

Cross-sectional study on accessibility to special education services in the Seattle/King County region

A Cross-Sectional Study on Accessibility to Special Education Services in the  
Seattle/King County Region

Olivia Handman

Summer 2020

A capstone Project in fulfillment of the

requirements for a degree of

Masters of Arts in Policy Studies

University of Washington Bothell

Capstone Advisor: Keith Nitta

Chapter

<b>1. Introduction</b> .....	4
Overview .....	4
<b>2. Literature Review</b> .....	7
Historical literature.....	7
Section 504 and the Individuals with Disabilities Act.....	9
Individuals with Disabilities Act.....	13
Disability and Poverty.....	14
Social Capital and Knowledge Transfer.....	15
<b>3. Methodology</b> .....	19
Study Settings.....	19
Participants.....	19
Study Design and Procedures.....	21
Research questions asked to participants.....	21
<b>4. Findings</b> .....	23
Social Capital and Knowledge Disparities.....	23
Struggling to Identify Students and Qualifying for Services.....	26
Inadequate Support/Resources.....	29
Findings Among the Low-Income Families.....	33
<b>5. Discussion and Conclusion</b> .....	34

Cross-sectional study on accessibility to special education services in the Seattle/King County region

Context.....34

Significant Outcomes.....34

Limitations.....35

Summary of Research Findings.....35

Recommendations.....38

References.....39

Abstract

In Seattle, there are 55,000 people enrolled in the public-school system, and out of those there are 8,497 students identified with a disability and 1,879 students with some type of accommodations. In the 2019-2020 school year, there were 18,134 students identified as low income in the Seattle/King County area. This study examined whether there was a correlation between income and accessibility to special education services in the Seattle/King County area. The method in which this data was acquired for the study was through a series of fifteen interviews of parents in the Seattle/King County area. The results of the data showed three distinct themes: one, social capital and knowledge disparities; two, Struggling to identify students and qualifying for services; and the third theme was inadequate support/resources.

Keywords: Special Education, Individualized Education Program, Parent Interviews.

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study aims to reveal whether there is a connection between income level and accessibility to disability services in the Seattle/King County area, and to uncover whether there are inequities in the special education system. In the local special education community there is general knowledge from experts in the field that say they can see the inequities. However, there is little research on this topic in this area. To what extent does social-economic status affect the ability to get disability services or a diagnosis of a learning disability? This research aims to show that students who come from lower-income families have a more difficult time accessing special education services here in the Seattle/King County area than students who come from middle- to high-income families. Fifteen families from varying income levels were interviewed to try to determine a link between income and accessibility to special education services in the Seattle/King County area.

### **Overview**

The Individualized Education Program (IEP) has been a staple in the American school system for students with disabilities for about forty-five years; it has helped many students navigate the system and allow them to gain equity in the system, but it is not perfect. In order to get an IEP, students must meet specific criteria. IEPs are given to students who show that they need more support beyond the standard curriculum. In order to qualify for an IEP, a student must first be diagnosed with a disability that falls under the Individuals with Disabilities Education

Cross-sectional study on accessibility to special education services in the Seattle/King County region Act (IDEA). After the student is diagnosed with a disability, an IEP meeting will be set up with the appropriate people: most likely, the teachers, the student involved, and their parents and or guardians (Chapman, 2002).

This meeting's purpose is to set down goals and help identify tools for the student and any other unique accommodation he or she might need. This is an essential step for the student and can help them thrive if everything is followed through on. Because IEPs are expensive, the IDEA is supposed to guarantee that parents do not have to pay out of pocket for any special services that go into having an IEP, but that is not always the case.

“At that point, even if parents ask the school to do some testing, they may meet resistance: Testing is expensive and time-consuming, campus psychologists are spread very thin, and schools are under pressure to put fewer kids in Special Education, in the name of “mainstreaming,” not more. So, the parents often end up resorting to private testing, which can run as high as \$2,000 and is seldom covered by insurance.” (Thompson, 2016)

Cost and lack of information given to parents have not been the only issues stated or researched over the years. Parents can feel discounted by the system.

“Other research suggests the IEP process can be difficult and complicated because school staff and families do not always share the same goals and perspectives about disability and education (Engel 1993; Valle and Aponte 2002) and teacher interaction with families of children with disabilities often uses a paradigm that reflects the dominant narratives of disability as deficit.” (MacLeod, 2017)

This reality goes against policy goals set up by FAPE (Free and Appropriate Education) and the IDEA. This is a crack in the system. The school is not refusing to do the testing, but not having the right staff available makes it hard for parents to make sure their children are getting the appropriate support.

Cross-sectional study on accessibility to special education services in the Seattle/King County region

The IEP is essential and provides an important service; it provides space for children to not feel like failures, and it makes it possible for a child to recognize that their learning differences do not define them.

“30 years of research and experience has demonstrated that the education of children with disabilities can be made more effective by having high expectations for such children and ensuring their access to the general education curriculum in the regular classroom, to the maximum extent possible, in order to meet developmental goals and, to the maximum extent possible, the challenging expectations that have been established for all children.”  
(Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, n.d)

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Historical/ Background Literature

A book written about disabilities by Bonnie M. Beyer and Eileen S. Johnson entitled *Special Programs & Services in Schools* talks about the past and how people with disabilities used to be viewed in society. For centuries, people have lived with disabilities, whether mental, physical, or a learning disability like dyslexia. It was not until the 1700s - 1800s when disabilities started to be looked at as something other than a burden on society. People were starting to understand differences in people and disabilities, and it did not mean that they were worthless. “In the 1700s several individuals contributed to a general shift in thinking about individuals with disabilities and what they could accomplish.” (Bonnie Beyer, 2014)

A book written in the 1800s shows a lot of great examples from the past and how western societies thought about disabilities at the time. The book is by Jean Marc Gaspard Itard and is entitled *An historical account of the discovery and education of a savage man, or: of the first developments, physical and moral, of the young savage caught in the woods near Aveyron in the year 1798*. This book recounts Itard's life as a doctor when he is trying to help a young boy named Victor, who was found lost in the woods. Victor was mute and deaf. At the time, many thought the boy was hopeless. Itard wanted to prove those people wrong, although Itard didn't make as much progress as he hoped. However, his working with Victor led to training and techniques that revolutionized the special education world at the time. (Itard, 1802)

The past literature on disabilities tells us that people with disabilities are less than human, that something is inherently wrong with them. Coming now to the present, we still see similar issues with disabilities and poverty.

Cross-sectional study on accessibility to special education services in the Seattle/King County region

The history of disability services is not a very long one in the United States of America. The 1960s was the start of disability services in America despite IDEA was not signed into law by George W. BUSH until 1975. During the 1960s, we started to see an influx of support services for those with disabilities. With help from organizations like The Arc, which was formed in the 1950s to advocate for those with intellectual and learning disabilities, and others, the federal government started to become aware of the disparities. The Arc implemented programs that later became the foundation's special education intervention programs. (The Arc, n.d.)

A few key legislative acts were enacted during the 1950s -1960s. In 1959, the Training of Professional Personnel Act helped to train people educating those with mental disabilities. In 1961, the deaf teachers act was signed, which helped to train educators working with the deaf.

