers enough time or skills to develop new strategies based on what they learned (Hirsch, 2005; Kelleher, 2003; Morris, 2003).

The National Staff Development Council (2001) asserted that professional development that improves student learning focuses on the results we want for adults and students, is aligned with standards that define quality practice and is focused on the daily work of teaching (Hirsch, 2005). As schools seek to embrace a diversity of student learners, the context and process of learning must be re-defined in ways to engage students and teachers in active pursuit of learning goals. The model of simply telling factual information must be replaced by joining experiential learning and content knowledge (Ackerman, 2003; Darling-Hammond, 1995; Lieberman, 2005).

In an effort to meet the challenge of educating diverse learners, teachers have begun to reach out to other professionals by networking through use of the internet. The concept of this network is to promote a sharing of ideas and expertise with others who may have similar or related interests in the field of education (Guskey, 2003; Morris, 2003; Lieberman, 2005). These communities of practice also know as networks, collaboratives, coalitions, or partnerships, offer teachers professional development that differ in quality and kind from those available inside school or traditional programs.
These external networks provide opportunities for teachers to come together across schools and regions in professional learning communities. Professionals may also develop internal networks which provide opportunities for them to share expertise developed externally with colleagues in their schools (Morris, 2003).

Research conducted on professional development in school districts across the country supports the need for a change in thinking. Findings of a national study in four reform minded districts revealed that professional development spending in these districts ranged from $1000- $5000 per teacher which represented 1.5%-4% of districts total budgets (Kelleher, 2003). This research also highlighted the issue that these districts spent more than they thought on professional development and that it was not linked to district goals. Research examining characteristics of effective professional development programs revealed inconsistency and contradicting information and highlight the need for a clear articulation of goals (Guskey, 2003). An example of this inconsistency was in the need for sufficient time and resources for effective professional development, yet the amount of time spent on these activities were unrelated to student achievement. This example highlights the importance of professional development activities to be well organized, carefully structured and purposefully directed.

Professional development activities should be closely linked to district goals as well as to outcomes for students (Darling-Hammond, 1995; Kelleher, 2003; Lieberman, 1995). Administrators must envision the national reform agenda for each classroom teacher’s need to learn through provision of identified structures and supports. This expanded view of professional development moves away from the traditional in-service
training mode toward long-term and continuous learning in the context of the school and classroom. Professional development that is nurtured both within and outside the context of the classroom, that is both individual and collective, personal and professional, will better enable teachers to meet the diverse needs of their students (Lieberman, 1995).

As policy, research and best practice guidelines promote the education and achievement of all students, an expanded and dynamic view of professional learning is needed to reflect this challenging goal.

*Harbor School Staff Development Program Description*

The staff development program as it relates to parent-professional collaboration at the Harbor School has been in place for the past six years. The program was put in place to assist the Harbor School staff in gaining a heightened awareness of the needs of each student’s family. It emphasizes the importance for staff and parents to have a collaborative relationship while working together to define individualized goals for the child.

The current staff development program also stresses the importance for staff to immediately develop and maintain open lines of communication with the parent or guardians of the child. This program aims to assist the professionals in researching and identifying the individual needs of the family as well as assisting them in gaining information and resources for their children outside of the immediate school community.

The staff development program is needed for a variety of reasons but among the most important are the 1997 Amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) which is a legislative requirement that establishes a role for parents in the educational planning process. Outside of the legal requirement, the field of special education is highly
litigated due to disagreements on service delivery and appropriate placement of the child; therefore it is crucial for the Harbor School staff to be sensitive to the issues the parents have dealt with in the past.

A family-centered approach has also evolved in the field of special education which focuses on respecting families’ priorities and decisions. The staff must also assist families in identifying appropriate goals that will help the child function not only in school but in the natural environment of their homes and communities. It is necessary for the professionals of the Harbor School to continue to learn how to become and remain allies with parents while providing services for their child. Taking into account the severity of the disabilities of the children, it is crucial for the staff to aid the parents in gaining better access to information and services for their child whose needs will last well beyond their years at the Harbor School.

The Harbor School has several staff development program activities regarding parent-professional collaboration in place. A review of the professional development logs from the 2003-04 school years to the 2009-10 school years reveals that the staff receives on average two to three workshops per year focused on this topic. In addition to these workshop training sessions, opportunities for parent-professional collaboration are available during Open House, Parent-Teacher Conferences, Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings, and Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) meetings.

One of the initial workshops focusing on parent-professional collaboration was entitled, “Life After 3:00PM” which was held during the 2003-04 school year. The idea for this program evolved from conversations between this researcher and a teacher at the Harbor School. The teacher, who was also a parent of an adopted child with severe
disabilities, began to share stories of her challenges as a parent of a child with disabilities. As a result of these conversations, the idea for an interactive panel consisting of this teacher and other staff members who had children with disabilities began to take shape. Each staff member was asked to generate specific questions/topics of interest which would be reviewed by the panel prior to the workshop.

The workshop was provided to the entire staff and opened with each panel member projecting a picture of their child or young adult onto a large screen while providing basic background information such as current age, classification, age diagnosed, educational program and siblings. Specific topic areas which were generated by the staff were then discussed as each panel member took turns describing their daily experiences and challenges in raising their child with disabilities. Topic areas included hygiene, homework, communication, behavior, child care, community integration and family issues/concerns.

Another workshop featured the teacher referred to previously who has an adopted daughter with severe disabilities who shared her perspective of sitting on the” other side of the table” at an IEP meeting. This interactive workshop utilized a role play situation simulating the very first IEP meeting that this teacher attended as a parent. She vividly recounted the meeting which was dominated by a large group of professionals who worked with her daughter. The Harbor School staff participated by playing the roles of the various professionals who left this parent feeling totally confused and overwhelmed by the end of the meeting.

During the 2004-05 school year, a workshop entitled, “Riding the Bus with my Sister,” featured author Rachel Simon who discussed her book and subsequent television
movie. The book and film depicted the life of her sister who was developmentally
disabled and how she spent her days riding the buses in the small city where she lived.
The bus route and people she met along the way became her social connection to the
world in spite of family pressure for her to find employment at a workshop. The author
learned about self-advocacy and self-determination as she experienced her sister’s life by
riding the bus with her for a week. She came to realize that although her sister’s life was
not what she would have wanted, it was a full and rewarding life for her sister.

The paradigm shift in staff development practices chronicled in the book *In-
Service Education for Teachers, Supervisors, and Administrators* (The National Society
for the Study of Education, 1957) challenged previous beliefs about teacher in-service
education. This work proposed that school administrators and teachers collaborate
together in providing in-service training. The administration and staff at the Harbor
School have attempted to promote this type of staff development as noted by the above
three examples of workshops. These workshops go beyond the collaboration of
administration and staff as they also included parent and sibling participation in these
training sessions.

As noted in the literature on professional development, staff training activities
should be closely linked to district goals as well as to outcomes for students and their
families. An expanded view of this training moves away from the traditional in-service
training mode toward long term and continuous learning in the context of the school and
classroom. The professional staff should be involved in the identification of structures
and supports that will better enable them to meet the diverse needs of their students and
families. This research study will seek to support this expanded view of professional
Professional Development

development by addressing the professional perspective on the kinds of training they consider essential to achieve a collaborative partnership with families of their children with disabilities.

This literature review has highlighted the importance of a collaborative partnership between professionals and families in the field of special education. This partnership is supported by policy, research and best practice guidelines. In spite of legislation and the desires of parents and professionals the development of collaborative partnerships is not always achieved (Blue-Banning, Summers, Frankland, Lord-Nelson & Beegle, 2004; Dinnebeil & Hale, 1996; Fyling & Sandvin, 1999; Hilton & Henderson, 1993; Keyes, 2002). Limited evidence available on professionals’ perceptions of partnerships indicates that professional attitudes, lack of training and knowledge, and/or lack of experience may contribute to conflict in the collaborative partnership (Bherring, 2002; Campbell & Halbert, 2002; Croll, 2001; Dinnebeil & Hale, 1996; Luckner & Hanks, 2003; McWilliam, Tocci, & Harbin, 1998). Research focused on family-professional partnership from the professional perspective is needed to identify effective training program components to connect the current policy-to-practice gap (Blue-Banning, Summers, Frankland, Lord-Nelson & Beegle, 2004; Kelly & Barnard, 1999; Lake & Billingsley, 2000; McWilliam, Tocci & Harbin, 1998; Summers, Hoffman, Marquis, Turnbull & Poston, 2005).

Conceptual Framework

The framework for this study begins with the child with disabilities who is related to and dependent upon family and professionals to design an appropriate individual education program including needed supports and services (see Figure 1).
As policy research and best practice guidelines continue to support and promote the goal of a collaborative partnership between professionals and parents of children with disabilities it is critical that research focused on the perspectives of professionals be conducted to identify components of staff development programs that are needed to achieve this goal. Research previously conducted with the students’ families and as documented in the literature review identified communication, sensitivity to family needs, and knowledge of supports and resources as three areas needed to support a collaborative partnership. The challenges and benefits of achieving a collaborative partnership between families and professionals in the field of special education will be identified and discussed to inform practitioners who work with parents of students with disabilities.
Figure 1. Conceptual framework for staff development training needs leading to collaboration between families and professionals in special education.
Chapter 3

Methodology

This inquiry utilized a descriptive case study design to provide a rich description of a single program. This type of design can be most useful in informing stakeholders about what is actually happening in a program (Fitzpatrick, Sanders & Worthen, 2004; Stake, 1995; Turnbull, Friesen & Ramirez, 1998).

Creswell (1998) defines a case study as “an exploration of a ‘bounded system’ or a case over time” (p.61). The data collected for a case study involves accessing multiple sources of information to gain in-depth information needed to provide a complete picture. One private special education school that provides a staff development program was included in the study. This research design meets the definition of an instrumental case study as it seeks to provide needed data to inform all professionals working in the field of special education (Stake, 1995). Information regarding the history, purpose, benefits and challenges of collaborative partnership was collected through the use of surveys, document review and focus groups in order to gain a complete picture of the program.

Setting

The site selected for the study was a private special education school that serves children with disabilities between the ages of five and twenty-one years. The students’ classifications include: Other Health Impaired, Multiple Disabilities, Mild and Moderate Cognitive Impairment, Communication Impairment, Autism, Auditorily Impaired, Traumatic Brain Injury and Specific Learning Disability. The students’ families also represent a range of different ethnic, religious, racial and socio-economic backgrounds.
The school services children of families living in thirty-eight different public school districts representing three counties in New Jersey. Each sending school district contracts the school to provide the appropriate services to meet the child’s individual educational needs. The researcher who is also the Principal of the school, which makes the site for the case study easily accessible, made the selection of this site. Two pilot studies conducted with the families at this school in 2006 and 2007, used the Family-Professional Partnership Scale Survey and follow-up focus groups to provide data on collaborative partnership from the perspective of the family. The three areas that were identified as needing improvement to assist in supporting a collaborative partnership were: communication, sensitivity to family needs, and knowledge of supports and resources.

The researcher had informed the professional staff about the current study over the course of the school year in an effort to promote some reflection of the topic before the formal process was implemented. Marshall and Rossman (2006) noted that there are both positive and negative aspects in conducting research within your own setting which should be considered before conducting the study. The positive aspects include easy accessibility to site location and participants, reduced time needed for data collection and” the potential to build trusting relationships” (p.62). The negative aspects include issues with role release and expectations on the part of the researcher, potential for bias, and the “risk of uncovering potentially damaging knowledge” (p.61). The professional staff at the school is mandated by the state of New Jersey to complete twenty hours of staff training per year toward the completion of 100 hours in a five-year cycle (NJAC 6A: 9-15 (1b)). The state guidelines stress the importance of connecting staff development
training to school wide goals focusing on student outcomes. The goal of achieving a collaborative partnership with our families remains a priority as the severity of the disabilities of the students’ who attend the school present significant challenges to both staff and parents.

Participants

The participants in this study included classroom teachers and therapists identified through application of purposeful sampling strategy (Creswell, 1998; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). This sampling method is consistent with case study design as it allows for different perspectives on an issue from those who are directly involved with the issue. The study participants included all twelve-classroom teachers who all have relationships with their students’ families and receive required staff development training. Ten therapists (six speech therapists, three occupational therapists and one physical therapist) who all have relationships with their students’ families and receive required staff development training also participated in the study. The teachers and therapists included in the study work with students age five through 21 years of age. This resulted in a total of twenty-two participants who were included in the study. Excluded from the study were the paraprofessional staffs, the nursing staff, the specialist staff and two physical therapists who only work one day per week.

Procedure

The data collection process for this study used a mixed methods approach. The purpose of multiple measures is to observe the staff development program from different perspectives so that it may be accurately described. The benefits of using a mixed method
approach include increased validity in gaining a complete picture of the program (Fitzpatrick, Sanders & Worthen, 2004; Stake, 1995).

The quantitative method of data collection consisted of the document review of the school data on professional development its quantity and duration of training related to family-professional partnership. The other quantitative aspect of data collection was provided by a survey which used a Likert scale to gauge staff perspectives related to the staff development program. The focus group process provided the qualitative method of data collection which was a follow-up to the survey and provided more depth to the staff perspectives about the current staff-training program. The document review also used qualitative methods to analyze assessments and evaluations of various training programs. This data was used to answer the research question and also served to provide a detailed description of the staff development program in regard to family-professional partnership in this school.

**Document Review**

A review of the staff development training logs starting from the 2003-04 school year through the 2009-10 school years was conducted in order to provide a detailed description of this program as it pertains to the family-school partnership. A chronology of activities was compiled and feedback generated from staff evaluations of these activities was also included. This chronology served to provide a picture of the consistency and duration of these activities over a specific time period. Information from staff needs assessment documents over the same time period in the area of staff development in support of family-professional partnership was also reviewed. This document review also included results of both pilot study research projects conducted at
the school with the families of our students in March 2006 and February 2007. Results of these research studies were shared with the staff during in-service training programs.

**Survey**

The Family-Professional Partnership Scale survey (see Appendix A) was utilized to gain the professional perspective on the staff development program in regard to family-professional partnership. As previously noted, the original survey was developed by researchers at the University of Kansas (Summers, Hoffman, Marquis, Turnbull, Poston & Lord-Nelson, 2005) who gave this researcher permission to use the survey for a pilot study conducted at the school with parents in March 2006. A follow-up study involving focus groups was conducted in February 2007.