In 1965, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was signed by President Lyndon B Johnson. He believed that everybody has a right to a full education. The ESEA added a new grant to low-income districts for low-income students. The money would cover textbooks and library books, funding for special education centers and college funds. Although this was not specifically about disabilities, this act set a precedent in American society to create more equity in the public-school systems. It also helped to set in motion the policies that directly related to supporting disenfranchised students with disabilities. (Paul, 2014)

Around the same time, several court cases set a new precedent for children in the school system who were being disenfranchised by the system. *Mills v. Board of Education District of Columbia* (1972) was brought to the U.S. Supreme Court; this case is specifically about students with disabilities getting access to free education. This court case involves several students with

Cross-sectional study on accessibility to special education services in the Seattle/King County region disabilities. The students were denied admission to public schooling because of a disability. Because of *Brown v. Board of Education*, the Supreme Court found in *Mills* that there was a direct violation of those students' rights to public education. The court explained that the school board's failure to meet its mandate could not be excused by its argument that there were insufficient funds available to pay for the children's services. Instead, the court held that the board's duty to educate the children outweighed its interest in preserving its resources. (*Mills v. Board of Education*, 1972)

At the same time as *Mills*, there was another critical case taking place in Pennsylvania, *PARC v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania*. This case was brought on behalf of thirteen individuals with disabilities, from the age six to age twenty-one.

“Thirteen named plaintiffs sue on their own behalf and, pursuant to rule 23 Fed. R. Civ. P. and each portion thereof, on behalf of the class of all persons, residents of Pennsylvania, aged six to twenty-one years, who are eligible for a free education expect that defendants herein (1) have excluded or (2) excused them from attendance at public school or (3) have postponed their admission or (4) otherwise have refused to allow them free access to public education because they are retarded.” (*Pennsylvania Ass'n, Ret'd Child. v. Commonwealth of Pa.*, 1972)

The judge ruled in this case that it was unconstitutional not to provide proper education for students with disabilities.

#### Section 504 and the Individuals with Disabilities Act

Before IDEA was signed into law, several acts targeted issues for people with disabilities. Section 504 of The Rehabilitation Act was enacted in 1973, two years before IDEA. Section 504 is a federal law that protects people with disabilities from being discriminated against (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office for Civil Rights, n.d). 504 plans are still used in American schools to make sure students with disabilities are being treated correctly.

Cross-sectional study on accessibility to special education services in the Seattle/King County region

Section 504 protection applies to anyone who is a part of an organization that is funded by federal money, including government jobs, public schools, NGOs that receive federal funding, etc. It protects persons defined as having a physical or mental disability which limits their ability to have an "average life," such as caring for oneself, walking, seeing, hearing, learning, speaking, breathing or performing manual tasks. As a result, Section 504 plays a significant role in America's public schools. (Lee, 2018)

"An important responsibility of the Office for Civil Rights (O.C.R.) is to eliminate discrimination on the basis of disability against students with disabilities. O.C.R. receives numerous complaints and inquiries in the area of elementary and secondary education involving Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, 29 U.S.C. § 794 (Section 504). Most of these concern identification of students who are protected by Section 504 and the means to obtain an appropriate education for such students."

Free appropriate education (FAPE) is also covered under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Anyone with a disability who goes to an American public school is qualified for FAPE. (Lee, n.d)

"To be appropriate, education programs for students with disabilities must be designed to meet their individual needs to the same extent that the needs of nondisabled students are met. An appropriate education may include regular or special education and related aids and services to accommodate the unique needs of individuals with disabilities." (U.S. Department of Education, n.d)

One way to ensure that a student is getting appropriate help is to give them an Individualized Education Program (IEP), provided the student has a diagnosed disability and meets the IEP qualifications.

These acts were a significant first step in disability services, but it was not until 1975 that the IDEA was signed. At first, it was called the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (public law 94-142). This act states that all children with disabilities must have access to free and

Cross-sectional study on accessibility to special education services in the Seattle/King County region appropriate education in every state in America and ensures the protection of children with disabilities in the school system. All disabilities are covered under this law regardless of severity, including autism, deafness, emotional disturbance, hearing impairment, intellectual disabilities, learning disabilities, multiple disabilities, speech or language impairments, visual impairments, traumatic brain injury, and orthopedic impairments. (The Understood Team, n.d)

Under IDEA, parents should not be paying for any services for their child's educational needs. Under the law, once a child is diagnosed with a disability, or suspected of having a disability, the families should be able to get all of the disability services provided without cost. The parent should not have to find an outside source for identification; the school should be able to provide adequate testing services. (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, n.d)

Funding for the IDEA comes from the federal government. Initially, the federal government promised to fund 40% of each state's special education budget. However, the federal government has not been able to meet that promise. It only covers about 25% of each state's special education budget. This funding has to cover all students with disabilities in the state. The funding formula has changed over the years since the IDEA was first put into place in 1975, one of the most significant being in 1997. In 1997 Congress became concerned that the amount of money that was given to each state was allowing states to over-identify or incentivize over-identifying students with disabilities (Bonnie Beyer, 2014). At that time, Congress was mainly concerned with how many students of color were being identified with a disability. There was a 33% increase in kids being diagnosed in 10 years, so the concern was justified. However, because of this over-diagnosing, congress changed the way the federal government funded the IDEA Act. Congress moved from basing federal funding on the number of children who received

Cross-sectional study on accessibility to special education services in the Seattle/King County region

special education funding in the state to basing it on the population of children in the state and the percentage of children living in poverty. Congress thought this would help to make sure that students would not be over-diagnosed.

"Funding varies from state to state, and in some states, the available funds and support are lacking. States use one of four ways to pay for special education, 1: per person funding, 2: cost reimbursement, 3: instruction/teacher units, and 4: census data." (National Council on Disability, 2018)

Increasing the budget for special education has been a topic of debate for years. The state must fund all public education, and there are many programs that states have to fund, like general education, special education, bilingual education support, and others. Special education funding is directly related to the severity of the disabilities that are being worked with. Because funding is tied to individual cases, it can be hard to find a formula that equally increases funding. (Bonnie Beyer, 2014)

"The IDEA is one of the largest educational programs overseen by the U.S. Department of Education (E.D.). From the first year of Funding in 1977 until about a decade ago, appropriations for the Part B grants-to-states program had been rising rapidly. In the first 20 years of Funding for the Part B program, appropriations increased 470% in constant 2015 dollars. Between the last two reauthorizations of the IDEA in 1997 and 2004, Part B appropriations rose an average of 18% per year in constant dollars. However, Part B funding trends changed after the 2004 reauthorization, and appropriations fluctuated in the decade between FY2005 and FY2015. Part B funding reached its highest levels in FY2005 and FY2009, with inflation-adjusted amounts exceeding \$12.6 billion each year. In FY2015, the appropriation was \$11.5 billion." (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, n.d)

The IDEA was put in place to help underrepresented students in the American school system. Getting appropriate funding for everything is very important to help these students do well, along with other components to the act. (National Council on Disability, 2014)

### Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Public Law 94 – 142 or the IDEA signed into law the Individualized Education Program, otherwise known as IEPs. Individualized programs are a specific set of instructions for students with disabilities to get the appropriate learning that fits their unique needs.

“The term 'individualized education program' means a written statement for each handicapped child developed in any meeting by a representative of the local educational agency or an intermediate educational unit who shall be qualified to provide, or supervise the provision of, specially designed instruction to meet the unique needs of handicapped children.” (Public Law 94-142, 1975)

It was evident during the writing of this bill that there needed to be something put in place to help tip the scale for children with disabilities.