The surveys were distributed at an in-service meeting time during school hours. The classroom teachers and therapists were asked to complete the surveys on an individual basis during this time, and were asked to turn in the survey at the end of the in-service time period (1.5 hours). The first part of the survey contains questions about the background and experience of each of the professional staff. It also asked about their communication with parents and training received on parental support outside of the school program. The second part of the survey contained fifteen questions with a rating scale from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied) to rate each item regarding the school’s staff development program with regard to family-professional partnership.

**Focus Groups**

Upon completion of the surveys and document review, focus groups were conducted to provide more depth to the staff perspective in regard to the current staff-training program. The benefit of scheduling these groups after the survey and document
review was to verify data already collected through multiple perspectives. This also provided an opportunity for clarification of any issues that may have surfaced during the study.

The hallmark of a focus group, according to Morgan (1997), is their specific use of group interaction to gather data and insight that would be “less accessible without the interaction found in a group” (Morgan, p.2). The focus group aspect of this study provided a qualitative complement to the quantitative portion of the study, which were the survey and document review. Another benefit to the focus group is that it provides member checking and shifts the validity from the researcher to the participants in the study (Creswell & Miller, 2001).

The focus group format for this study consisted of four groups. The first group consisted of three teachers and two therapists, the second group had two teachers and two therapists, the third group contained three teachers and three therapists and the last group included four teachers and two therapists. The groups were organized to include teachers and therapists to give the groups a broader scope of perspectives on the staff development program with regard to family-professional partnership. The formation of these groups was also according to scheduling convenience for the individual staff members. The teachers typically experience interaction with families on a more consistent/ daily basis, whereas the therapists typically interact with families on a more infrequent basis. The focus groups were held in a meeting room in the school during school hours at a time mutually convenient for the participants. The group ran for an hour and a half to two hours, and was audio taped and transcribed at a later time.
The participants in each focus group were asked to reflect on fifteen questions (see Appendix B) which served as a follow-up to the survey question regarding the staff development program. As noted in Patton (1990) a focus group provides a semi-structured social format where people can reflect on their personal views in the context of others. At the conclusion of the session the researcher took a few minutes to clarify data or answer questions as needed. All recorded data was transcribed verbatim and offered to participants for review prior to data analysis.

The issue of trustworthiness between the researcher and participants was challenging due to the nature of the supervisory role of the researcher to the participants. The researcher remained diligent in keeping an awareness of this relationship and the possible bias it presented. The benefit for the participants was an opportunity to “vent” some of their issues/concerns with their relationship with our families as well as give their input as to the kinds of training they felt would be helpful to better meet the needs of our families.

Tape-recorded data was transcribed as soon as possible after each focus group was completed. The researcher also added comments and anecdotal information during the transcription process in order to provide a more accurate context to the transcribed text. The researcher kept all data in a locked file cabinet and it will be maintained for three years following the completion of the research. As per research protocol this data will be destroyed after the three year time period via shredding of hard documents, destruction of computer disks, and permanent deletion of all computer files.
Chapter Four

Data Analysis

This chapter will describe the steps used to analyze the data from the document review, surveys and focus groups. The analysis will focus on answering the research question regarding components and structures of staff development programs considered essential by professionals in special education to develop and maintain a collaborative partnership with their students' families.

Step 1 - Data Management Throughout the data collection process, there were specific procedures that were implemented and followed for data management. Wolcott (1997) notes that first-time qualitative researchers face their biggest challenge not in gathering the data, but in, "figuring out what to do with the data they get" (Wolcott, 1997, p. 9). At the conclusion of each focus group, the audio recordings were transcribed using a word processing program. This program was also used to type up comments and memos throughout the process. This data was also saved onto a separate storage device as a back-up so that this information was recorded and saved.

A research log was maintained throughout the data collection process in order to record the sequence of activities, note reflections and record decisions made regarding the research process. This log included personal notes and comments which served to provide more depth to the analysis process. As per research protocol, all data was kept in a secure area and will be maintained for a three year period after the completion of the research. This data will then be destroyed via shredding of hard documents and permanent deletion of all computer files.
Miles and Huberman (1997) point out that during early data analysis, the researcher should take time to pause and reflect on the main concepts, themes and issues seen and heard throughout this phase of the process. This idea of reflection was implemented as part of the data analysis plan, which was integrated throughout the study (Miles & Huberman, 1997).

**Step 2- Describing Staff Development for Family-Professional Partnership in Special Education.**

At the completion of the data collection process, analysis of the data incorporated both quantitative and qualitative methods. All transcripts were typed using a numbered line format and included field note comments in parentheses. Professional development logs from 2003-04 to 2009-10 school years served as the primary document review. These logs provided data regarding the history and purpose of the staff development program and also reflected the legal mandates for this program. These logs included record of in-service training given by in-house staff and outside agencies. Examples of in-house training activities included: interactive parent panel, parent survey results, and parent focus group results. Examples of outside agency training included: legal issues, financial planning, and guardianship.

Research participants were given copies of staff training logs from 2003-04 to the 2009-10 school years prior to completing the surveys. Participants were asked to review and reflect on the nature, scope and duration of training activities focusing on parent-professional partnership. These types of activities included those addressing the components of communication, sensitivity/support, and knowledge of resources.
Data collected from the completed surveys was entered into a computer software program SPSS for analysis. Responses to the Likert scale were analyzed by descriptive statistics (mean, mode, median) and were also summarized into bar graphs as a visual aid for dissemination of results. The analysis of the staff surveys was primarily quantitative, as the Likert scale provided statistical information to measure attitudes and opinions of the sample. Participants were given a copy of the results from the SPSS computer analysis of the survey for review, reflection and feedback prior to the focus groups.

The first section of the survey provided background information on the research participants (classroom teachers and therapists). This information assisted in providing a more in-depth description of the experience level and previous training on parent-professional partnership through staff development activities. In addition, the surveys provided personal background details such as being a parent and having a child with a disability.

The second section of the survey revealed staff opinions and attitudes regarding the staff development program relating to family-professional partnership. Areas involving program components and structures which received a 15% or higher dissatisfaction rating as indicated on the accompanying Likert scale were identified as being statistically significant for purposes of this study.

Focus groups were then held as a follow-up to the surveys to gain more in-depth information to better describe the staff development program. Each participant was provided with a copy of the focus group transcript for their review, reflection and feedback prior to beginning analysis. Data from the focus group transcripts was entered into a software program Atlas.ti to assist with coding and synthesizing material. The
focus group data was analyzed using qualitative methods as it was coded and summarized into major themes. Some of the codes which emerged from the focus groups were derived from the literature and previous research conducted with the parents, while other codes were specific to this case study.

The coding process included a micro-analysis method, which is described by Strauss and Corbin (1998) as a "line by line analysis of the words in front of you to look for codes or key categories" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p.57). A domain analysis was utilized to further analyze emerging themes to search for all possible meanings (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). Each theme contains supporting data from document review, survey results, and focus group conclusions.

**Step 3 - Develop an Understanding of Staff Development and Its Impact**

Upon completion of the initial review of the entire data record, each data set was separated (document review, survey, focus groups) and organized into what Weitzman (2000) refers to as a data display chart (Weitzman, 2000, p. 806). This display served to highlight the broad themes/findings with supporting codes listed as analyzed for each data set (see Appendix C - Summary of Codes Linked to Findings). This chart also assists with connecting the data back to the original research question through a visual illustration.

The data for this case study was analyzed progressively starting with the professional development logs. These logs served as a framework documenting the history, purpose, requirements and chronology of the staff development program listing types of training, consistency and duration of these activities from the 2003-04 school year to the 2009-10 school year. A review of the professional development logs from 2003-04 to the 2009-
10 school year reveals 88 activities focusing on parent-professional partnership and professional development guidelines/requirements (see Appendix D- Staff Development Activities from 2003-2010 on Family-Professional Partnership). The components of these activities include: guidelines/requirements for staff development, needs assessments, sensitivity, communication, and knowledge of supports/resources. These activities are broken down by category in Figure 2 below.

*Figure 2- Staff Development Program Components*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COMPONENT</th>
<th>NUMBER</th>
<th>PERCENT %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional Development Guidelines/Requirements</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needs Assessments</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensitivity</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>20 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of Supports/Resources</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>59 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The surveys provided the second layer of data which highlighted statistical information measuring the staff opinions and attitudes regarding the staff development program. The focus groups served as the third layer of data and provided a more in-depth perspective on the staff development program as related to family-professional partnership.
The development of the data display offered an opportunity to pull the separate data pieces together in an effort to start making connections between these pieces of information. As noted by Richards (2005), the process of "exploring threads of meaning and patterns of responses" was then begun (Richards, 2005, p.59).

As the list of codes from the focus groups was compiled it became evident that some of the codes were interactive as they impacted and overlapped one another. All data was compiled and analyzed to provide a rich description of the staff development program as it relates to family-professional partnership and its impact on the staff within this site.

*Step 4 - Create and Compare Perspectives*

The final step of this case study analysis focused on what Stake (1995) refers to as "watching closely and thinking as deeply as possible" (Stake, 1995, p. 77) on my observations of the case. After each data set was pulled apart, coded, and codes linked, this coded data was then put back together and organized into themes. The final themes/findings served to identify the components and structures of staff development programs needed to achieve a collaborative partnership between professionals and families of children with disabilities. The findings also serve to provide a rich description of the staff development program related to family-professional partnership.

A case study, as viewed by Stake (1995) requires extensive verification through triangulation and member checking. He also provides a "critique checklist" (Stake, 1995, p.131) for a case study and shares 20 criteria for assessing a good case study report. This checklist was utilized as a guide during the final stages of this study.
The validity of the data was demonstrated by using triangulation, member checking and researcher reflexivity. The use of multiple measures and multiple informants incorporated triangulation. Creswell and Miller (2000) note that as a validity procedure triangulation is “a systematic process of sorting through the data” (Creswell, 2000 p.127) in an effort to identify common themes or categories by reducing repetitive information.

Member checking as described by Lincoln and Guba (1985) is the most important technique to establish validity. It consists of taking data and interpretation back to participants in the study so they can confirm the credibility of the information and narrative account (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Creswell, 1998; Stake, 1995; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Member checking was provided during debriefing sessions after the focus group and upon review of the survey results and transcribed notes by the participants.

In addition to the importance of establishing validity of the study, Creswell (1998) notes that "assertions or an interpretation" (Creswell, 1998, p.63) of the meaning of the case be detailed in the final interpretive stage of the research. This phase of the analysis included efforts to make generalizations from the findings to inform stakeholders not only at the local level but to all those who work in this challenging field.

Researcher reflexivity, as described by Creswell and Miller (2000), involves a process where the researcher identifies and acknowledges” personal beliefs, values and biases that may shape the inquiry” (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p.127). My role as supervisor for the research participants will have an effect on this study. It was important for this researcher to include a section on the role of the researcher to acknowledge and
describe my beliefs and biases. This section will be included in the discussion chapter.

This idea of reflection was implemented and used throughout the study.
Chapter Five

Results

This research study was conducted to identify from the perspective of the professionals at the Harbor School what they consider are the essential components and structures of the professional development program to develop and maintain a collaborative partnership with their students' families. Results of the analysis of the data collected from the site including document review, surveys and focus groups are reported below.

Sensitivity

Sensitivity to the needs of the parents of the Harbor School students is the first theme/finding that was reflected across all data sets and is a critical component of parent-professional partnership. The need for the staff to gain a perspective as to the uniqueness of each family better enables these professionals to support the challenge of raising and educating a child with special needs. As noted in Figure 2, a review of the professional development logs reveals that training in this area occurs 1 time per year. Following is a brief description of some of the activities focusing on parent sensitivity.

One of the initial workshops focusing on family-professional collaboration was entitled, "Life After 3:00 PM," which was held during the 2003-04 school year. This parent sensitivity panel workshop was provided to the entire staff and opened with each panel member projecting a picture of their child or young adult onto a large screen while providing basic background information such as current age, classification, age diagnosed, educational/ adult program, and siblings. Specific topic areas which were generated by the staff were then discussed as each panel member took turns describing their daily experiences and challenges in raising their child with disabilities. Topic areas
included: homework, hygiene, communication, behavior, child care, community integration and family issues/concerns.

Another workshop featured a teacher who has an adopted daughter with severe disabilities who shared her perspective of sitting on the "other side of the table" at an IEP meeting. This interactive workshop utilized a role play situation simulating the very first IEP meeting that this teacher attended as a parent. She vividly recounted the meeting which was dominated by a large group of professionals who worked with her daughter. The Harbor School staff participated by playing the role of the various professionals who left this parent feeling totally confused and overwhelmed by the end of the meeting. One of the basic issues that this workshop highlighted was this parent's frustration at just trying to keep everyone's name and title straight.

A workshop that focused on the theme of sensitivity featured a guest speaker, Paul Wichansky, who was an adult with cerebral palsy. Mr. Wichansky provided the staff with poignant stories about the challenges and triumphs of living with a disability. He spoke at length about his parents and the tremendous role they played in his positive outlook and determination to succeed in spite of his many obstacles.

During the 2004-05 school year, a workshop entitled, "Riding the Bus with My Sister," featured author Rachel Simon who discussed her book and subsequent television film which depicted the life of her sister who was developmentally disabled and how she spent her days riding the buses in the small city where she lived. The bus route and people she met along the way became her social network and connection to the world in spite of family pressure for her to find employment at a workshop. The author learned about self-advocacy and self-determination as she experienced her sister's life by riding the bus with
her for one week. She came to realize that although her sister's life was not what she would have wanted, it was a full and meaningful life for her sister.

During the 2008-09 school year, an in-service program entitled, "Special Children, Challenged Parents (The Struggles and Rewards of Raising a Child with Disability)", based on the book by Dr. Robert Naseef, was presented to the staff of our three schools. Dr. Naseef, a professional psychologist and father of a son with autism, shared his experiences through his unique dual role as parent and professional as he navigates through his journey in raising his son.

This workshop served as a bridge to our own parent panel as the speaker spoke from both roles, that of being a parent and professional dealing with disability. As a father he shared his insight into the feelings of anger, grief, and isolation felt by many families. As a professional he offered the wisdom to focus on the things that could be controlled, things to celebrate, the role of acceptance, and sensitivity to the needs of siblings.