“Congress finds the following: (1) Disability is a natural part of the human experience and in no way diminishes the right of individuals to participate in or contribute to society. Improving educational results for children with disabilities is an essential element of our national policy of ensuring equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency for individuals with disabilities. (2) Before the date of enactment of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (Public Law 94–142), the educational needs of millions of children with disabilities were not being adequately met because— (A) the children did not receive appropriate educational services; (B) the children were excluded entirely from the public-school system and from being educated with their peers; (C) undiagnosed disabilities prevented the children from having a successful educational experience, or (D) a lack of adequate resources within the public-school system forced families to find services outside the public-school system.” (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, n.d)

When IEPs were first formulated, there were some concerns about the new policy. There were concerns about the federal government getting involved with states' education. Many people did see this as a win for those with disabilities, while others thought more about how it would affect the education budget. There were also concerns about how much time it would take

Cross-sectional study on accessibility to special education services in the Seattle/King County region to create an IEP for a student and the number of people that needed to be involved in doing it. Finally, there were some concerns about how IEPs would function in a school setting. (Phelps, 1980)

This policy was put in place to give equity to people with disabilities, starting in schools. This was to stop people from thinking that people with handicaps would not be able to be functioning members of society. “The IEP then is one vehicle designed by Congress to assure individualization and to stop programming based on labels and stereotyping.” IEPs allow students to get extra help in a school outside of the main classroom (Phelps, 1980). There have been many amendments added to the IDEA act over the years.

### Disability and Poverty

A book titled *Mental Disorders and Disabilities Among Low-Income Children*. is a study by the National Academy of Sciences (2015) talks about poverty and childhood disability. It points out that there is a link between disability and poverty. The link is complicated and there are a lot of factors that might lead to why this is.

“The relationship between childhood disability and poverty is best described as complex and interactive ([Lustig and Strauser, 2007](#)). Poor health and disability are strongly associated with poverty ([Stein and Silver, 2002](#)). This relationship is thought to be a linear one, in which income or socioeconomic status and parental education (which are highly correlated) are correlated with health both within and across societies ([Marmot et al., 1987](#)).” (Committee to Evaluate the Supplemental Security Income Disability Program for Children with Mental Disorders; Board on the Health of Select Populations; Board on Children, Youth, and Families; Institute of Medicine; Division of Behavioral and Social Science, 2015)

Cross-sectional study on accessibility to special education services in the Seattle/King County region

*Mental Disorders and Disabilities Among Low-Income Children*. That mothers that are in low-income households have a higher chance of giving birth to a child that is premature, which can lead to other health issues:

“Even when preterm babies have an identical medical status, their prognosis is heavily influenced by their socioeconomic status, with those from less advantaged backgrounds being more likely to experience poorer outcomes ([Escalona, 1982](#); [Stein et al., 2010](#)). Furthermore, children who grow up in poverty are less likely to be treated for their conditions, as they generally have more limited access to care, and even those with insurance may face additional barriers and consequently have poorer health outcomes ([Van Cleave et al., 2010](#)).” (Committee to Evaluate the Supplemental Security Income Disability Program for Children with Mental Disorders; Board on the Health of Select Populations; Board on Children, Youth, and Families; Institute of Medicine; Division of Behavioral and Social Science, 2015)

Another relevant study, entitled *Poverty and Disability: Addressing the Challenge of Inequality*, by Carolyn Hughes, PhD, provides information about how students that grow up in low-income households have a higher chance of having a disability.

“Poverty is also more prevalent among individuals with disabilities. More than one fourth of children with disabilities are living in families with earnings below the poverty level (Parish, Rose, & Andrews, 2010). Children with disabilities are also more likely to be from single-parent families and families of racial minority backgrounds (Parish, Rose, Grinstein-Weiss, Richman, & Andrews, 2008). These children may face additional obstacles, such as racism or prejudice, along with the educational, employment, and social challenges associated with poverty (Hughes & Avoke, 2010; McDonald, Keys, & Balcazar, 2007).” (Hughes, 2014)

### Social Capital and Knowledge Transfer

To examine the special education system in Seattle we must examine the concept of social capital social networks and the transfer of knowledge. “Knowledge acquisition has been

Cross-sectional study on accessibility to special education services in the Seattle/King County region

identified as a direct benefit of social capital” (Tsang, 2005). Having the ability to transfer specific knowledge from one community to another benefits those community members greatly. It's hard to transfer specific knowledge when there isn't a clear view on how to socially network to build social capital.

“The structural dimension of social capital involves the pattern of relationships between the network actors and can be analyzed from the perspective of network ties, network configuration, and network stability. Network ties deal with the specific ways the actors are related. Ties are a fundamental aspect of social capital, because an actor's network of social ties creates opportunities for social capital transactions (Adler & Kwon, 2002). A key feature of intra corporate networks is that members of a network belong to the same corporation” (Tsang, 2005).

Building social networks is an important way to help low income communities thrive but this is also something that can be hard to do. Studies suggest that having a larger network of acquaintances helps to build communities that are more financially stable and have more resources. Lower-income communities don't always get those same opportunities to build larger social networks, which puts them in a position to not have the same opportunities and resources around them.

“More affluent communities do have greater financial and human capital resources, and their public institutions, like schools, are stronger. Their social capital can be more effective because it is reinforced by these other resources. For example, residents of poor communities may be friends with their neighbors, but those neighbors cannot provide them with connections and references to high- paying jobs. PTA members in an affluent community can discuss the latest curriculum innovations with schoolteachers. PTA members in an inner-city school can work together too. But instead of using their social capital to advance pedagogy at the school, they must discuss how to get an unresponsive central bureaucracy to fix the ceiling that has been falling down in the school auditorium for the last ten years.” (Saegert, 2001)

Going through the special education system without a fluid way to transfer knowledge and build social capital can be very challenging for parents. It's very challenging for parents to understand their rights and their children's rights in the special education system when they're not

Cross-sectional study on accessibility to special education services in the Seattle/King County region able to build up that specific knowledge. Studies suggest that the readability of the information given to parents by the school system is not accessible. It's hard to understand, which makes it very difficult for parents to make informed decisions for their child and to understand their rights in these situations. A study done in 2006 measured the readability of special education documents around the country. They found that in Washington state the readability of those documents was at the 14.8 grade level. (Watkins, 2006).

“The majority of the words used in the samples were of one syllable. It is generally believed that the more syllables a word has, the more difficult it is to read. Thus, an average of 60% of the total words would be considered simple and easy to read. The words in each sample were also compared to a list of difficult words created for use with the original Dale-Chall readability formula (Dale & Chall, 1948). On average, approximately 24% of the words in each sample would be considered unfamiliar to the average reader.” (Watkins, 2006)

The results from this study would suggest that the documents given to parents are not as accessible as they should be.

“The results from this study indicated that only 4% to 8% of the documents were at or below the recommended 7th- to 8th-grade reading level. The vast majority of the documents, 92% to 96%, were at a 9th- to 10th-grade reading level or higher. Furthermore, the New DaleChall scores indicated that 20% of Parents’ Rights documents were written at the college reading level or higher. The Flesch Grade Level scores showed that more than 50% of the documents were written at the college level or higher. Considering that almost 50% of American adults read at or below the 8th-grade level (National Work Group on Literacy and Health, 1998), the results suggest that more than 90% of Parents’ Rights documents are above the 7th- to 8th-grade level, and thus, are too difficult for the average person.” (Watkins, 2006)

A more recent study published in 2016 looked at 30 years of readability. The study found:

“Appropriate readability levels, as recommended by researchers from studies within this review, steadily decreased from 1984 to 2014 where early recommendations were no higher than ninth grade, and by 2014, recommendations were steady at fifth grade. Roit and Pfohl (1984) conducted the first systematic analysis of the accessibility of informational parent documents to understand the appropriateness of such

communication methods when considering parent education and literacy levels.” (Sarah A. Nagro, 2016)

It appears that documents sent home by the school lack accessibility. Without accessibility, it would be very hard to advocate for your child's rights in the special education system. Without social capital to help navigate the system through knowledge transfers of specific information, it is very hard for parents to advocate effectively for their child. Having an advocate or being trained in advocate services can help the parent navigate the system. A study from 2018 done in Illinois, *Studying the Impact of Advocacy through the Perspective of School Professionals and Teachers*, shows that,