These workshops served to provide a glimpse into the lives of our students outside of the classroom and to assist the staff in gaining a better understanding and empathy as to the needs of the family. The surveys given to the participants provided data as to the attitude of the staff regarding the staff program related to sensitivity to the needs of the family (Summers, Hoffman, Marquis, Turnbull, Poston & Lord-Nelson, 2005).

There were seven questions on the survey that related to the area of sensitivity to the needs of the family. The questions that received a cumulative percent rating of 15% or higher for responses 1 (very dissatisfied), 2 (dissatisfied), and 3 (neither satisfied or dissatisfied) were identified as statistically significant. Using this criteria, there were three questions in this category.
Question 17 on the survey asks about the satisfaction that the staff member has that the staff development program at Harbor School… "helps you to value your students' parents' opinions about their child's needs." One person responded dissatisfied, four people responded neither dissatisfied or satisfied, resulting in a cumulative percent of 22.7% of the total responses.

Question 21 on the survey asks about the satisfaction that the staff member has that the staff development program…” helps you to protect your students' families' privacy." One staff member responded dissatisfied and three people responded neither dissatisfied or satisfied, resulting in a cumulative percent of 18.2% of the total responses.

Question 24 on the survey asks about the satisfaction that the staff member has that the staff development program…” helps you to be a person your students' family can depend on and trust." One staff member responded dissatisfied and 4 staff responded neither dissatisfied or satisfied, resulting in a cumulative percent of 22.7% of the total responses.

The remaining questions in the area of sensitivity are: #15, #19, #22, and #23. The results of the responses to these questions are listed below:

Question 15- The staff development program at the Harbor School…"helps you to treat your students with dignity." Total cumulative percent rating of 95.5% of the staff are satisfied /very satisfied.

Question 19- The staff development program at the Harbor School…”helps you to be available to parents when they need you." Total cumulative percent rating of 95.5% of the staff are satisfied/very satisfied.
Question 22- The staff development program at the Harbor School…"helps you to show respect for your students' families' values and beliefs." Total cumulative percent rating of 95.5% of the staff are satisfied/very satisfied.

Question 23- The staff development program at the Harbor School…"helps you to listen to your students' family without judging them." Total cumulative percent rating of 95.5% of the staff are satisfied/very satisfied.

"I think that when our staff members who are parents of special needs children got up and spoke…it gave me a real sense of empathy for what goes on after we leave here each day, the struggles and how it never ends…"

The discussion on sensitivity to the needs of the students' families focused on the Parent Sensitivity Panel workshop that was held in November 2003. Although this program was provided more than six years prior, it was mentioned several times during the course of each focus group. This workshop was one of the initial programs that focused on the topic of family-professional partnership and remains a pivotal point in the chronology of this topic in the Harbor School staff development program. Several staff members expressed the need for this type of program to be given on an ongoing basis as…" everyone found this to be so powerful that it needs to be done on a regular basis because of new staff that come in…"

Another staff member pointed out that even for the veteran staff it was important for them to be reminded of the many challenges faced by the parents. She talked about the change in her own attitude when she became a parent herself and how that changed how she judged the parents of her students. She also went on to comment…" to hear the parents and how they struggle, to hear it more often, just reminds us…"
One staff member spoke about this ongoing struggle in relating a story about one of her students' parents who told her that the only day of the year that she feels sorry for herself for her situation with her child is on the day of the IEP when the disability is "driven home…” Another staff member commented, "I think that the IEP meetings are overwhelming for parents…” as there is a lot of information that is presented at this meeting. Another participant commented, "I think about the parents listening to all these things we are saying and try to remember that we are talking about their child…”

An issue that seemed to be a constant presence throughout the groups was the importance of understanding the dynamics of each family in order to form and maintain a collaborative partnership."…maybe some training in family dynamics or something like that could help us, not that it would change the situation but at least we could be more sensitive to it…” Another perspective on the theme of sensitivity to family needs shared by several staff members was reflected in this statement," In some cases you just have to say that I will do the best that I can for this kid on my own because at home there is nobody to help me for whatever reason…” This statement generated a lively discussion and another participant noted"" some parents are capable and some are not."

One of the staff members brought up the issue of parents feeling guilty about their child's disability and "…you get to see sometimes that they must be feeling, first off that the child is my responsibility and maybe I did something wrong, almost like a whole blame thing…”The other members of the group also spoke about their experiences with different parents over their years of experience and agreed that this feeling of guilt or blame seemed to be present in some families.
"The area we need to focus on and get more training on is how to move parents through the whole denial process…"

This comment brought up a lot of discussion about the issue of denial that some parents experience in raising their child with special needs. This theme is also connected to communication as articulated by another staff member,"…besides the intelligence level of the parent there is also the emotional piece of how far they have come along in accepting their child's disability and to me in my years here is where the big glitch comes in my communication with parents and trying to move them along in accepting the things that we can change and what things we can't change about their disability…”

Another area connected to family dynamics which also flowed along the discussion on denial and blame, was the importance of developing a cultural awareness in supporting a partnership with students' families. One staff member commented"…I remember one student… we talked about cutting her hair so that she could be more independent with her grooming and hygiene…her parents kept saying that they would and never did…we did eventually find out that in her culture her hair meant power…”

One staff member highlighted this issue with this story:

Some people from other cultures just don't believe in medicine, and on graduation day a parent said to me do you think if I gave my son the pill would he be able to read and write? That is the whole thing so I said I don't think so and he said he didn't think so either. He was graduating and the whole time he was here he had not been medicated and he had severe anxiety, but we could never get the point across…

The discussion on parent sensitivity also touched upon the attitude of staff and how sometimes we are quick to judge how parents deal with different situations with their children. One staff member pointed out, "…knowing a little more about the parents picking their battles, which we tend to be critical of, was pretty important to know…we
are so quick to criticize sometimes…” Another staff member suggested that, "...I think that it has a lot to do with trust...I don't know how you go through a school day and not have the support of the parents...you have got to have the support of the parents to benefit the child…"

The idea of gaining perspective was shared by another staff member who noted that,"...we probably all think that we are the experts and I am sure when we are presented with any kind of issue, we think our perspective is the right one because we know a little bit better, but maybe we don't…"

The need for staff to gain a perspective as to the uniqueness of each family better enables these professionals to support the challenge of raising and educating a child with special needs. The idea of being sensitive to the needs of the students' families is also reflected in the next component which is communication.

Communication

Communication with the parents of the students at the Harbor School is the second theme/finding that was highlighted across all three data sets and is another important component needed to support a family-professional partnership in special education. This communication may take many forms including daily notes, phone calls, newsletters and social conversation. A review of the professional development logs reveals that activities focused on communication took place approximately two times per year (see Figure 2). Following is a brief description of some of the activities focusing on parent communication.

One of the workshops provided on a yearly basis and generally held in September or early October is Open House preparation. This meeting is held prior to the school’s Open
House when families are invited to come into the school in the evening to meet with the school staff. This preparation focuses on assisting the staff to reach out to their student's families as they work on developing an open line of communication by asking the parents to complete a Provision for Communication form. This form is sent home prior to the Open House evening and helps to establish a mutually convenient method of communication between home and school. All staff attends both the preparation meeting and the Open House so that the parents have a chance to meet with all the staff that interacts with their children on a daily basis.

Another workshop that is provided on an annual basis is Parent Conference preparation workshop. This meeting is held in November prior to the scheduled parent conferences. The workshop provides guidelines for setting up the conferences on an individual basis with each parent and also emphasizes the importance of working closely with each parent to assess their communication needs. This meeting also focuses on the collaboration of the professional staff in presenting the child's progress report and the need for this team to be open communicators with one another as well as with their student's families.

During the 2005-06 school year, Maureen Banias, the Supervisor of Instruction, provided a workshop from the Lee Canter Assertive Discipline Program, entitled, "Getting Support from Parents and Administration." This workshop, which was given to all staff, stressed the importance of parent communication regarding student behavior expectations. This program is part of the school-wide behavior management program and requires that staff, administration, and parents work together to support the behavioral needs of the students.
Home-School communication was the topic of a workshop held during the 2006-07 school year as this researcher focused on this issue as a follow-up from the parent focus groups. Many of the parents had voiced concerns about the inconsistency of the communication between home and school, especially for the high school aged students. The introduction of a more formalized system of communication was introduced to the staff which consisted of a new Harbor School folder which would be utilized to send important papers and notices back and forth. The parents were notified of this new system and encouraged to look at the folder on a regular basis as it would generally contain important notices and communication from the school. This folder would be used in addition to the communication books which were already in place.

A follow-up workshop on Home-School communication was held at the beginning of the 2007-08 school year during the full staff Orientation meeting. This researcher, along with Maureen Banias, the Supervisor of Instruction, reinforced the importance of the Harbor School folder and use of the communication books as a means to provide consistency of this communication. The Provision for Communication form was also reviewed with the staff and the need for staff to reach out to families, especially during the first few weeks of school was stressed.

These workshops served to provide the staff with an understanding of the importance of establishing an open and consistent mode of communication with their students' families' right from the beginning of the school year. Studies focused on family-professional partnership consistently identified the importance of communication for the development of positive partnerships (Blue-Banning, Summers, Frankland, Lord-Nelson & Beegle, 2004; Keyes, 2002; Lytle & Bordin, 2001; Shapiro, Monzo, Rueda, Gomez&
Blacher, 2004). The surveys provided data from the participants as to their attitude toward the staff training program in regard to communication with the students' families.

The final section of the first part of the survey asked for feedback on communication with parents of their students. The two questions on this part of the survey asked for information on the frequency of communication (see Figure 3) and the mode of communication (see Figure 4) most often utilized. The breakdown of data for the frequency of communication with parents is: daily- 27.4%, weekly-13.6%, bi-weekly-13.6%, monthly- 22.7% and other-22.7%.

*Figure 3- Frequency of Communication*

![Frequency of Communication](image)

The other category included responses for at IEP meetings, at parent conferences, and a combination of the above categories. For mode of communication there were three
categories which are as follows: communication log- 63.6 %, phone-27.3 %, and school folder- 9.1%.

*Figure 4* - Mode of Communication

There were five questions on the second part of the survey that related to the area of communication with their students families. The questions receiving a cumulative percent of 15% or higher for responses 1 (very dissatisfied), 2 (dissatisfied) and 3 (neither dissatisfied or satisfied) were identified as statistically significant. Using this criteria, there were three questions in this category.

Question 13 on the survey asks about the satisfaction that the staff member has that the staff development program “helps you speak up for your students' best interests when
working with the child study team members." Two staff members responded dissatisfied and 4 staff members responded neither dissatisfied or satisfied resulting in a cumulative % of 27.3% of the total responses.

Question 18 on the survey asks about the satisfaction that the staff member has that the staff development programs…"helps you to be honest with your students' parents even when there is bad news." One staff member responded dissatisfied and 7 staff members responded neither dissatisfied or satisfied, resulting in a cumulative percent of 36.4% of the total response.

Question 20 on the survey asks about the satisfaction that the staff member has that the staff development program…"helps you to use words that your students' parents understand." One staff member responded dissatisfied and 3 staff members responded neither dissatisfied or satisfied, resulting in a cumulative percent of 18.2% of the total responses.

Question 14- The staff development program at the Harbor School…"helps you to let the parents know the good things that your students do." Total cumulative percent rating of 95.5% of the staff are satisfied/very satisfied.

Question 25- The staff development program at the Harbor School…"helps you to pay attention to what your students' family has to say." Total cumulative percent rating of 86.4% of the staff are satisfied/very satisfied.

"I communicate frequently with my parents however they are not usually making requests as to things or areas they need help with at home…so maybe surveys or questionnaires as to what kind of difficulties they might have, even with teacher expectations, like homework would be helpful."
The focus group questions that reflected on communication with parents generated some interesting discussion and the idea of sending home a survey or questionnaire for parents to complete and send back was supported by the participants as one way to reach out to parents to get some general feedback as to their needs. The importance of staff reaching out to parents on a consistent basis was reflected by a participant who noted, "...making the phone calls right that very first week of school to introduce you to set up a good rapport...and maybe two weeks later a follow up call just to say how well a student is doing..."

The focus group participants also talked about the importance of the staff communicating with one another, especially as student moved from one class to another and,"...we talk to each other especially in September when we might be getting a student that somebody else had for a few years and we get a good background..."

One of the questions asked for the participants' feedback on being honest with parents when there is bad news and several staff was quite honest in saying that they had difficulty with this when they had to deliver bad news. This topic is also intertwined with parent sensitivity and was expressed in this way by one participant, "I have a hard time with bad news, and I let a lot of things ride..." Another staff member followed up with, "It's too depressing for the parents..." and another echoed, "...and defeating and I don't think that builds communication skills, I think you have to pick your battles..."

The theme of communication also incorporated an exchange of ideas in regard to the need to be an active listener to support a partnership with parents. One staff member suggested that..." maybe a course or training could be given on developing
communication skills, learning to be an active listener" to assist the staff in gaining more effective skills when communicating with their students families.

"…it's a good idea to communicate with parents before you get to the IEP meeting so that you can get a feel for the level that they are on in understanding the issues their child has."

The IEP meeting seemed to be a focus in terms of communication between professionals and parents as these meetings generated a lot of discussion in each of the focus groups.

One staff member notes that…” I don't want to belittle or anything but I have parents who like some of the children have not gotten past the fifth or sixth grade and other parents who are doctors…” Another staff member commented, "…Just knowing how important it is to kind of simplify things for them but also get your point across and really read over your report before hand and kind of summarize in a way that makes sense to the parents and focus on some key points...I don't want them to get overwhelmed with the whole report…” The discussion on this topic started off with the staff talking about using words that the parent understand in their communication and one participant noted that,"…find a key word that they can understand, keep it short…you don't want it too wordy but you want to give them the info they need…”

The importance of using words that the parents understand has been complicated by the NCLB requirements related to the appropriateness of the curriculum frameworks for most of our students, as reflected in this statement, "…then you can skip the IEP because I don't understand half of that stuff. The standards are, I don't even understand the
standards…” Another staff member spoke up about the,"…gobbledygook that is a part of what we have to do, so that they understand what the requirements are…”

This discussion was also entwined with the theme of sensitivity to families and the issue of parent denial as another staff member went on to say”…I think that everyone is empathetic to parents but there still comes a time that you have to give information and trying to battle the denial us a problem…” The group also talked about the need for some training on how to handle issues around denial and possibly having a psychologist come in to discuss strategies to handle this when dealing with parents.