“Parents and professionals reported that parent (e.g., knowledge, socioeconomic status, employment, personality), child (e.g., type of disability, age), and parent–school characteristics (e.g., family–school partnership, degree of parent–teacher communication) affected parent advocacy. Regarding parent characteristics, parents and professionals reported that parents with more knowledge about their rights, social-communication strategies, and the disability of the child were more likely to advocate. A special education teacher in a vocational program for students with significant disabilities reported, “When parents have more knowledge, whether it be about their child’s type of disability, programs, services, or about their rights, they have more advocacy skills.” Moreover, parents who were professionals in the disability field were more likely to advocate for their children; such professionals included attorneys, speech and language pathologists, and special education teachers. A parent of a child with a learning disability and other health impairments reported “I do know my rights. I am an attorney. I brought articles and statutes [to the school].” Notably, this parent had a contentious relationship with her school district wherein the parent had filed for due process. Professionals reported that parents from low socioeconomic backgrounds were less likely to advocate because of limited knowledge and resources. A special education teacher of students with intellectual disabilities reported, “Being in that lower income community, I think plays a big role in how much time parents can devote to really aggressive advocacy.” Teaching in a low-income community, this teacher felt that many of her families struggled to advocate.” (Meghan M. Burke H. M.-K., 2018)

Parents who are able to advocate for their child, pay for an advocate, or take advocate courses have a much better chance of navigating the system than parents who don't have those opportunities.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

This chapter describes the methods used, participants, demographics, procedure and design. To the researchers' knowledge, this is the first study done on income level and accessibility to services in the Seattle area.

#### Study Setting

In the Seattle/King County area district no. 1, there are more than 55,000 students enrolled. In the 2019-2020 school year, there are 8,497 students identified with a disability and 1,879 students with a section 504 plan. In the 2019-2020 school year, there are 18,134 students identified as low income in the Seattle/King County area (Washington Office of Superintendent, n.d)

#### Participants

This study included fifteen families whose children have a learning disability and qualified for an IEP. I spoke with fifteen parents (fourteen women and one man) from 15

Cross-sectional study on accessibility to special education services in the Seattle/King County region

families that live within the King County/Seattle area. The grade ranges for the children in this study were second grade to seventh grade. Three out of the fifteen participants qualified as low income at some point in their child's schooling.

To recruit families I first reached out to the administrator of this Facebook group who is an advocate for children with disabilities and she promoted my study. In the participation letter, I asked parents to email me and that's how we set up our interviews. The participants got in contact with me through a Facebook group for parents who have children in Washington state with disabilities. Once parents had emailed me and we set up a time I sent them a consent form to look over before the interview.

All names in the study have been changed to a pseudonym to protect the anonymity of the participants.

Participant Pseudonym	Level of income based on having free and reduced lunch or tuition scholarships / waivers at some point during the IEP and service gathering for special education process	Grade diagnosed/ age	Private / public school or homeschooling
Hedy	Low income	Service since age 2	Private
Jane	Not low income	First grade	Private
Rosalind	Not low income	Kindergarten	Public school in a new district
Claudette	Low income	Second grade	Public school
Frida	Low income	5 years old	Private school
Zora	Not low income	Fourth grade	Homeschooling
Amelia	Not low income	Kindergarten and first grade	Private school
Aretha	Not low income	3 years old	Public school

Cross-sectional study on accessibility to special education services in the Seattle/King County region

Clara	Not low income	Fifth grade	Public
Sylvia	Not low income	Second grade	Public school
Frederick	Not low income	Third grade	Public school
Jeanette	Not low income	First grade	Private school
Billie	Not low income	Second grade	Private school
Marsha	Not low income	Second grade and kindergarten	Public school
Mildred	Not low income	Kindergarten	Public school

Study Design and Procedures

I conducted a qualitative study with a cross-sectional design. This study is attempting to find themes across the data in this case using interviews, the coding of these interviews are trying to determine whether there is a correlation between low income and accessibility to services in the Seattle/King County area.

The study’s research question is: How does income affect how a child gets access to special education services in the Seattle area? My hypothesis is that it does affect the outcome.

The interviews took about 15-20 minutes. Due to the current event of COVID -19, all of the interviews had to be done remotely over the phone; I recorded all of the interviews to be transcribed later. I asked six questions in the interview (below). The data collected through interviews have been analyzed and coded; the themes that arose during this process are presented as they relate to the research/themes of questions of this study.

Research question asked to participants

1. How do you think your child was treated in school before the diagnosis of a learning disability?
2. What grade did they get diagnosed?
3. How does your student feel about school outside of academics?
4. Do they like school? (how do they feel about the other kids)
5. Before the diagnosis what did you notice about your child when you would do homework with them?
6. After the diagnoses did anything change?
7. Did the school system pay for the testing or did you get private testing?
8. After the official diagnoses how hard was it to get your child the correct support in school?
9. Are there any services that are lacking?
10. What kind of administrative support did you receive from your child's school to help navigate the system?
11. Did you switch schools or stay in the same school after the diagnosis?
12. Do you think the school properly told you what your rights were and your child's?
13. Does your child qualify for free and reduced lunch? Or tuition waivers?

## **Chapter 4: Findings**

This chapter presents the findings from the study in the form of quotes from the participants along with summaries of the findings.

### Social Capital and Knowledge Disparities

Many parents lacked the social capital and the specific knowledge to support their child in the school system, and the process to get help caused stress. These knowledge disparities are not only among the parents, but also the teachers who are not specifically trained in learning disabilities. Many parents did not feel well enough equipped to handle the special education system, and also didn't feel that the teachers or the administration were very helpful. There was a distinct lack of understanding of the special education system for the parents and often even the administration.

This is how one parent felt.

“The private school he was at was actually really good about giving me information on navigating the system, but I would say it's completely overwhelming. It feels like Seattle public school; the way they place kids in special education seems like it's a secretive process. That there are different things, but you can't get information. It's a very weird

process and it felt like in my case us vs. them instead of a team. It's really frustrating.” - Claudette

Another parent felt similarly: “No, we got nothing; I also work for a special education advocacy group. I got most of my information from that but none from the school itself.” - Frederick

Another parent had another experience in which she didn't feel understood by her child's school.

“So at first we did a casual meeting before the IEP meeting. In my opinion I think it's kind of illegal because it discourages parents from doing an IEP request but I didn't know that yet. It was the spring of fourth grade and I said what should we do, I think our kid has a learning disabilities, and the school psychologist said, oh, you can ask for special education or we can just have a school support team meeting, and I was like, what's the difference, and she told me the school support team meeting is more casual and it's for us to sit in circle and talk about what we observe, and I was like, ok, that sounds good and less scary. We had that meeting and during that meeting we all agreed that he should be evaluated, but they said it's spring and we already have a lot of evaluation, so we won't be able to get it done till the fall. I didn't know I had the right to say no, I want him evaluated. I'll put that in writing on your timeline. So, fall comes they do the evaluation and they say he doesn't qualify because his performance has to be 2 standard deviations lower than his IQ and it's not. But we are getting concerned because he's talking about how he wants to die, and he hates himself and he hates school. And we were like, what should we do, and they said, well, bring him back next year and maybe he'll be more behind. And I said what do you think about dyslexia? We did mention the word dyslexia back at the school support team meeting. Nobody said a word... but in the fall when he didn't qualify again, I said, what do you think could be dyslexia? And then they said we can't diagnose that. So, I said, ok, who does that, they said a neuropsychologist. I said ok, can you refer me to one, they said, no, we can't do that... So I went home and did all my research and found a neuropsychologist. So, we did get private testing done and we got back the diagnosis and he was diagnosed for dyslexia... I ran into the school's physiologist and I told her what his diagnosis was, and she said that doesn't mean he will qualify for services and I was taken aback. And still at this point I didn't know what the laws were. I don't know why I didn't look it up. I happen to be a lawyer, but I didn't.” - Zora

Another parent had a similar experience.