Communication with the families of the students may take many forms including daily notes, phone calls, newsletters and social conversations. This communication is often given in regard to the next component which is knowledge of supports and resources.

**Knowledge of Supports/Resources**

Knowledge of support and resources is the third theme/finding that was reflected across all three data sets and is also another critical component of staff development programming to support family-professional partnership in special education. The student population at the Harbor School is quite diverse in terms of age range, classification, and programming needs. A review of the staff development activities focusing on supports/resources reveals that the staff receives approximately seven workshops per year focused on this aspect of training. Some of the activities listed in Figure 2 under Knowledge of Supports/Resources are briefly described below.

One annual workshop provided to all staff is a Curriculum Fair which is generally held at the end of the school year. This program consists of each classroom teacher (and their staff) as well as each therapist and specialist demonstrating an activity or program that
they utilized over the past school year which they found to be effective for their students. This interactive program provided an opportunity for all staff to gain insight as to the diverse needs of our student population as well as to have an opportunity to gain a broader perspective on the expertise of the staff.

During the 2003-04 school year an in-service program featuring a guest speaker from the ARC spoke to parents and staff regards the availability of afterschool and weekend recreational programs. The ARC staff highlighted the type of programs, fee structure, participant requirements and availability of transportation.

Another workshop held during this school year featured a lawyer, Ms. Christina D. Hardman, Esq. form the Foss, SanFillippe Milne,LLC, who spoke to parents and staff about guardianship for their child with special needs. This attorney discussed the options for them to obtain guardianship for their child once they turned 18 years old as at that time their child would be considered their own guardian .in spite of any limitations they may have.

"Salability," was the topic of a recreational program presented by Ms. Tono Miakoda, to parents and staff during the 2005-06 school year. This program involves introducing sailing to children with special needs. The program is held during the summer months at various local marinas and offers support from professional in the field to make this a reality for those with disabilities.

"Transition" was the topic of the initial in-service program held during the 2006-07 school year and was presented to the entire staff. This program served to provide the staff with an overview of the transition services offered by the school for those students aged 14 years and older.
"Financial Planning and Tips for Success" was the title of a workshop presented by Mr. Scanelli, a representative from Allstate Insurance Company. This program was provided to staff and parents and featured strategies for securing special needs trusts for those with disabilities in order to provide the maximum financial security needed for their children in the future.

Mr. Richard LaVoie was featured as a guest speaker during the 2006-07 school year and presented, "Batteries Not Included: Motivating the Reluctant Learner," to the staff of Harbor, Alpha, and Gateway Schools. This program featured a discussion of specific strategies designed to foster motivation in all students. It also emphasized the importance of working closely with families throughout this program.

Another workshop which focused on the same topic of program options for our students upon their graduation featured speakers from two different programs. Mr. Jared Deppeler, Coordinator of the Adult Services of the Ladacin Network described the types of post secondary programs and the requirements for entry. In addition, Ms. Barbie Pigman, Director of the ARC Adult Services of Monmouth County, also spoke about the Work Opportunity Center (WOC) as a good option for our students as a post secondary program.

Dr. Jed Baker presented his Social Skills curriculum program to the staff of the Harbor, Alpha and Gateway schools during the 2007-08 school year. This full day in-service program featured Dr. Baker's discussion and demonstration of his curriculum program which focuses on assisting the students to navigate through home, school, and community using the strategies outlined in his materials.
Sarah Logan, a representative from the ARC organization met with staff and parents to review changes in the options available to parents for funding of post 21 programming. She described the "Real Life Choices" option as one of several currently available from the Division of Developmental Disabilities as a way to utilize their funds to provide post 21 services for their eligible children.

Ms. Bianca Rodriguez from the New Jersey Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) spoke to the staff and parents during the 2007-08 school year as part of the school's staff development program. This in-service featured the various services available to those parents who had their children registered with this agency.

A guest speaker, Ms. Elizabeth Guidone Abadiokatis, Occupational Therapist, presented a workshop entitled, "ACE- Activity, Children and the Environment," to staff and parents also during the 2008-09 school year. This program focused on the use of various strategies and activities to assist with behavior and sensory issues in children with developmental delays.

"A Day in the Life of a Group Home Resident," was the topic of an in-service program provided by Jim Scavone, Director of the Adult Program with the Ladacin Network. This workshop was provided to all staff and gave the staff an overview as to the types of skills that we should focus on as a pre-requisite for acceptance into a group home situation, as well as the basic schedule of what a day looks like for a group home resident.

Mary Beth Ward, the school's Related Services Specialist and Occupational Therapist, provided the staff and parents with an overview of the school's integrated therapy model during the 2008-09 school year. This program highlighted the progression of the therapy services from an isolated/direct model to the generalization of skills/strategies.
At the beginning of the 2009-10 school year, Maureen Banias and this researcher met with the certified staff to review the changes to the staff development requirements set by the state of New Jersey which included the creation of Professional Learning Communities (PLC) as a major shift in the focus of training. These PLC's should have opportunities to meet and discuss relevant issues during the school day with an emphasis on better sharing their expertise and collaborating to better meet the needs of our diverse learners.

A guest speaker, Ms. Ellen Ball-Malvin, from PLAN-NJ spoke to staff and parents regarding planning for adult life and guardianship of their children with special needs during the 2009-10 school year. This program highlighted the need for families to consider the options for guardianship for their children and the importance of planning ahead for issues regarding their child's future medical needs, housing needs, and financial concerns.

These workshops served to assist the staff in gaining information to give to their students' families regarding the availability of resources and supports. The surveys provided data from the participants as to their attitude toward the staff training program in regard to available supports and resources.

There were two questions on the survey that related to the area of knowledge of supports/services for the families of their students. The questions receiving a cumulative percent of 15% or higher for responses 1 (very dissatisfied), 2 (dissatisfied) and 3 (neither dissatisfied or satisfied) were identified as statistically significant. Using these criteria, there was one question in this category.
Question 12 on the survey asks about the satisfaction that the staff member has that the staff development program...helps you gain information to give to the parents of your students." Four staff members responded neither dissatisfied or satisfied, resulting in a cumulative percent of 18.2% of the total responses.

Question 11- The staff development program at the Harbor School..."helps you gain skills to give to the parents of your students." Total cumulative percent rating of 86.4% of the staff are satisfied/very satisfied.

"I feel terribly at a loss that I don't really know what is out there for our parents..." This sentiment expressed by one of participants was supported by most of the members of the focus groups. Some members of the groups expressed frustration as to the focus on the older student population needs in the staff development training. One of the staff who works with younger students felt that although her students' parents would eventually need information regarding topics such as transition services this information was not relevant at this time for her or her parents.

The "need for information as to what's out there for the parents" was also expressed as an ongoing need to stay current with information. One staff member went on to suggest that," maybe we could have a community provider fair which could be held here at the school." This comment generated some positive discussion, but this same staff member also noted that," it would be a lot of work, but I think it would be well worth the effort."

"You know believe it or not I listen to this one radio station and I heard this one commercial about autism...it is really about parents getting together and having parent groups so maybe we can find out about some of these and encourage our parents to join..."
The idea for a parent support group to be formed and held at the school received some mixed reaction as one staff member offered, …"maybe our school social worker could work with the families to start some kind of group so they could share information and talk about things that are happening in their situation…” Another participant spoke up and said that"…sometimes parents have told me that depending on their own situation and how they look at their child that it is almost too depressing to go to these groups…”

Another idea was brought up by this group which also involved the school social worker and the possibility to"…have her meet with the parents to let them know that she would be available to discuss concerns or issues related to their child, if they do not feel comfortable discussing it with a teacher or therapist…” Another staff member suggested that the social worker could also"…be available to our staff so that we could get suggestions to work through a difficult area…”

"Maybe a parent newsletter because some of the issues they have at home are basic parenting and it must be pretty scary parenting a special needs child…”

The discussion around the parent workshop continued and the idea for a parent newsletter was mentioned as one way to help keep parents and staff updated as to available resources and supports. This idea received a lot of positive comments as it would provide the parents some basic information, would not require them to come into school, and "…might help the parents to carryover some of the skill development into the home…” Another staff member spoke up and said, "…I talk to a lot of parents and I think that having strategies and ways to help…” Another member continued,"…It could be a simple as it’s okay to have your child do this...for kids who are ages five to eight…these are great activities that they can do to help the household…”
The issue of helping staff to gain information to give to their students' families speaks to the diversity of the student population and the ability or attitude of the parents as to the type of information they feel they need or want. The educational training and background of the staff is integral to assisting the students' families in gaining this information.

Program Participants

The fourth theme/finding highlighted in the data collected from the surveys as a critical component is the program participants' educational background and training, as well as personal statistics. The participants in this study included twelve classroom teachers and ten therapists including six speech therapists, three occupational therapists, and one physical therapist. All participants have relationships with their students' families and receive required staff development training. Surveys administered to the participants provided data on their educational background and training and measured their attitudes/opinions on the staff development training related to family-professional partnership.

The first section of the survey (Appendix A) focused on gathering information from the staff regarding:

a. educational experience (#'s 1, 4, 5, 6)
b. educational training (#'s 9, 10)
c. personal background (#'s 7, 8)
d. current communication with parents (#'s 2, 3)

Analysis of the educational experience of the staff participating in the study reveals a mean of 11.659 years teaching at the Harbor School. Figure 5 highlights the range in years of experience in this group from a minimum of 1 year to a maximum of 22 years.
Also included in this analysis is the age range currently teaching as well as data on other ages taught. Due to the four year age span in each classroom, we came up with six categories of age range currently teaching. These categories are broken down as: 1. Elementary (ages 5-10), 2. Middle (ages 11-13), 3. High School (ages 14-21), 4. Elementary/Middle, 5. Middle/High School, 6. Elementary/Middle/High School. A teacher may have students in elementary and middle school in the same class, and a therapist may have a caseload with children from all three age levels.

The data for this category reveals that nine of the 22 staff currently teaches high school and that six of the 22 currently teach all three age groups. The next highest number is
three staff who teaches middle school and two staff teaches elementary. The remaining
two staff teaches elementary/middle and middle/high school. The final question in this
section is in regard to other ages taught, and the data reveals that 64 % answered no to
this question with the remaining 36 % answering yes to other ages taught.

Question four on the survey sought data from the staff on the age group they felt most
comfortable teaching. The highest percentage of staff ( 36.4 %) feel most comfortable
teaching high school, followed by 31.8 % indicating all/any age group. The elementary
level received 18.2 % followed by the middle school age group receiving 13.6 % of staff
feeling most comfortable with this age group. The disability group that the staff feels
most comfortable teaching asked in question five was multiple disabilities
(50%), followed by learning disabilities (31.8 %), communication impaired (9.1 %),
autism (4.5 %), and cognitive impairment (4.5%).

The final question regarding staff educational experience gathered data on related work
experience outside the Harbor School. The majority of the staff (90.9 %), answered yes to
this question with the remaining nine percent (9.1%) indicating that they did not have
related experience outside of the Harbor School. The types of related work experience
outside of the Harbor School included: home care, regular education in public school,
special education in public school, other private special education school, outpatient
facility, Head Start, Early Intervention, residential program for the developmentally
disabled, adult program for developmentally disabled, and the ARC recreation program.

The next section of the survey assessed the educational training of the research
participants. There were two questions on this topic which included coursework and
degrees obtained. Question nine asked the staff if they had taken courses or attended
workshops on parent support/communication outside of the Harbor School. A majority of the staff (68.2%) indicated that they had not received outside training, with the remaining 31.8% answering yes to receiving outside training on this topic. The types of outside training listed by the staff included: continuing education coursework, COSAC conferences, Special Education PTA workshops, seminars, and adoptive parent workshops.

The final question regarding staff educational training had two parts, the first asking what was the highest degree achieved, and the second part asking about the type of degree received. The data indicated that half (50.0%) of the staff has a bachelor level degree and the other half (50.0%) has obtained a master level degree. Following is a breakdown of the type of degree which relates directly to the position that each staff member has at the school. All 12 classroom teachers have a degree in special education, the occupational therapists have degrees in occupational therapy, physical therapist has a degree in physical therapy, and the speech therapists have degrees in speech-language pathology.

There were two questions on the survey that asked for information on the personal background of the participants. These two questions were in regard to whether or not the staff member was a parent, and if so, did they have a child/children with a disability. Ninety (90%) of the staff surveyed indicated that they were parents, and twenty-two percent (22%) of this group have a child/children with a disability.

The combination of the participant's years working at the school and in other related areas reflects a highly experienced group of individuals. The surveys provided data on the
attitude of the staff as to the staff training program in regard to the means or structure of how the training is given.

Program Structure

The structure of the staff development program including: format, type, time frame, frequency, speaker type and opportunity to interact with parents is the next theme/finding which was reflected across all three data sets and is as important to the staff development program as are the components. A review of the staff development logs reveals the following description of the program structures with accompanying figures 6-11.

The format of the staff development activities consists of either large group with the entire staff, or small group with a select number of staff. Of the 88 total workshop activities listed, 63 percent of these activities were done with a large group. Figure 6 highlights these statistics.

Figure 6- Format for Staff Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FORMAT</th>
<th>NUMBER</th>
<th>PERCENT %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Small Group</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large Group</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The four types of activities listed in the staff development logs are: lecture, interactive, survey, and independent reading. Figure 7 reveals that 76 percent of the activities were given in a lecture style.

Figure 7- Type of Staff Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE</th>
<th>NUMBER</th>
<th>PERCENT %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lecture</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>76 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There were several time frames listed for the staff development activities including: 1/2-1 hour, 1.5-2 hours and 2.5-6 hours. Below in Figure 8 see that the predominance of activities were given in the 1/2 to 1 hour time frame.

*Figure 8- Time Frame of Staff Development*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TIME FRAME</th>
<th>NUMBER</th>
<th>PERCENT %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1/2-1 Hour</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>67 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5-2 Hours</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>26 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5-6 Hours</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The consistency of training is reflected in Figure 9 which highlights the frequency of training activities. Figure 9 lists the four categories for frequency as: annual, once, twice and ongoing.

*Figure 9- Frequency of Staff Development*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
<th>NUMBER</th>
<th>PERCENT %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Annual</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>38 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>40 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twice</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>21 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There are three types of speakers listed within the Harbor School training logs. Figure 10 below reveals that sixty percent of the staff training from the 2003-04 to the 2009-10 school years was given by in-house speakers. The remaining training was given by outside speakers/resources.