“She wasn't really given support. She's getting feedback on papers and things and it was pretty low grades and the comments were not really helpful because I felt like she was putting a lot of effort but not getting acknowledged for that. It has built a lot of

frustration. They would say things like, I would like to see you do this over, you didn't answer the question. That kind of thing versus, oh, you need some support to help understand this. Offering support isn't being provided. Offering support isn't being provided and she's in 5th grade. They would say, you're not listening, or you just don't get it, like if not understanding is a punishment, like it's a bad thing.” - Clara

Another parent felt like the school wasn't helping her understand her rights.

“The admin was very standoffish and wasn't helpful. The teacher in the public school was really helpful and apologized for the administrators. But I was given a bunch of papers and it was like, good luck. And I would rather talk to someone directly instead of sending an email. There isn't really a direct line of communication, which is not efficient and frustrating.” - Claudette

Other parents felt similarly:

“I know they gave us all the paperwork and they were good about being in compliance with that, but I think I had to do my own research in terms of what her rights were. They didn't do any more than they needed to.” - Jeanette

“No, I'm aware of them [the rights of the child and family in the special education system] through other means. I feel like the school pushed back and made excuses that we're meeting the district guidelines for how many instructional assistants are needed without providing any other support. - Aretha

“No, it was terrible, it was the opposite. They are good people and I like them very much, but they are fairly ignorant. They lack a knowledge base about special education in general. Specifically, about learning disabilities, when I called the school about the diagnosis for the older one, going through the process of getting it, they told me I wasn't qualified to make these statements, and said the school psychologist would be the one to tell if she was qualified. The school psychologist came back and said she didn't believe the test scores or the report. They are good people, but they don't try, and I understand that they are resource constrained but they don't try. When we had our first IEP meeting, what me and my husband got out of it is that the assistant principal and the assistant teacher just don't know how the brain of someone with a learning disability works. However, the special ed teacher knew what was going on, but the assistant principal and the homeroom teacher didn't know what they were talking about. She did speak up eventually. We have been learning that there isn't a child advocate; at best there is an advocate for the school district.” - Marsha

“I don't think he was treated fairly, I don't think his teacher wanted to handle some of the challenges that came with it, and I believe they put it all on him as opposed we need to figure out how we can teach him. Before the diagnosis I feel like school was just super

hard for him and us and honestly his teachers, because they didn't know what they were doing.” - Jane

“They [the school] were worried about behavior. Dyslexia wasn't talked about or mentioned. Literally he was in kindergarten, they said they were concerned about his behavior. He's avoiding class and at one point they said he was bullying other kids. And I was mortified, and he was the sweetest kid and it had nothing to do with anything.” - Frida

“I think the teachers were kind, but they didn't understand how to help her. It was more like benign neglect. The teachers aren't trained to know how to help so it's more like a systemic issue, not much more individual.” - Billie

Finally, a parent felt like not all of the schools were ready and wanting to help students and parents: “Not every school is excited to support different kinds of learners, and as a parent you might not know what your rights are and what your child's rights are. It's all written but it's not written very clearly. I don't think it's written for the benefit of the family.” -Jane

Participants felt like they didn't have the specific knowledge and specific social networks to help advocate for their child in the special education system here in the Seattle/King County area. The process of getting help was more difficult than it should have been.

### Struggling to Identify Students and Qualifying for Services

Parents have found it hard to have their child even be identified to qualify for services, and parents who have gone through identification from private sources have had schools tell them that their child does not meet the requirements for being qualified.

This was one parent's experience with getting their child identified:

“It was pretty hard. They were kind of ambivalent about testing him in general because he was in kindergarten. They would say, oh, he's just young, he's just a boy, he will mature, why don't we have him repeat kindergarten. So he unfortunately repeated kindergarten and still at the end of the year they were struggling to do an IEP. After all the struggling with the IEP all they said is we will offer him 15 minutes of reading and writing support a day, and I was just mortified and disappointed, but they said why don't we just try this, and we will do some more testing in the third grade. And then we will have a better idea of how to help him.” - Frida

Other parents had similar experiences:

“I tried to get the Seattle public school system to evaluate him and through a series of more than 2-3 months of over 40 emails back and forth, and they lost his information, his private school teachers had documented him in the classroom to show he needed an evaluation. But they kept losing his paperwork; they failed to follow up at the end of the year [summer]. In the fall I contacted them again and they said that they had provided a response saying that they wouldn't be evaluating him. I didn't receive anything, and their response to that was they sent that email to the wrong person. But we responded in time but accidentally sent it to the wrong person.” - Rosalind

“You know what really pisses me off is that every year we would ask at parent-teacher conferences. I noticed he wasn't making as much progress as his peers and I would ask his teachers about it, and in the second grade he was still writing with all caps and the teacher said she noticed it too but figured he would just figure it out because he sees how it's normally done in print. In the second grade they were getting writing assignments to write like 3 to 5 sentences but he still couldn't do that, so I asked the teacher if he could just practice his handwriting and she was fine with that. So, I had him do that, so I was already modifying his work. Again, though, nobody was worried. And I noticed his spelling was off and asked what we can do about that, and his teacher told me we don't grade for spelling. Fast forward to fourth grade. We are concerned he has a learning disability (I think this is the first time we used the words learning disability). He's really behind. He's feeling bad and she said if I was going to ask you about that, and I was thinking when? So that is what prompted the first school team meeting where everyone around us told us how great he was and how smart he was, and we were like, we know, but he can't read or write.” - Zora

“I was the only one who suspected it [a learning disability]. Teachers didn't say anything to me.”-Frida

Another parent felt like private testing was the only way to go based on past experiences.

“We did private testing on my daughter back then, which wasn't that long ago, but back then you would have to get reevaluated every 3 years in order for it to count. So in the second grade, knowing how much I paid in kindergarten, I went to the Seattle public schools and said you need to do this, and they did, and they said, oh, she's fine. They

completely disagreed with the 21-page documentation and data from the private neuropsychologist. So that made me mad, so I went to another private neuropsychologist so I could make sure I had all of the right stuff they came up with the first original diagnoses. So Seattle public schools didn't do me a lot of good so I didn't even consider them for my other child.” -Amelia

Another parent felt like her child wouldn't get the proper diagnoses without private testing.

“At first the school psychologist really pushed for the testing to be done at school but was concerned he wouldn't qualify because he wasn't failing enough, and she tested him and his IQ was so high compared to his reading ability and his IEP was put into place a week later. Before the school tested him, we did get private testing because the school psychologist had mentioned she was worried he wouldn't qualify because he wasn't failing enough. So, we did get private testing.” - Sylvia

Another parent reflected on how they didn't feel like her daughter got properly identified when moving to the King County area.

“At the time I thought they were helpful, but now I feel like they wasted so much time because we had this paperwork from Alabama saying she has dyslexia. Why wouldn't they just use that right away? She could have been receiving services earlier if they had done what they should have done.”- Mildred

Another parent had a similar experience with not being properly identified.

“The public school didn't support us very well. They told me that she didn't qualify for more services because she wasn't old enough. They were clearly using the discrepancy model to make that statement. You can't use discrepancy to not give a child services. I was told by the resource teacher that dyslexia was not one of the 13 qualifying disabilities, although it is on the list. With the help of my advocate I brought documents that said it was and I had those documents there when I was told that.” - Billie

Another parent chose private testing for their child to be identified because they had worked in the school system before and didn't trust it to identify their child properly because of the school district's lack of funds and resources.