*Figure 10- Speaker Type for Staff Development*

**Program Structure**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SPEAKER TYPE</th>
<th>NUMBER</th>
<th>PERCENT %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In-house</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>69 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside Speaker</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>24 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside Resource</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The final category under program structure is the opportunity to interact with parents. Please note that there are two categories indicating yes for interaction with parents. The 13 workshops which provided limited interaction with parents were separated into its own category because only two or three staff members were able to attend these parents' workshops. This data is reflected in Figure 11 and reveals that staff training focused on parent-professional partnership does not include an opportunity to interact with parents 75 percent of the time.

*Figure 11- Opportunity to Interact With Parents*
The surveys provided data from the participants as to their attitude toward staff training in regard to the structure of how the training was given. As noted in the literature review, a new expanded view of staff training stresses the importance of staff development activities to be well organized, carefully structured and purposely directed (Guskey, 2003).

There were ten questions on the survey that related to the area of program structure in regard to the staff development program at the Harbor School. The questions receiving a cumulative percent of 15% or higher for responses 1 (very dissatisfied), 2 (dissatisfied), and 3 (neither dissatisfied or satisfied) were identified as statistically significant. Using this criteria, there were six questions in this category which will be discussed first.

Question 26 on the survey asks about the satisfaction that the staff development program..."is provided on a consistent basis." One staff member responded dissatisfied and three staff members responded neither dissatisfied or satisfied, resulting in a cumulative percent of 18.2% of the total responses.

Question 28 on the survey asks about the satisfaction that the staff member has that the staff development program..."provides follow-up to previous training." One staff member responded very dissatisfied, one staff member responded dissatisfied, and two
staff members responded neither dissatisfied or satisfied, resulting in a cumulative percent of 18.2% of the total responses.

Question 29 on the survey asks about the satisfaction that the staff member has that the staff development program…"provides opportunity for small group or individual training." Two staff members responded dissatisfied and five staff members responded neither dissatisfied or satisfied, resulting in a cumulative percent of 31.8% of the total responses.

Question 30 on the survey asks about the satisfaction that the staff member has that the staff development program…"provides opportunities for interacting with parents or other family members." One staff member responded very dissatisfied, one staff member responded dissatisfied, and 6 staff members responded neither dissatisfied or satisfied, resulting in a cumulative percent of 36.4% of the total responses.

Question 32 on the survey asks about the satisfaction that the staff member has that the staff development program…"provides training relevant to family-professional collaboration." Two staff members responded dissatisfied and 3 staff members responded neither dissatisfied or satisfied, resulting in a cumulative percent of 22.7% of the total responses.

Question 35 on the survey asks about the satisfaction that the staff member has that the staff development program…"provides opportunities for training by outside family resource service providers." One staff member responded dissatisfied and seven staff members responded neither dissatisfied or satisfied, resulting in a cumulative percent of 36.4% of the total responses.
Question 27- The staff development program at the Harbor School…"is provided at a convenient time." Total cumulative percent of 90.0% of the staff are satisfied/very satisfied.

Question 31- The staff development program at the Harbor School…" provides a variety of methods of presentations." Total cumulative percent of 90.9% of the staff are satisfied/very satisfied.

Question 33- The staff development program at the Harbor School…" provides training on topics relevant to support students success." Total cumulative percent of 90.9% of the staff are satisfied/very satisfied.

Question 34- The staff development program at the Harbor School…" supports your ability to apply what you learn to work collaboratively with families." Total cumulative percent of 86.4% of the staff are satisfied/very satisfied.

In discussing the theme of the program structure of the staff development program, the need for more consistency of training was supported by a good majority of the participants in the focus groups. Once again, the Parent Sensitivity Panel was brought up by a participant as she stated that "this type of workshop should be given at the beginning of the school year to remind all of us…I think that is a really important time and needs to be held definitely more than once per year." Another participant spoke up and said, "Yes, we need programs focused on parent partnership at the beginning, middle and end of the school year. At the end of the year to assess how it went… it is important."

One of the other ideas that surfaced along with the discussion of how often these kinds of programs should be held was the need for some small group format. One staff member
noted, "I mean you put me in a big group and I'm not going to talk...I mean this is about as big as it gets."

The discussion on the concept of having opportunities to interact with parents or other family members as part of the staff development program generated a lively and lengthy discussion. One staff member commented that, "yes, it is two ways, it is not just, we are going to do this parent partnering and us saying you are the parent and you are going to do what we say...their needs to be give and take as well...I think it is very important because you are getting their input...they are the ones raising these kids."

One of the other ideas that surfaced during this group along the lines of the structure of the program was suggested by a staff member who shared the following

I know there is one thing in the military we always did and that is role play...and we would do it to the point where we were all dressed up and ready to go and deal with whatever situation might come up...we could also do some kind of role play where a couple of people are the parents and a few are the staff and have a scenario of what is going on with these parents and this is what they are going to say to you and how are you going to deal with it? We do this a lot in the military and it helps to be prepared for things that are going to come up

Another idea that was suggested and discussed on the theme of program structure was brought up by a staff member who suggested, "...I think that case studies might be something to look at..." This could be a useful tool as part of the staff development program to work in small groups and take a case and look at it from the perspective of the parents and the perspective of the professional. This format described here

We did this with one student...after the IEP we had about a 3.5 hour meeting and the parent was struggling with things at home so we took parts of what we discussed at the IEP and videotaped the child and I think it was extremely enlightening for the parents...it was very practical...we also used it to do some education for the staff...

"...It's the hands on activities that help you remember what you learn..." and still another participant spoke up,"...I think overall we need involvement with the parents
with specific activities…like having them work with us to set up a picture schedule for home…"

The need for staff training to be provided in an interactive manner as opposed to lectures was noted by one participant who commented, "…nobody likes lectures…" The idea for a parent curriculum fair was discussed at length as different staff members gave their input,"…You know how we do our open house…OT has a section and they show off some of the things they do…take this to the next level and have OT show the parents how to help their child brush their teeth…" Another staff member said,"…almost like a curriculum fair…" Another participant chimed in with,"…You are not telling them, and you are showing them…you are teaching them…"

These ideas support research noted in the literature review asserting that the context and process of learning must be re-defined in ways to engage students and teachers inactive pursuit of learning goals (Ackerman, 2003; Darling-Hammond, 1995; Lieberman, 2005).
Chapter Six

Discussion

The purpose of this descriptive case study was to examine and describe from the perspective of the professional, the kinds of training considered essential to achieve a collaborative partnership with the families of their students with disabilities. As federal policy, research and best practice guidelines continue to support and promote the goal of a collaborative partnership between professionals and parents of children with disabilities, a policy-to-practice gap has emerged for many professionals who struggle to meet the complex needs of their students' families (Blue-Banning, Turnbull & Pereira, 2000; Dinnebeil & Hale, 1996; Judge, 1997; Luckner & Hanks, 2003; Park & Turnbull, 2001; Soodak, Erwin, Winton, Brotherson, Turnbull, Hanson & Brault, 2002; Summers, Hoffman, Marquis, Turnbull & Poston, 2006). The research question guiding this study looked to identify and describe what the staff considered are essential components and structures of staff development programs for professionals in special education to develop and maintain a collaborative partnership with their students' families.

In answer to the research question, the program components and structures considered essential to support a partnership between the staff and families at the Harbor School were identified as: sensitivity to the family needs, communication, knowledge of support and resources, program participants educational background and experience, and specific program structures including format, type, time frame, frequency, speaker type and the opportunity to interact with families. The findings of this case study also highlighted the program description, professional development guidelines/requirements, challenges,
benefits and future program needs regarding the Harbor School staff development program as it relates to family-professional partnership.

The components of staff development in support of a partnership in special education that were initially identified by researchers at the University of Kansas included: sensitivity to the needs of the family, communication and knowledge of supports and resources. They developed the Family-Professional Partnership Scale based on families' perceptions of the skills and attitudes professionals need for them to achieve partnership with families (Summers, Hoffman, Marquis, Turnbull, Poston & Lord-Nelson, 2005).

Research conducted previously with the families at the Harbor School and currently with the staff utilized this scale which revealed that these components are necessary to support this partnership.

*Sensitivity*

Sensitivity to the needs of parents is a critical component of family-professional partnership. The need for staff to gain a perspective as to the uniqueness of each family better enables these professionals to support the challenge of raising and educating a child with special needs. As noted by a staff member during the focus groups, "…to hear the parents and how they struggle, to hear it more often, just reminds us…” Not only is it important to gain insight as to the daily struggle that families face in raising a child with special needs, but also to gain awareness of the ongoing struggle.

The discussion on sensitivity to the needs of students' families focused on the Parent Sensitivity Panel workshop that was held in November 2003. One staff member commented, "…everyone found this to be so powerful that it needs to be done on a regular basis because of new staff that come in…”This workshop was one of the initial
programs that focused on the topic of family-professional partnership and remains a pivotal point in the chronology of this topic in the Harbor School staff development program.

The diversity of the student population at the Harbor School brings a unique set of challenges when interacting with the families of our students. Another topic which was threaded throughout the focus groups was the need to gain an understanding of the dynamics of the family. As noted in the literature review, concerns regarding the implementation of a family-centered model of program delivery have focused on defining family and understanding family dynamics from both the family and professional perspective (Brinker, 1992; Mahoney & Bella, 1998; Mahoney, Kaiser, Girolometto, MacDonald, Robinson, Safford & Spiker, 1990).

One staff member brought up the issue of the guilt that some parents experience as she noted, "...you get to see sometimes that they must be feeling, first off that the child is my responsibility and maybe I did something wrong, almost like a blame thing..." Another participant shared that, "...knowing a little more about the parents picking their battles, which we tend to be pretty critical of, was important to know...we are quick to criticize sometimes..."

A staff member related back to a program that featured a motivational speaker who had cerebral palsy..." having that type of speaker to show success and he spoke about his parents and the way his parents raised him and dealt with him with his challenges and things like that, it refreshes our memory and brings us back to the idea that some of the things we can do to work together with the parents to assist in any challenges that they are having, and he faced a lot of challenges..."
Another participant spoke about the workshop with Rachel Simon (Riding the Bus with my Sister) and how…" that was a real good one because it gave the sibling perspective…" Still another staff member talked about the workshop with Dr. Robert Naseef (Special Children Challenged Parents) and how it was "wonderful because he was a professional who we could relate to in the same field and then he had a child with a severe disability…that was really moving…" Another staff member agreed and said that…" his case was not one where the child made great strides and who grew up to be able to hold a job…he needed to be put into a residential facility…and how his family dealt with that…how they make peace with that…"

The topic of siblings generated some interesting discussion as a participant related…" I have one family here and the family said that the sibling is so embarrassed by the sister and the sibling won't have any friends come into the house and it is not good…" Another perspective on this topic was offered by a participant who said that," I have a situation in my room where the siblings are so supportive and they do everything they possibly can with him and they come to the shows and they bring him here if he misses the bus…they do everything and anything for him…"

Another perspective on this is reflected in this comment by a participant…" I think it helps that there are multiple siblings, in other words if you have a child that has just one sibling, it is just you. The burden is all on you…" An idea for a sibling day was discussed as way for this issue to be addressed in a positive way. The siblings could be invited to come in for a day of social activities and games so that they would be able to experience some positive interaction with their sibling and get an idea of the kinds of things that they can do as part of their school community. This might be a normalizing experience for the
siblings as they would get a better sense of the kinds of things that their sibling can do as part of the school community.

Some of the areas identified as needing a focus for staff training in this area included: family dynamics (including sibling perspectives), stages of denial, impact of blame and guilt, and cultural awareness...

Communication

Communication with the parents of the students at the Harbor School is another important component considered essential to support a family-professional partnership in special education. This communication may take many forms including daily notes, phone calls, newsletters and social conversations. The discussion on communication as a component of family-professional partnership was highlighted by the importance of staff establishing an open and consistent mode of communication with their students' families' right from the beginning of the school year. Studies focusing on family-professional partnership consistently identified the importance of communication for the development of positive partnerships (Blue-Banning, Summers, Frankland, Lord-Nelson & Beegle, 2004; Keyes, 2002; Lytle & Bordin, 2001; Shapiro, Monzo, Rueda, Gomez & Blacher, 2004).

One teacher noted,"… I communicate frequently with my parents however they are not usually making requests as to things or areas they need help with at home…so maybe surveys or questionnaires as to what kind of difficulties they may have, even with teacher expectations, might be helpful." The notion of staff reaching out to parents on a regular basis to help them stay connected and get a sense of who they are and how they deal with their child's needs is critical to support a partnership.
The IEP meeting seemed to be a focus in terms of communication between professionals and parents as these meetings generated a lot of discussion throughout the focus groups. One staff member noted, "… It is important to kind of simplify things for them but also get your point across and really read over your report before hand and kind of summarize in a way that makes sense to the parents and focus on some key points…I don't want them to get overwhelmed."

There were several issues that were related to these meetings that were identified as needing more focus with regard to staff training. These areas include: simplifying educational jargon, having a pre-IEP meeting, active listening skills, and sensitivity to families when communicating and speaking up for the child's best interest with the district child study team member.

**Knowledge of Supports/Resources**

Knowledge of supports/resources is also an important part of staff development programming to support family-professional partnership in special education. One staff member suggested, "…maybe a parent newsletter because some of the issues they have at home are basic parenting and it must be pretty scary parenting a special needs child." The importance of staff keeping updated as to the availability of outside resources and supports is crucial to support a partnership with their students' families. One staff member addressed this issue by simply saying, "… I feel terribly at a loss that I don't really know what is out there for our parents."

The issue of helping staff to gain information to give to their students' families speaks to the diversity of the student population and the ability or attitude of the parents as to the type of information they feel they need or want. As noted in the literature review, parent's
perspectives on their role as advocates for their child with disabilities included a need to maintain a balance in their family lives, to be informed of their child's daily activities, for acceptance and harmony with service providers, and to accept the "ongoing and forever struggle" (Soodak & Erwin, 2000, p.36) to help their child (Osher & Oasher, 2002; Park, Park & Turnbull, 2001; Soodak, & Erwin, 2000; Wang, Mannan, Psoton, Turnbull & Summers, 2004).

Another staff member expressed, "...I think being aware of what's available outside of here once they graduate, and having those agencies come in and hearing from them...at least we can support what the parents need and we can interpret some of the information for them."

There were several ideas which were presented during the focus groups within this topic which need more focus to assist staff in gaining more knowledge in this area including: having staff attend parent workshops, networking with other schools and agencies to gain information, and to host a community provider fair.

Program Participants

The staff at the Harbor School who participated in this study all have relationships with their students' families and receive required staff development training. The data gathered from this research reveals that the majority of staff at the school who participated has nine years or more teaching experience at the school. The research also indicated that a majority of the staff who participated has related experience outside of the school. The range of experience is quite extensive and inclusive. The combination of the participant's years working at the school and in other related areas reflects a highly experienced group of individuals.
The educational training of the staff is also important to the support of family-professional partnership especially in working with parents to establish appropriate goals for the child’s individual education plan (IEP). The data from the survey reveals that each of the participants has a degree in the field that they are working in and that fifty percent (50%) of these professionals also has a master level degree.

The personal information on the survey indicated that ninety-one percent (91%) of the participants are parents, and twenty-two percent (22%) of them are parents of children with disabilities. In assessing the importance of sensitivity to family needs, communication, and knowledge of supports/resources for the students' families, many of the staff have first hand experience in each of these areas of partnership. One staff member highlighted this as she talked about the change is her own attitude when she became a parent herself and how that changed how she judged that parents of her students. She noted, "to hear the parents and how they struggle, to hear it more often, just reminds us…"

*Program Structure*

The structure of the staff development program including: format, type, time frame, frequency, speaker type, and opportunity to interact with parents, is as important to the program as are the components (Kelleher, 2003; Morris, Chrispeels & Burke, 2203; Darling-Hammond, 1995). The discussion on the theme of program structure of the staff development program focused on the importance of consistency of training and the need for follow-up training in support of a partnership with families. One staff member suggested that,"…the Parent Panel type workshop should be given at the beginning of the school year to remind all of us…I think that is really an important time and it needs to be
held definitely more than once per year." Another staff member agreed that,"…Yes, we need programs focused on parent partnership at the beginning, middle and end of the year…at the end to assess how it went."

The idea of hands-on and interactive workshops generated a lot of discussion in the focus groups as noted by one staff member who suggested that,"…I think we need more hands-on professional activities in small groups." Another staff member followed up with, "…It's the hands-on activities that help you to remember what you learn." The idea of an interactive workshop with the families was also discussed as noted here by a staff member who stated,"…I think overall we need involvement with the parents with specific activities…like having them work with us to set up a picture schedule for home."

Other areas that need to be considered in the structure of the program are: small group or individual format, hands on and interactive workshops, opportunities to interact with families, use of role play and case studies, and staff involvement in parent workshops. These ideas support research noted in the literature review asserting that the context and process of learning must be re-defined in ways to engage students and teachers in active pursuit of learning goals (Ackerman, 2003; Darling-Hammond, 1995; Lieberman, 2005).

Program Description

The staff development program as it relates to family-professional partnership at the Harbor School has been in place for the past six years. The program was put in place to assist the Harbor School staff in gaining a heightened awareness of the needs of each student's family. It emphasizes the importance for staff and parents to have a
collaborative partnership while working together to define individualized goals for the child.

A family-centered approach has also evolved in the field of special education which focuses on respecting families' priorities and decisions (Wang, Mannan, Poston, Turnbull & Summers, 2004) The staff must also assist families in identifying appropriate goals that will help the child function not only in school but in the natural environment of their homes and communities. It is necessary for the professionals of the Harbor School to continue to learn how to become and remain allies with parents while providing services for their child. Taking into account the severity of the disabilities of the students, it is critical for the staff to aid the parents in gaining better access to information and services for their child whose needs will last well beyond their years at the Harbor School.

The staff development program also stresses the importance for all staff to immediately develop and maintain open lines of communication with the parent or guardian of the child. This program aims to assist the professionals in researching and identifying the needs of the family as well as assisting them in gaining information and resources for their children outside of the immediate school community.

*Program Guidelines/Requirements*

The staff development program is needed for a variety of reasons but among the most important are the 1997 Amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) which is a legislative requirement that establishes a role for parents in the educational planning process. In addition, professional development program activities are required for all educators who hold an instructional certificate as set forth in the New Jersey
Administrative Code (N.J.A.C. 6A: 9). Outside of the legal requirement, the field of special education is highly litigated due to disagreements on service delivery and appropriate placement of the child (Blue-Banning, Frankland, Lord-Nelson & Beegle, 2004: Campbell & Halbert, 2002; Lake & Billingsley, 2000; Luckner & Hanks, 2003) therefore it is crucial for the Harbor School staff to be sensitive to the issues the parents have dealt with in the past.

Congress enacted the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation in 2001, which mandated the development of curriculum frameworks and delineated specific achievement on standardized tests for all students. This standards movement has also created a heightened interest in the professional development of teachers who have a direct impact on these students.

The need for all staff to receive ongoing staff development training is critical to the support of family-professional partnership in special education. Changes in the model of required professional development training in 2008 recently adopted and mandated by the New Jersey State Department of Education fostered the notion of Professional Learning Communities (PLC). These PLC's are comprised of small groups of staff members who work collaboratively to share their expertise in a dynamic and interactive manner. This current study embraced this new model of professional development through the focus groups which were highly interactive and provided in a small group format. These requirements were also reflected in the mission statement from the Harbor School Professional Development Plan for the 2009-10 school year:

"We envision a professional staff dedicated to continuous involvement with professional development as life long learners. We are dedicated to a vision of professional development as an ongoing process of reflecting on educational practices so that the professional staff may refine skills, as well as develop new methods to improve
their personal professional performance as they improve student learning. We engage the practice of collaboration as intrinsic to the professional development process as is the use of data collection to make decisions on the content and type of activities that constitute professional development. We see professional development as an extremely vital endeavor towards which we will commit our financial support, time and planning. In addition, we envision a continuous commitment to evaluate our Professional Development Plan reflective of student learning, content area knowledge, and classroom practices."

**Challenges**

The staff development program features an ongoing assessment of the training needs as documented by four needs assessments activities completed during the 2003-04 through the 2009-10 school years. Data collected from these surveys are utilized to identify challenges faced by the staff. Challenges related to the development of parent-professional partnerships identified through the needs assessments are: time constraint, social skill development, vocational skill development, and post secondary program availability.

The NCLB legislation has had a significant impact on the staff development program as it relates to the support of family-professional partnership. This legislation has added several layers of mandates for staff training related to the development of curriculum frameworks and the assessment process to measure student achievement within these frameworks. The assessment demands of this process, which are also identified in previous research (Luckner & Hawks, 2003), led to several comments as noted by this staff member who stated that,"…APA is the undoing of Harbor School." Another participant noted that,"…the whole APA takes the teachers off their game form October until February." The requirements for this curriculum development and assessment
process continue to evolve and change, which has resulted in a serious time constraint on the overall staff development program.

The classroom teachers are accountable for this process which involves an enormous time commitment and has an impact on their daily schedule. The APA process also impacts on the students and families as the curriculum must reflect grade level goals which are not always the most appropriate considering the severity of the students’ disabilities. Parents and teachers must work together to determine appropriate goals which include the requirements of the NCLB legislation.

"There is not a lot of time for parents and teachers to interact."

The importance of having opportunities for staff to interact with their students' families is critical to supporting a partnership. The issue of a time constraint for staff and parents to interact is a challenge that was overwhelmingly stressed during the focus groups. As previously stated, the NCLB legislation has had a tremendous impact on the training requirements for the staff in terms of curriculum development and assessment. The complex needs of the student population also requires that the teachers and therapists meet to develop strategies across all the child's domains of learning in order to help them achieve their educational goals. Our students also have many needs in the life skill area including toileting and feeding issues which also take time throughout the day. These factors combine to impact on the amount of time professionals have to focus on parent-professional partnership.

It is also problematic for the parents to find the time to interact with the staff. As one participant noted, "...there are always a million things going on and parents don't have the ability to come after school because of baby sitting issues and things like that. We
always provide somebody to watch over their child while they are conferencing but I think they feel that we are putting them out…" Another staff member noted that," a lot of our parents hold down more than one job and for them to come and see us during the day can mean a loss of income…"

Another challenge to family-professional partnership identified through the needs assessment is in regard to social skill development. One of the drawbacks to the students being placed at the Harbor School is the limited opportunity to interact with non-disabled peers. Social skill development is an area that affects every aspect of our student's lives, especially at home and in their communities. Many of our families do not have opportunities to have their children socialize outside of the school community. Although we have a social skill curriculum in place at school it remains problematic for many of our families to assist their child with the practice of social skills as the availability of interaction with non-disabled peers remains limited.

Additional challenges to supporting a partnership with families are in assisting them to access appropriate recreational activities for their children. Not only is it difficult for the staff to stay updated as to the kinds of programs available, but they must also be able to match the child's skill level to the skills required for the particular program. The other challenge in this one participant noted was,"… a lot of my parents think that as a parent I can't do that with my child because once they are outside they might dart away or will the program staff be able to manage my child's behaviors." Many times the parents do not participate in activities outside of the school because of their inability to access these programs which leads to feelings of isolation as they struggle to assist their child to become an integrated member of their home community.
The next challenge to family-professional partnership expressed by staff through survey is regarding the vocational skill development for our students. The school transition program focuses on vocational skill development starting formally at age 14, but pre-vocational skill training is also needed with many of our younger students. One of the difficulties faced in supporting the vocational needs of our students is in the diversity of their needs as well as in the diversity of the parent's expectations for post secondary job placement. Considering that we have students from three different counties and 45 public school districts, it is a challenge to assist each family in gaining an understanding of, planning for, and accessing the most appropriate post secondary program for their child. The staff must continue to work closely with families, even those with the younger children to address the need for pre-vocational/vocational training so that they will be best prepared to make a successful transition upon graduation.

The area of availability of post secondary programs remains problematic for our staff in supporting a partnership with our students' families. The complex needs of our students continue to present tremendous challenges especially as they prepare to graduate and enter the world of work. Some of our higher functioning students, who may have the cognitive ability to work in a supported employment situation, may not have the appropriate social skills to work through difficult relationships. Our students with more cognitive issues may need more of a sheltered workshop situation, which may not have the level of supervision that the school setting provides. Transportation and funding for these programs both remain as issues for all of our students and their families, as these are not always available.
The complex needs of the student population at the Harbor School require a diversity of supports and resources. As noted above, time constraints due to NCLB mandated staff training requirements has limited the amount of time available for other staff training. In an effort to maximize the time available, outside speakers are scheduled to highlight programs geared to the general student population, but might not be appropriate for all students and their families. The ability of the parent to use the information given may be impacted by lack of resources or in their attitude/opinion that it is not what they feel their child needs.

One of the other issues in gaining knowledge of available supports/resources through the staff development program is in the ever-changing nature of these services. The current economic climate has had a significant impact on the availability of many resources/supports needed by our families. As these supports become sparser, the needs of the family become greater. Many of our families remain challenged in trying to navigate through the state and federal bureaucracies as they attempt to figure out what their child/family is entitled to. Medical insurance, transportation issues, changes in program funding requirements all seem to be continually changing. This creates a great challenge to the staff development program to keep up with these changes and help the staff and families stay current in order to best meet their child's needs.

Feedback from the staff on the surveys in the area of program structure revealed some dissatisfaction with the consistency of the programming related to parent-professional partnership, as well as the provision of follow-up training in this area. Consistency of programming, especially in the area of family-professional partnership is critical to developing and maintaining this relationship. The importance of follow-up to previous
training is also critical to support a partnership with our students' families. The need for follow-up activities assist the staffs in identifying what the issues are and come up with ways to work through these issues. This process helps to build on the skills previously developed so that they can be applied to each situation where it occurs.

Another concern highlighted through the survey is the need for small group or individual training in support of family-professional partnership. The unique nature of this partnership rests between two individuals, the parent and the professional. Setting aside time to train small groups of staff members, or having an opportunity to work one on one with a staff member, may make the difference in being able to help develop and maintain the relationship, especially during a difficult situation.

Another challenge raised along these same lines is that there is not a lot of opportunity to interact with families in a less formal situation. One staff member gave an example of when parents come to our annual field day, which would be a nice opportunity for the staff and parents to interact more informally, except that"…here are the kids in a wide open space and we might lose them while we are chatting with the parents." Several staff members expressed a desire to have some" casual sit down time" with their parents where they could talk about the child or any needs/concerns in a less structured format.

The staff development program in support of parent-professional partnership faces a challenge related to the student's sending public school district. As a private receiving school, the Harbor School is contracted by a public school district to educate a student. The relationship between the public school child study team and the parent of the student can be adversarial (Lake & Billinglsey, 2000); especially if there have been disagreements with regard to the child's placement or service delivery. Quite a few of our
students have been placed in our program as a result of litigation stemming from these disagreements. This situation places our staff in a precarious position.

As a private receiving school, we want to maintain a positive relationship with each local public school district that places students in our program. A continued positive relationship will assist us in maintaining our enrollment. We also have first hand knowledge of each student's complex needs and want to support the families in securing the most appropriate services for their child. In light of recent economic issues, many school districts are under tremendous pressure to streamline services to meet budget constraints. The Harbor School staff will need to focus on positive supports for students and their families and balance this with a positive supportive relationship with the sending school district keeping in mind the challenges facing each.

An additional challenge noted in the literature (Hanline & Daley, 1992; Gavidia-Payne & Stoneman, 1997) that faces the Harbor School staff in developing and maintaining a supportive partnership with their students' families is how to deal with the stress felt by their parents and themselves. This theme seemed to be present in the discussion during the focus groups as noted in this comment, "...I think you have to evaluate how much help the parents are going to be in this or how much they will be a drawback to what you are trying to do..." This issue relates to the need to gain insight to the dynamics of the family, cultural differences and the issue of blame/guilt and denial and how these impact on the families and their impact on the relationship between the parents and the professionals who work with them.

The role of the school social worker may need to be expanded to include some staff training in how to deal with stress on an individual/personal level for the staff, as well as
having some group training as to strategies for dealing with stressful situations, and
finally to assist the parents in recognizing and implementing strategies to deal with stress
in their lives.

One staff member noted that"…I think we need more help in managing our own stress
because we are sensitive to the fact that we don't want to hurt anyone's feelings." Another
staff member echoed this sentiment as she suggested that,"…I think we need more skills
in how to get through that stress, you know they exist and you can't just ignore them…we
need to get more support and move forward."  