“We choose to get private testing because it would get done faster than the school district. I am a former elementary educator. In the past I have worked with kids that have learning disabilities, so I knew something was up. It was hard because as an educator I knew all the stuff that was coming down the pipeline. I knew that we had a lot of decisions to

make as parents. For we wanted to address those challenges, and I also knew there was a big financial burden coming up for us to do that. There was no doubt in my mind that we needed to get him tested, but then trying to figure out what person should test him and how much do we want to invest in it. I am very familiar with the public-school diagnoses, and it's not nearly as thorough or nearly as accurate as private testing. I understand why the limitations are there [for public testing]. It's not accurate because the private sector is much more current and up to date, but the public testing is using more outdated testing tools. They are on a different scale as well; a private clinician might be able to spot certain areas because their testing is more sensitive than a public-school clinician. We also knew that going into IEP meetings (depending on the school district and the teachers/ admin) the private test typically holds more weight than saying the school needs to do all these things. The private test is a record of this is what is going on. And you also have that support outside of the school that can help you if you need it." - Jane

This parent also had a hard time getting their child identified for a learning disability through the public school.

"So, we met for the meeting and I showed them the 20-page report and they said, oh, ok, that's cool, he can qualify for services. At the time I didn't realize what they were doing. He's qualifying for services because ADD is categorized as other health impairments and you don't need the discrepancy model for that to qualify. However, they still didn't qualify him for services for dyslexia. I went to the special education teacher casually and I told her he needs direct explicit multisensory instruction, what do you have for that? And she said I have not been trained in dyslexia. I don't really know how to support it and I don't think our district really has service to help. Which was really great of her to tell me because then I knew the truth. So then I asked in an official meeting what they can do for him with dyslexia, and they told me, don't worry, we have a group of several students who are low in reading and we get them together out in the hallway and we do a read circle and we have them practice reading out loud and we read books together. And I was like, that isn't what we are looking for." - Zora

Parents found it difficult for their child to be adequately identified with a learning disability with the tools available to them through the public means of the Seattle School District. All participants had private testing for their child, although it cost up to \$7,000 depending on the type of testing (Long 2019). Some parents were able to use insurance to get the testing but not all went through insurance. They found that the public-school system did not support them in

Cross-sectional study on accessibility to special education services in the Seattle/King County region

getting their child identified with a learning disability and in fact hindered them from getting the proper diagnosis in some cases.

### Inadequate Support/Resources

Many parents have found it very difficult to get their child the correct support once their child had a diagnosis and even an IEP. Ten out of the 15 parents moved their children from the schools they started in to get an adequate education. Many parents feel like there has not been enough resources for their children to make the progress they should be making in school. This was one parent's experience with their child's school in regard to the school giving learning support to their child:

“Well, what we did was put her in a private school after finding out, and that did help, but they didn't have the means to truly make a difference. There were a lot of issues with the emotional part of it. But when we moved to Washington I had to push to get the testing done because they wouldn't recognize the testing from Alabama. Unfortunately, we have moved a great deal with our child, and it's been a detriment because of the different learning systems each district has. Unfortunately, I didn't realize moving from city to city [in Washington] that we would have a difference in her learning and just the interpretation of the IEP. I'll be very honest with you. Bellingham is very set up. We were blessed, we had a teacher trained in a method called Briton. And she was very successful with that, but then my husband got a job in Bothell. Our transition from Bellingham to Bothell has just been awful. They didn't transfer the IEP correctly. Now I find out they aren't implementing the IEP correctly. We are in the process of mediating, but because of the COVID-19 we are on hold because I want to do a face-to-face meeting, not a Zoom meeting. I am discouraged because it seems like at each elementary school level ... I've been reading online that you can move from one school to another school in the district to a different elementary school and it's a completely different setting on how it's set up for special education. There isn't unity within the district. There is no standard on how to deal with learning differences. It should be a set standard for the district and the state. And then not to recognize dyslexia ... I have teachers who have told me that, oh, you know kids like her, there's hope for them and they will do well. It's not without doubt she's intelligent, she just has a decoding problem. I've been fighting to get dyslexia put on her IEP. They wouldn't let me have it on there. It's been awful.” - Mildred

Another parent felt like their child was not getting the proper support.

Cross-sectional study on accessibility to special education services in the Seattle/King County region

“I am not a teacher but I don't feel like some of the teaching methods they are using are correct, but no one is listening to me. They aren't rude or anything, but they aren't teaching him in a way that actually is meaningful for him to gain improvement in his reading. They should be using a different approach with him, and he is making small gains, but I think if they switched their approach, he would be making larger gains. Because there is no one size fits all for teaching.” - Claudette

Only when this family moved to schools out of the Seattle district did they feel like they were getting support.

“That's a hard question because, when we were in the private school, they were very able to handle any of the accommodations that were needed. Moving to public school I reached out to the district here in Lake Washington and they were very helpful. Within 20 minutes of a conversation I received more information than I ever did in 2-3 spans of 40 or more emails to the Seattle school district.” - Rosalind

Another parent felt similar.

“What I wanted was him to learn how to make the connections in his brain that were not firing, but in the public school they were able to support those needs and I totally understand because there are so many children that need support and there are limited resources. For us having the teachers write for him and him having access to technology is helpful, but ultimately isn't the right thing for us and our son. He was never going to be able to get the level of intervention that we feel he needs because they just don't offer it. But they were super willing and agreeable and had great ideas with the things that they could do. But for us it wasn't the whole picture of what should happen.” - Jane

This parent felt like private school was a better fit.

“Yes, we are now in a private school. We did have a great experience at our public school, I was actually very surprised, but we switched because he needed to be in a smaller environment.” - Jane

This parent didn't feel like the school gave his child a clear message on what was expected from him.

“Even after the diagnosis, the expectations weren't clear from the school. We found out he was expected to do third-grade work, spelling and vocab. Because of that there was a lot of struggle with homework. But a few months later we found out that he was only supposed to do second-grade work, and that distinction wasn't made. A lot of heartache would have been saved if the school was clear on that.” - Frederick

This family also moved schools from private to public.

“We moved to a private school that has better options for him. Moving schools was difficult. It was very far from where we lived and it had a huge financial impact. At the time I was a single mom. That was a really big deal when you are a single parent trying to pay 24,000 dollars so that your kid can get a basic education. It's just brutal.” - Frida

This family has had a similar experience with not having the correct support as the other parents.

“We don't have the correct support now, but that's in part because of COVID. Outside of COVID, overall we have him at a school that is known for having a better focus program, but I think because of his behaviors he was put into the special ed too much. He's not taken to general ed as much as he should be. And that's because of resource issues that did not have enough instructional assistance to get everyone to their gen ed time. He needs one-on-one support to accompany him to his gen ed classes.... I find pushing to get the IEP executed is difficult. The IEP is very clear how much time he's supposed to get gen ed; what was happening was the execution of being in that time. The way it was done was disingenuous. For example, he is supposed to be in gen ed for lunch and recess. They count that as some of his gen ed time. I had been told he was part of the general population mixed is what I thought, I had to go to school once to give him cold medicine and so I went three days in a row at lunch time and I realized that he and his focus classmates were spread between a few tables with other kids from another class for kids with autism. They were not mingled with the other classes at all. They were very much only with each other at lunch and that was to make it easier for the instructional assistants so they can watch them all at once. So there was no mixing. So for me lunch doesn't count and even recess I'm not sure should be counted.”- Aretha

Several parents also moved their child to a private school.