Benefits

"All of our professional development goes back to making us better at what we do to
benefit our students and their parents…"

Staff needs assessments completed during the 2003-04 to 2009-10 school year revealed
that benefits to a family-professional partnership include: skill development, gain insight
and understanding, gain knowledge of available supports/resources, cooperation and
collaboration. One of the benefits articulated through the survey process is skill
development which is needed to support a partnership with families. Topics such as
technology, social skills, physical handling, orthopedic rehabilitation, and assertive
discipline are some of the areas of skill development provided to the staff.

The student population at the Harbor School is quite diverse, as each student presents
with a very unique educational profile. All of our students have deficits across more than
one domain, and the impact of their issues result in a complexity of program needs. Many
of our parents have developed heightened advocacy skills and often request
implementation of cutting edge programming. Our staff continues to seek out a variety of
innovative, research-based techniques to best support the ever-changing needs of our student population.

Input from both parents and professionals regarding topics and methods needed to support student success combined to benefit staff, students, and families. The staff applies these learned skills in their daily work with students. Through a partnership with the students' families, these skills can be generalized across all environments. This idea of partnership was highlighted in the literature review as noted in studies by Dunst & Paget, 1991. One staff member spoke about assisting families with community integration as she suggested, "...I just think about all the parents who don't take their child out into the community because of behavior problems...we could give them step by step strategies...including pictures to help them accomplish this."

The notion of gaining insight and understanding of the many challenges faced by our students' families is a benefit highlighted across all data sets. As noted by one participant, "...I think that it helps us to empathize with their situation at home...I think we get a good perspective as to the burden...it's a continuous thing." The emotional aspect of raising a child with special needs may result in the parent having feelings of blame, guilt, and denial, which may become obstacles to the partnership that the staff needs to continue to keep a focus on as they interact with their students' families. Some of the enlightening statistics noted in the 2006 parent survey include: 15% of our families live at or below the poverty level, 44% of our families are supporting between 5 and 8 people, and 60% of our families have more than one child with a disabling condition. This information is critical for our staff to be aware of as they work closely with these
families on a daily basis, as their children may come in hungry and without basic life necessities.

Gaining insight to the needs of our students' families is achieved in part by paying attention to what the parents have to say. As noted in the literature review, the evolution of this partnership came about as professionals began to view parents as the experts, rather than the professionals (Lord-Nelson, Summers & Turnbull, 2004; Park & Turnbull, 2002; Soodak & Erwin, 2000). The idea of a family-centered philosophy embraces the families' priorities and decision-making in setting and achieving their goals for their child. Feedback from the surveys revealed that the Harbor School staff development program does support this aspect of partnership with parents.

Analysis of the staff surveys reveals a benefit to focusing on developing a partnership with families as it emphasizes the importance of staff being available to parents... Many of our families have very limited resources to support the needs of their children. We have students who come in to school hungry or without appropriate clothing. Sometimes our families find themselves in a crisis situation and become overwhelmed with the many challenges faced in raising a child with special needs. Sometimes they just need someone to talk to so that they can keep a positive perspective on their lives and know that they are not alone in dealing with their child's needs. Our families need to know that if they reach out to us for help that we will be there to support them.

The needs assessment process enabled the staff to identify knowledge of available supports and resources as another benefit to parent partnership. As noted above, many of our families have need of basic support and services. Due to their own lack of resources many of our families have to reach out to outside agencies for assistance. Ongoing
training is needed to assist the staff in remaining aware of the availability of supports and resources as these may change depending on the political and economic climate.

Another benefit to the staff development program relating to parent partnership is the development of cooperation and collaboration (Ankenny, Wilkins, & Spain, 2009; Judge, 1997; Osher & Osher, 2002; Park & Turnbull, 2002; Wang, Mannan, Poston, Turnbull & Summers, 2004). The importance of parents and staff working together on behalf of the students will go a long way to support a positive outcome for all involved. As parents and staff work together during an IEP meeting, a collaboration of sharing ideas, observations, and expertise will result in a clearly articulated plan of individual goal development for the child across all environments. It is critical that the staff promote this idea of cooperation and collaboration as this will help to create a win/win situation for everyone involved.

Collaborative relationships are characterized by emphasizing family strengths and encouraging family choice and control over services for their child (Blue-Banning, Summers, Frankland, Lord-Nelson, & Beegle, 2004; Bruder, 200; Osher & Osher, 2002; Summers, Hoffman, Marquis, Turnbull & Poston, 2005). The more the family is involved in the decision-making for their child's educational program, the more vested they will be in imbedding the skill development into the natural environment of their home. As the professionals are trained to focus on letting the parents know about the good things their child does, this in turn builds the parents confidence in being able to assist their child. The parents are then able to focus on their child's strengths and work closely with the professionals in developing appropriate strategies to assist the child in gaining skills which they can practice in the home and in their communities.
Future Programming

The evaluation process for staff development is ongoing and is used to plan for future training needs for staff development to support family-professional partnership. Assessments completed during the 2003-04 to 2009-10 school years reveal the following needs: broader definition of staff development, focus on a more process-oriented approach and follow-up to parent sensitivity panel program.

As detailed in the literature review, a new model of professional development embraces the concept of school administrators and staff working collaboratively together to provide in-service education (Darling-Hammond, 1995). Future programming of staff training should embrace long-term and continuous learning in the context of the school and classroom. As noted here by one of the participants, "...it’s the hands on activities that help you remember what you learned..." and another staff member who suggested that,"...I think if we do things more hands on as opposed to lectures because nobody likes lectures." The school staff should be provided opportunities during the school day to share and collaborate with one another in pursuit of positive outcomes for students and their families.

The 2009 meeting of the Local Improvement Panel (LIP) focused on the changes required by the New Jersey Department of Education. The concept of Professional Learning Communities (PLC) was reviewed and embraced and fostered the notion of professional sharing their expertise in a spirit of collaboration. This new model of professional development also broadens the definition and concept of professional development. As our student population continues to present us with complex challenges,
our training must reflect a more dynamic and interactive approach to meet not only our students needs, but the needs of the family as well.

Along these same lines, one of the staff members was questioning the definition of professional development as she questioned,"…I have seen parents come in here whether invited by the teacher or therapists to observe and see things with their child…is that professional development?" Another staff member spoke to this and said, "…I get ideas from therapists from the things they show me as how to work with the kids, and then suggest things to the parents. There may be things that I send home for hem to do…"

Another staff member said that,"…I think that a big problem for the parents is grooming with their child…the teacher is working on having the child wash and it helps to have a picture schedule, you know step by step…you don't think of all these things…”

"A make and take situation might be helpful for parents but we need to follow it to see if it is really helpful to them…”

The focus groups spent a good amount of time discussing ways to include parents in hands on and interactive training sessions as part of the staff development program. Another staff member noted that, "it’s the hands on activities that help you remember what you learned…” Another participant reiterated, "…just some basic strategies if its not simple and easy then it won't be implemented and won't be useful…” These comments reflect on the new vision for staff professional development which embraces a learn by doing notion, one that is process-oriented and leads to positive outcomes for students and their families.

Future programming for the Harbor School staff development program should also include opportunities to interact with families. The concept of having staff and families
interact during a staff training activity will help the staff to recognize that parents have an expertise gained from raising their child with special needs, and this will help them gain better insight into the support that the family has or may need. As noted in the literature review, one of the key components of a collaborative partnership is to focus on the strengths of the family (Lytle & Bordin, 2001; Salend & Duhaney, 2002; Santelli, 1995; Turnbull, Blue-Banning, Turbiville & Park, 2000). Factors such as: cultural differences, emotional/intellectual issues, denial/anger, and family dynamics all impact on the development of partnership between parents and professionals.

"…staff development along the lines of negotiating and compromise would be helpful…"

This comment was made during the discussion about the staff development program and the training needed to let the parents know that the staff respects their values and beliefs (Harry, 1992; Lee, ostrosky, Bennett & Fowler, 2003; MacFarlane, 1996; Park & Turnbull, 2001). This area seemed to present more difficulty for the staff to articulate specific programs that had assisted with this topic. One staff member said that…" I think that we are able to do different things to meet their ideas in regard to values and beliefs. I would take that as in maybe religious values and beliefs according to the curriculum making it diverse to the needs of the families that come here…” Another participant commented"…I am wondering if staff development along the lines of negotiating and compromise would be helpful, even in regard to collaboration with teachers and therapists. I think the therapists have tunnel vision sometimes when they tell the teachers things and the teachers say but I have to do this and this…”

This comment reveals that the staff development program in regard to family-professional partnership may have an impact beyond the partnership with families, but
may also strengthen the collaborative relationship between and among the staff members themselves. Another staff member points out that"…I think it is also a process of just being, learning and knowing that not everything is always going to go your way, and …I think some broader things like that would be helpful for parents and staff ..." Another participant also talked about cultural differences and the need for some training to gain a perspective on the different cultures represented in the school and that …"their culture may influence their view on disability as well as the needs of their particular child…"

Another idea which seemed to resonate throughout the focus groups was related to the use of surveys or questionnaires as one means to stay connected to the needs of the students' families (Davern, 1996; Salend & Duhaney, 2002; Shapiro, Monzo, Rueda, Gomez & Blacher, 2004; Soodak & Erwin, 2000). This kind of tool would be useful as it,"…would help the staff to find out from the parents what their personal goals are for the home environment or maybe they need help in a different area that we are not aware of..." It would also be useful for those parents who might not feel comfortable speaking up about their concerns as"…it would be good for parents who don't want to be identified." This strategy would also address the time constraint challenge as this information could be gathered at a time that is convenient for both partners.

"I think some training in family dynamics could help us, not that it would change a situation, but we could be more sensitive to it."

This comment from a staff member revolves around the emotional needs of the parents and staff in working together in a partnership. A discussion around the role of the school social worker involved the need for more staff training on family dynamics, dealing with stages of denial, issues of blame and guilt and cultural differences. As this social worker
position is relatively new to the school, there may be a need to re-look at her role in the staff development process to incorporate some of these ideas for future program needs. It may also be beneficial to incorporate the suggestion made by one of the staff to utilize some role playing strategies as a means to help staff to better prepare for potential conflicts in their interactions with families.

A follow-up Parent Sensitivity Panel workshop should be included in future programming for the staff development program. The original program served as a pivotal point in the chronology of the staff development program related to parent-professional partnership and the one workshop that seemed to have a lasting effect on the staff. One staff member shared that, "…I think the parent panel was very informative…it is the only one that really sticks out in my mind that I really remember as being helpful." The workshops that seemed to promote this kind of lasting impact on the staff are those that involve parents and siblings sharing their real life stories that describe the challenges and triumphs of raising and living with a child who has special needs.

Researcher Reflection

My personal experience in working with students and families in the field of special education began thirty years ago as a teacher working with juvenile offenders in a residential program in New York City. My students were all young men who were wards of the family court system as their families could no longer care for them. It was at this time that I was struck by the critical nature of the relationship between professionals and families in support of children with special needs.

I eventually became the Principal of a private special education school (Harbor School) and over the past eighteen years have interacted with hundreds of families raising
children with disabilities. I am often the first person that many of these parents talk to after their child has been diagnosed or classified with a special education label. I have witnessed first hand the range of emotions including heartbreak, anger, frustration, sadness, and isolation that is often felt by these families as they struggle to access the services and programs needed to support their child's education.

The initial idea of focusing on family-professional partnership as part of the staff development program at the Harbor School evolved out of conversations between this researcher and a teacher at the school. This teacher, who is also the parent of an adopted daughter with severe disabilities, began to share stories of her challenges as a parent of a child with disabilities. As a result of these conversations, the idea for an interactive panel consisting of this teacher and other staff members who had children with disabilities began to take shape.

As the Principal of the school, I am charged with organizing and coordinating the staff development program as required by the New Jersey Administrative Code (N.J.A.C. 6A:9). The Supervisor of Instruction and I also work together to develop a school-wide Professional Development Plan which is submitted to and approved by the New Jersey Department of Education on a yearly basis. As noted in the mission statement from the 2009-10 school year plan our vision of professional development is that of an"…ongoing process of reflecting on educational practices so that the professional staff may refine skills, as well as develop new methods to improve their personal professional performance as they improve student learning."

My role as researcher in this study has several layers of effect on this work. My background as a teacher of students with disabilities has provided me with first hand
experience in a partnership when interacting with my students' families. As the Principal of the Harbor School, I have first hand experience interacting with hundreds of parents and children with special needs and witness the struggle of these families to access the services and programs needed to support their child's educational needs. I am also charged with the responsibility of designing and implementing the staff development program for the staff of the school, including the provision of programming to support family-professional partnership between the staff and their students' families.

During the course of the school day, I often find myself in the role of mediator between a staff member and a parent who may be experiencing a conflict in their perspective on a specific situation with a student. I believe that in most of these instances I attempt to assist the staff member to be sensitive to the overwhelming challenges that the parent faces on a daily basis. The impact of family-professional partnership in special education is something that is experienced on a daily basis at the Harbor School. The importance of gaining data from the perspective of the professional staff at the school as to the kinds of training needed to support a partnership with their students' families has complemented research previously conducted with the families of the Harbor School students. The combination of these perspectives will better enable the administration, staff and families of the Harbor School to work in a collaborative manner in support of the complex needs of the students at the school.

Final Thoughts

The concept of a collaborative partnership between professionals and families of children with special needs remains an elusive goal in spite of legislation and research that supports this as best educational practice( Blue-Banning, Summers, Frankland, Lord-
The current research conducted with the professional staff at the Harbor School provided invaluable data as to the components and structures of staff development training considered essential to develop and maintain a collaborative partnership with their students’ families. This data not only identified the components and structures considered essential but also revealed their dynamic and interactive nature. Supported by previous research, the current study reveals that the staff at the Harbor School must not only gain a sensitivity to the needs of each family, they must embed this sensitivity in communicating with the family regarding the supports and resources required to best support the child's educational needs (Lessenberry & Rehfeldt, 2000; Park, Park & Turnbull, 2000; Park & Turnbull, 2002; Soodak & Erwin, 2000).

The severity of the students' disabilities at the Harbor School presents the staff with many challenges in developing and maintaining a collaborative partnership with their students' families. The educational background and training of the staff provides them with a high level of skills, knowledge and experience to meet the complexity of the students needs. The demands of the NCLB legislation have added more curriculum and assessment requirements for our highly challenged students this in turn requires the staff to have a high level of expertise in order to accommodate and implement these legislative mandates.