“The way he got to this private school was when he was in the seventh grade the school isn't following his IEP.... I have a master's in special ed and my sister works in special ed law as a paralegal, so between the two of us we were able to get them to follow it. He's made a lot of progress.” -Hedy

“Yes [they were lacking the correct support] but we just went to a private school.”- Amelia

“We are not in the same school. I took her out of public school after a year of services mainly because the services were not helping her. Her needs aren't being met. After a year we had her re-evaluated privately to check her progress and she wasn't making progress in her public school. When I brought that information to the school to adjust her needs the school started to pull her services. She also was just not doing well emotionally. So now we are at a private school. And she's in private therapy now, she's

been able to make progress now. It's been a process but she's doing well now.” - Jeanette

“So, we decided to look into homeschooling. We decided to do part-time homeschool and public school. Now he's just homeschooled. It's working better for us.” - Zora

This parent also felt like their child was not getting the proper support:

“No, well, she did get LAP [learning assistance program] support starting in the first or second and my feeling was they thought, well, we got her into LAP so we'll see if that helps, and that went on for 2 or 3 years. Other than LAP, no, they knew we had private tutoring. But we had to find all of the information ourselves.” - Clara

Parents who participated in the study found that even when their child had been identified with learning disability, the public school did not meet their expectations of support and did not have the correct resources. In a lot of cases, parents moved their child from a public school to a private school just to get the adequate support that they were looking for, and many of them still in the public school have outside private help to make sure their child is reaching the goals to thrive academically.

#### Findings Among the Low- income Families

Three out of the fifteen parents that I interviewed identified at some point to be low income while trying to access services for their child. One of the parents who was low income had no trouble accessing services for her child because she had a background in special education and had family members who had legal knowledge of the special education system in this area. The other two parents did not have this specific knowledge and struggled to get services, much like the rest of the participants in the study. This study can't make any conclusions about how income plays a role in getting access to services because there wasn't

Cross-sectional study on accessibility to special education services in the Seattle/King County region

enough data; however, it is clear that having access to the specific knowledge needed to navigate the special education system is what makes a difference in getting easier access to services.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion**

This chapter discusses the experiences of the participants in the study regarding support, resources, and access to special education programs in the Seattle area. The participants of the study all have children with IEPs and go to school in the Seattle/King County area. The age range for the children at the time of diagnosis is from kindergarten to the fourth grade. The participants come from varying backgrounds and income levels, only three of which qualified as low income.

### Context

This study was conducted to determine whether there is a link between income and access to services in the Seattle area. To my knowledge, there have not been any studies done in this area on accessibility of services and level of income, and not many studies done on this specific topic in the country. I interviewed 15 families with children with IEPs in the Seattle area.

### Significant outcomes

The findings of the present study contribute to research on accessibility to special education and social capital and knowledge transfer. This study focuses on income level and accessibility with social capital and knowledge transfer. Specifically, this research has shown that parents have a difficult time understanding the language in special education literature and documents provided to them through the current system.

### Limitations

I had limitations in gathering participants, and I was only able to recruit people through online means, mostly through Facebook groups. This did make it hard to find the diversity I was looking for in my study. In total, only three people who identified as low income participated in my study, and because of this I don't have enough data to say whether income is a large factor in the treatment of students with disabilities. I also had mostly women participants and one male participant. In order to come to a more concrete conclusion on this research topic, more studies would need to be done, and more families, particularly low-income families, would need to participate in order to create a more diverse pooling system.

### Summary of Research Findings

The first theme that was identified in the study was social capital and knowledge disparities. I don't have enough information to determine whether income truly played a role in people's social capital and knowledge disparities. However, I did find that there were many

Cross-sectional study on accessibility to special education services in the Seattle/King County region issues for the participants regarding this theme. Many of the parents didn't feel like they were able to navigate the system very well and didn't feel like the school provided the right kind of knowledge support to understand it. They had to do their own research on what their rights were and how to get their kids the proper support. People who have taken advocacy classes and/or had family who were in the special education system or themselves had worked in special education or general education felt like they had a better understanding of the systems and an easier time navigating it. These findings suggest that social capital and knowledge transfer is an important part of how parents are able to navigate the system.

The second theme that was found was that students were struggling to be identified and having difficulty qualifying for services. This study cannot determine whether there was a significant difference in treatment based on income level, but many parents found it difficult to get their child identified through public means. All the parents in this study had their children identified and diagnosed through a private neuropsychologist, because these parents found it difficult to get the public-school system to take them seriously. Some parents had their children retested by the public-school system only to be told that there wasn't anything wrong and that they disagreed with the 20 pages of documents written up by the private neuropsychologist. Parents understandably found this process to be very frustrating and tiring.

The third theme identified was inadequate support and resources. Ten out of the fifteen families interviewed moved their children from public school to private school or homeschooling because of the lack of support and resources provided to their children. Parents felt like their children weren't making enough progress, and most parents have to supplement private help outside of school so that their child can succeed academically.

Parents who participated in the study were disappointed in the treatment, support, and identification process for their children. They didn't feel like their rights were being upheld, and at times they didn't even know what their rights were. They felt like there was a large disconnect between the abilities of the individual schools within the district to aid in their needs. Some schools seemed to be better equipped than others for assisting children with learning disabilities. One parent who moved from Bellingham to Seattle felt as though Bellingham was set up to support their child in a way where all the schools were on the same page with each other on how to help. She compared that to Seattle, where the schools don't appear to be organized in the same unified way, and each administration's understanding of this community's needs vary dramatically. Experts in the field would agree that the school system in this area is set up in a way that doesn't fully support the child. A reading intervention specialist said in an interview,

“It is very hard, it really is entirely school dependent, in the Seattle area it is totally dependent on the school (this is not true of all of the districts in Washington) but in Seattle every school is on an island. It really depends on the team of teachers and the principle how well they understand the learning difference and how good they are at responding to it. So, some schools are great, and some are just terrible. I would say the parents who don't have experience when they go through this, if they luck out at one of the few schools where the team is great awesome but that's only about a quarter of the schools, the other three quarters of the schools the parent often have to really raise hell to get anything done.” (Sorby, 2020)

This study was not able to make a clear link between income and accessibility to services because there wasn't enough data to conclude whether a child coming from low-income homes has a more difficult time getting services than children coming from middle- to high-income households; however, it has shed light on the lack of information parents feel that they have in navigating the system. Parents who had prior experience in this system, or knew those who did, felt that they had an easier time navigating the special education system compared to the families

Cross-sectional study on accessibility to special education services in the Seattle/King County region experiencing this for the first time. Families felt that the Seattle Public School system was not properly communicating with them or giving them the proper information they needed.

### Recommendations

The interviews conducted for this study revealed problems regarding the special education system in the Seattle/King County area, and there are a few ways that we can begin to address them. Transparency with policies and procedures in the special education system will help parents access services for their children. All staff and faculty at each school in the Seattle/King County area need more extensive training to better understand learning disabilities and the needs of these students. In the state of Washington there needs to be more legislation to fund special education in schools. If these steps are taken, students in the special education system will have an easier time accessing services, teachers will be able to effectively recognize learning disabilities, and they will be able to support and accommodate the child properly.

It's clear that parents don't feel they have the correct tools or knowledge to navigate the special education system. My recommendation is for there to be more transparency with procedures throughout the IEP process and for the information to be more accessible for the average reader. This would require the districts to rewrite information to be more accessible, along with coming up with a process to make their policies more transparent so families can have an idea of what is going on.

Cross-sectional study on accessibility to special education services in the Seattle/King County region

All staff and faculty at each school in the Seattle/King County area need to better understand learning disabilities and the needs of these students. Many parents talked about how much of the process was dependent on the school you went to. Each school seems to have a different understanding of these problems, and as a result, they have different policies and solutions for them. This lack of standardization in the system is a clear hurdle for families seeking proper help. My recommendation for this is to have more extensive training for all school staff and faculty to understand students with learning disabilities and how to support them.