Critical to the staff development program for the staff is the structure or means of how the program training is given. As noted in the literature review, an expanded view of professional development that embraces long-term and continuous learning in the context
of the school and classroom will better enable the staff to meet the needs of their diverse learners (Ackerman, 2003; Darling-Hammond, 1995; Kelleher, 2003; Liberman, 2005).

The structure of the staff development program must reflect a dynamic and highly interactive mode of training that embraces opportunities to interact with the students' families. This will foster the notion that families have expertise (Soodak & Erwin, 2000; Osher & Osher, 2002; Turnbull, Turnbull, Erwin & Soodak, 2006) and also provide ongoing opportunities to remain sensitive to the family needs in support of the child who unites their partnership.

**Study Limitations**

Limitations to this research included: the use of only one site for the study, and the exclusion of the paraprofessionals, specialists, and nurses who are part of the school educational staff. The original survey had been developed by researchers at the University of Kansas through research conducted with parents. This survey was adapted to measure attitudes and opinions specific to the Harbor School program. The subjective nature of this assessment may have resulted in bias or error in its development. The first section of the survey (questions 1-10) asks the participants for feedback regarding their educational experience and training, personal background and current communication with families. The second section of the survey (questions 11-25) utilized the same content of questions as were contained in the original survey. Questions numbered 26-35 were added by this researcher to elicit information related the structure of the staff development program.

As noted in the methodology section, the students at the Harbor School have significant disabilities and the findings in this study may not apply to all programs that
serve children with special needs. The role of the researcher as supervisor for the study participants may have had a limiting effect on the data collection, as the participants may have felt intimidated by my presence. The issue of trustworthiness between the researcher and the participants was challenging due to the nature of the supervisory role of the researcher to the participants. The researcher remained diligent in keeping an awareness of this relationship and the possible bias it presented. The benefit for the participants was an opportunity to "vent" some of their issues/concerns with their relationship with our families as well as give input as to the kinds of training they felt would be helpful to better meet the needs of our families.

**Implications for Future Research**

Implications for future research include: the need to include paraprofessionals, specialists and nurses in a future study, the need to include adult students and family members in a future study, and evaluation of the effectiveness of the staff development training program. Additionally, research conducted with professionals who are also parents of children with special needs in a comparison study with professionals who are not parents or who are parents but do not have a child with a disability might provide additional interesting data on this topic. As more public school districts are developing programs within district to educate children with significant disabilities the need to incorporate professionals within the public school system in this research will be important to add to the minimal data that exists on this subject. It would also be important to conduct research with professionals and parents together in a study to assess the components of staff development in support of family-professional partnership. There is
also a need to study the application of these findings to other private and public school programs serving children with disabilities and their families.
References


New Jersey Administrative Code, Title 6A, Chapter 9. Professional Licensure and Standards, Subchapters 1, 2, 3.


Appendix A

Family-Professional Collaborative Partnership in Special Education

Harbor School Staff Survey

Please answer the following about yourself:

1. Please indicate your working experience by answering the following:

   How many years have you been employed at The Harbor School? _________

   What is the age range of the children you currently teach? _______________________

   Have you taught other age ranges at the Harbor School (Please circle one) Yes No. 

   If you have answered yes to the above question please list all age ranges you have taught.

   ______________________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________

2. On average, how often do you communicate with parents? (Please mark off one box)

   □ Daily
   □ Weekly
   □ Bi-Weekly (every two weeks)
   □ Monthly
   □ Other

   If you have chosen “other” please specify: ___________________________________
3. Please indicate the mode of communication that you most often use when communicating with parents. Please check one.

☐ Communication Log
☐ Phone
☐ E-mail
☐ School Folder
☐ Face to face (i.e. when child’s parent or guardian picks him or her up from school)
☐ Other

If you have chose other please specify: ____________________________

4. Please indicate the age group you feel most comfortable teaching. ____________________________

_________________________________________________________________________________

5. Please indicate the disability group you feel most comfortable teaching. ________________

_________________________________________________________________________________

6. Do you have other related work experience outside of Harbor School? (Please circle one)

Yes     No

If you answered yes to the above question please list:

_________________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________________

7. Are you a parent? (Please circle one) Yes    No

If you have answered yes to the above question please indicate the number of children that you have. __________
8. Do you have a child or children with a disability? (Please circle one)  Yes  No

If you have answered yes to the above question please indicate the child or children’s ages
and their disability _____________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

9. Have you ever taken courses or attended workshops outside of those provided by the Harbor
School that focuses on parent communication or parent support?

(Please circle one) Yes  No

If you have answered yes to the above question please list the courses/workshops and/or a
Brief description: _____________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

10. Please indicate your educational training:

    Bachelors Degree in ________________________________________________________

    Do you have a master’s degree? (Please check the appropriate box)

    □ Yes in _________________________________________________________________
    □ No, but working on a master’s degree in ________________________________
    □ No
Please use the following scale for questions 11-35:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>N/A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Very Dissatisfied)</td>
<td>(Neither Satisfied or Dissatisfied)</td>
<td>(Very Satisfied)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How satisfied are you that the staff development program at Harbor School…

11. Helps you gain skills to give to the parents of your students

12. Helps you gain information to give to the parents of your students

13. Helps you speak up for your student’s best interests when working with the child study team members

14. Helps you to let parents know the good things that your student’s do

15. Helps you to treat your student’s with dignity

16. Helps you to build on your students strengths

17. Helps you to value your students’ parents’ opinions about their child’s needs

18. Helps you to be honest with your students’ parents even when there is bad news

19. Helps you to be available to parents when they need you

20. Helps you to use words that your students’ parents understand

21. Helps you to protect your students’ families’ privacy

22. Helps you to show respect for your students’ families’ values and beliefs

23. Helps you to listen to your students’ family without judging them

24. Helps you to be a person your students’ family can depend on and trust

25. Helps you to pay attention to what your students’ family has to say
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>N/A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>26. Is provided on a consistent basis</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. Is provided at a convenient time</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. Provides follow-up to previous training</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. Provides opportunities for individual or small group training</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. Provides opportunities for interacting with parents or other family members</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31. Provides a variety of methods of presentations</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32. Provides training on topics relevant to family-professional collaboration</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33. Provides training on topics relevant to support students success</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34. Supports your ability to apply what you learn to work collaboratively with families</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35. Provides opportunities for training by outside family resource service providers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B

Family-Professional Collaborative Partnership in Special Education

Harbor School Staff Interview Questions

1. Has the staff development program helped you to gain skills to share with the parents of your students? (If yes, how has it helped?) (If no, why not?)

2. Has the staff development program helped you to gain information to share with the parents of your students? (If yes, how has it helped?) (If no, why not?)

3. In your opinion has the staff development program helped you to communicate with parents by using words they understand? (If yes how has it helped?), (If no, why not?)

4. In your opinion has the staff development program helped you to communicate honestly with your students’ parents even when there is bad news? (If yes, how has it helped?) (If no, why not?)

5. In your opinion has the staff development program helped you in letting your students’ parents know that you value their opinion? (If yes, how has it helped?) (If no, why not?)

6. Has the staff development program helped you let your students’ parents know that you respect their values and beliefs? (If yes, how has it helped?) (If no, why not?)

7. Has the staff development program helped you to work together with your students’ parents to assist them with their child’s needs? (If yes, how has it helped?) (If no, why not?)
8. In your opinion has the staff development program helped you to work together with your students’ parents during a stressful situation? (If yes, how has it helped?) (If no, why not?)

9. What does the term “collaborative partnership” mean to you in terms of working with your students’ parents?

10. What are the components of the staff development program that assist you in establishing “cooperative partnership” with your students’ parents?

11. What topic areas do you think need to be provided in the staff development program to improve your ability to collaborate with your students’ families?

12. What types of training do you think would be most beneficial in assisting you to better partner with your students’ families?

13. What factors influence your ability to better apply what you have learned in staff training to do a better job in meeting the needs of your students’ families?

14. How often during the school year should professional development activities focus on family support and collaboration?

15. Do you think it would be helpful to have opportunities to interact with parents during staff development training on parent partnership?
## Appendix C
Summary of Codes Linked to Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Set</th>
<th>Theme/Findings</th>
<th>Related Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional Development Logs</td>
<td>Program Description</td>
<td>History, purpose, requirements, evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sensitivity</td>
<td>Empathy for parent struggle, family dynamics, sibling perspective, family needs, non-judgmental, survey, value parent opinion, honesty with parents, minimize isolation, level of stress, validate what parents say, respect, trust, cooperation, collaboration, partnership, identify obstacles parents face is assisting their child, family perspective on disability, develop rapport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Honesty with parents, foster collaboration with meetings, open and consistent, active listening, daily interaction, formal log/folder, informal discussion, minimize isolation, share info about available resources, sensitive to family dynamics, collaborative partnership, questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Knowledge of Supports/Resources</td>
<td>Recreational programs, post secondary programs, motivational speaker, legal issues, guardianship, brain research, behavior management, vocational skill development, social skill development, technology expertise, home programs, collaborative partnership, questionnaire, financial planning, DDD supports, self-determination, disability awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Structure</td>
<td>Large group, small group, formal/informal, 30 minutes-6 hours in length, outside agency guest speaker, process-oriented, held after school/ within the school day, opportunities to interact with families/, varying frequency- yearly, monthly, weekly, follow up to previous training</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges</td>
<td>Time constraint, social skill development, vocational skill development, post secondary program availability</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits</td>
<td>Skill development, gain insight/understanding, cooperation, collaboration, gain knowledge of available resources, positive student/family outcomes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future Programming</td>
<td>Follow-up to parent sensitivity panel, broader definition of staff development, process-oriented</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surveys</td>
<td>Program Participants</td>
<td>Educational/personal background, experience/training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensitivity</td>
<td>Value parent opinion, respect values/beliefs, non-judgmental, protect family/student privacy, develop trust/rapport, reliability</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Speak up for child with district, honesty with parents, simplify educational jargon, active listening, formal log/folder, varying frequency-monthly, weekly, daily</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of Supports/Resources</td>
<td>Gain skills, gain info to share with parents, build on child's strengths,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Structure</td>
<td>Varying consistency/ frequency-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Groups</td>
<td>Sensitivity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Challenges</strong></td>
<td>yearly, monthly, weekly, follow up to previous training, individual/small group, outside speakers, opportunities to interact with families</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Benefits</strong></td>
<td>Time constraint, consistency/frequency, follow-up to previous training opportunities to interact with parents, individual/small group, knowledge of available resources, CST/district policies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Future Programming</strong></td>
<td>Skill development, gain insight/understanding, collaboration, trust, respect, active listening, open communication gain knowledge of available resources, reliability, application of learned skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Focus Groups</strong></td>
<td>Promote in-house training, provide opportunities to interact with families, follow-up training on parent sensitivity/communication, outside agency speakers, communication skill development, consistent programming, individual/small group format</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sensitivity</strong></td>
<td>Empathy for parent struggle, family dynamics, family needs, develop trust/rapport, cultural differences, denial, communicating with parents, sibling perspective, non-judgmental, parent involvement, questionnaire, value parent opinion, daily interaction and support, shift thinking from staff as experts to parents as experts, identify obstacles parents face in assisting their child, level of stress, parent feelings of guilt/blame for child's disability</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Active listening, foster collaboration with meetings, honesty with parents,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>share info about available programs, home programs, negotiating and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>compromise, newsletters, simplify educational jargon, survey, informal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>discussion, social functions, questionnaire, sensitive to family needs,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>sensitive to family dynamics, daily interaction, validate what parents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>have to say, non-judgmental, minimize isolation, networking with other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>schools, parents, agencies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of</td>
<td>Recreational programs, cultural training, family dynamics, stages of</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supports/Resources</td>
<td>denial, motivational speaker, offer expertise, simplify educational jargon,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>network to share info, dealing with stress, staff attend parent workshops</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>info from internet, outside agencies, host community provider fair</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Structure</td>
<td>Need consistency and frequency, shorter in length, more focused, case</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>studies role play, individual/small group, interactive, hold within school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>day, outside resources/presenters, formal/informal, opportunities to</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>interact with families</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges</td>
<td>Time constraint, knowledge of available resources, level of stress, lack of</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>needed resources, limited access to resources, family dynamics, cultural</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>differences, denial, blame, CST district policy, streamline info to meet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>family need</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits</td>
<td>Ease parent frustration with overwhelming amount of info, collaboration,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>cooperation, knowledge, interaction, networking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative Partnership</td>
<td>gain insight/ understanding, minimize parent feelings of isolation, trust, respect, skill development, partnership, positive student/family outcomes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future Programming</td>
<td>Family dynamics, sibling perspective, motivational speaker, Pre-IEP meeting, negotiation and compromise, active listening, social skill development in home/community, developing trust, help families access appropriate resources</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Broader definition of staff development, process-oriented, support carryover of skill development at home, need for follow-up to previous training, opportunities to interact with families, ongoing activities on parent sensitivity and communication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Staff Development Activities from 2003-2010 on Family-Professional Partnership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of Program</th>
<th>Format</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Time Frame</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Speaker Type</th>
<th>Opportunity to Interact with Parents</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>09/03 ProfDev</td>
<td>Small Group</td>
<td>Lecture</td>
<td>1 hr</td>
<td>Annual</td>
<td>In-house</td>
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<tr>
<td>09/03 Open House</td>
<td>Large Group</td>
<td>Lecture</td>
<td>1 hr</td>
<td>Annual</td>
<td>In-house</td>
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<tr>
<td>09/03 Paul W.</td>
<td>Large Group</td>
<td>Lecture</td>
<td>3 hr</td>
<td>Once</td>
<td>Outside Speaker</td>
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<tr>
<td>11/03 Parent Sens Panel</td>
<td>Large Group</td>
<td>Lecture</td>
<td>2 hr</td>
<td>Twice</td>
<td>In-house</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>11/01 Parent Conf</td>
<td>Large Group</td>
<td>Lecture</td>
<td>1 hr</td>
<td>Annual</td>
<td>In-house</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>12/03 NC-IEP mtg</td>
<td>Small Group</td>
<td>Interactive</td>
<td>1 hr</td>
<td>Once</td>
<td>In-house</td>
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<tr>
<td>12/03 Needs Assesment</td>
<td>Large Group</td>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>1 hr</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>In-house</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>2/04 ARC Rec</td>
<td>Small Group</td>
<td>Lecture</td>
<td>1 hr</td>
<td>Once</td>
<td>Outside Speaker</td>
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