Lastly, there is a need for more funding for special education in the state of Washington. There isn't enough support staff for many teachers in the Seattle/King County area, which makes it hard for many great teachers to do their jobs correctly and meet the needs of each individual student. The lack of funding support for these schools leads them to not be able to offer important services for children. With these measures in place, students with disabilities in the Seattle/King County area will have a much easier time accessing service to help them thrive academically, which will lead to a more equitable school system that will be able to cater to a much greater range of students' needs.

## References

Andrew M.I. Lee, J. (2018). *Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA): What You Need to Know*. Retrieved July 29, 2020, from Understood.org:  
<https://www.understood.org/en/school-learning/your-childs-rights/basics-about-childs-rights/individuals-with-disabilities-education-act-idea-what-you-need-to-know>

Andrew M.I. Lee, J. (n/a). *What Is and Isn't Covered Under FAPE*. Retrieved July 29, 2020, from Understood.org:  
<https://www.understood.org/en/school-learning/your-childs-rights/basics-about-childs-rights/what-is-and-isnt-covered-under-fape>

Bonnie Beyer, E. S. (2014). *Special Programs and Services in Schools*. DEStech Publications.

Brown v. Board of Education, 347 U. S. 483 (The United States Supreme Court May 17, 1954).

Burke, M. M. (2013). Improving Parental Involvement: Training Special Education Advocates . *Journal of Disability Policy Studies*, 225–234.

Carla Braun, E. (2017). AN EXAMINATION OF LOW-INCOME MINORITY PARENTS' AND GUARDIANS' EXPERIENCES WITH THE SPECIAL EDUCATION

PROCESS USING A STRENGTHS- BASED PERSPECTIVE. *Department of Curriculum and Instruction Northern Illinois University, 2017 Elizabeth A. Wilkins, Director*. Illinois.

Chapman, R. (2002). Using the IEP to get appropriate services for students with disabilities. *Colorado Lawyer*.

Committee to Evaluate the Supplemental Security Income Disability Program for

Children with Mental Disorders; Board on the Health of Select Populations; Board on Children, Youth, and Families; Institute of Medicine; Division of Behavioral and Social Science. (2015). Poverty and Childhood Disability. In *Mental Disorders and Disabilities Among Low-Income Children*. Washington DC: National Academies Press .  
Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 , Public Law 94-142 (94th

Congress November 29, 1975).

Gross, J. (2013, April 12). Building Social Capital. *Baltimore Jewish Times; Baltimore*, p. 11.

Hughes, C. (2014). Poverty and Disability: Addressing the Challenge of Inequality. *Sage Journal*, 37-42.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. (n.d). *Section 1400*. Retrieved July 29, 2020, from <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/statute-chapter-33/subchapter-i/1400/c/5>

Itard, J. M. (1802). *An historical account of the discovery and education of a savage man, or : of the first developments, physical and moral, of the young savage caught in the woods near Aveyron in the year 1798*. London : Richard Phillips.

Kate MacLeod, J. N. (2017). Rethinking the Individualized Education Plan process: voices from the other side of the table. *Disability & Society*, 1-21.

Kosekif, M. H. (2017). MEETING THE NEEDS OF ALL STUDENTS: AMENDING THE IDEA TO SUPPORT SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS FROM LOW-INCOME HOUSEHOLDS. *Fordham Urban Law Journal*, 793-832.

Lareau, A. (2002). Invisible Inequality: Social Class and Childrearing in Black Families and White Families. *American Sociological Review*, 747-776.

Long, K. (2019, July 7). For some Washington students with special needs, diagnosis is too late, help is too little. *Seattle Times*.

Meghan M. Burke, H. M.-K. (2018). Advocacy for Children With Social-Communication Needs: Perspectives From Parents and School Professionals. *The Journal of Special Education*, 191-200.

Meghan M. Burke, P. H.-K. (2018). Advocacy for Children With Social- Communication Needs: Perspectives From Parents and School Professionals . *The Journal of Special Education*, 191-200.

Mills v. Board of Education . (1972, August 1). Mills v. Board of Education of District of Columbia, 348 F. Supp. 866. DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA.

National Council on Disability. (2018). *(IDEA Series) Broken Promises: The Underfunding of IDEA*. Washington, DC: National Council on Disability.

Paul, C. A. (2014). *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965*. Retrieved July 29, 2020, from Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965: <https://socialwelfare.library.vcu.edu/programs/education/elementary-and-secondary-education-act-of-1965/>

Pennsylvania Ass'n, Ret'd Child. v. Commonwealth of Pa, No. 71-42 (United States District Court, E. D. Pennsylvania. May 5, 1972).

Phelps, L. A. (1980). Individualized Educational Programming. *LEADERSHIP TRAINING INSTITUTE/ VOCATIONAL AND SPECIAL EDUCATION*.

Plagens, G. K. (2011). Social Capital and Education: Implications for Student and School Performance. *Education and Culture*, 40-64.

Public Law 94-142. (1975). *Education for All Handicapped Children Act*.

Saegert, S. T. (2001). The Role of Social Capital in Combating Poverty. In S. T. Saegert, *Social Capital and Poor Communities*. Russell Sage Foundation.

Sarah A. Nagro, M. L. (2016). Measuring Accessibility of Written Communication for Parents of Students With Disabilities: Reviewing 30 Years of Readability Research. *Journal of Disability Policy Studies*.

Shelden, M. E. (2009). Trust in Education Professionals Perspectives of Mothers of Children With Disabilities. *Remedial and Special Education* , 160-176.

Sorby, E. (2020, May 8). Interview on accessibility . (O. Handman, Interviewer)

The Arc. (n.d.). *Our History*. Retrieved July 29, 2020, from <https://thearc.org/about-us/history/>

The Understood Team. (n.d). *Understanding IEPs*. Retrieved July 29, 2020, from Understanding the IEP Process: <https://www.understood.org/en/school-learning/special-services/ieps/understanding-the-ie>

p-process?\_ul=1\*18xkha\*domain\_userid\*YW1wLXNoLWZCcUF2LWZuWUNHR0Y4  
TUpwWUE.

Thomas F. Boat and Joel T. Wu, E. (2015 ). *Mental Disorders and Disabilities Among Low-Income Children* . Washington DC: Committee to Evaluate the Supplemental Security Income Disability Program for Children with Mental Disorders.

THOMPSON, T. (2016, January ). The Special-Education Charade. *The Atlantic*, pp. 1-2.

Tsang, A. C. (2005). Social Capital, Networks, and Knowledge Transfer. *The Academy of Management Review*, 146-165.

U.S. Department of Education. (n.d.). *Archived: A 25 Year History of the IDEA*. Retrieved July 29, 2020, from HISTORY Twenty-Five Years of Progress in Educating Children with Disabilities Through IDEA.

U.S. Department of Education. (n.d.). *Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)*. Retrieved July 29, 2020

U.S. Department of Education. (n.d.). *About IDEA*. Retrieved July 29, 2020

U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights. ( 2010, August ). *Free Appropriate Public Education for Students With Disabilities: Requirements Under Section 504 of The Rehabilitation Act of 1973*. Retrieved July 29, 2020

U.S. Department of Education. (n.d.). *Protecting Students With Disabilities* . Retrieved July 29, 2020

Washington Office of Superintendent . (2019-2020). *Report Card: Seattle School District I* . Demographics , Seattle .

WATKINS, J. L. (2006). Parents' Rights in Special Education: The Readability of Procedural Safeguards. *Council for Exceptional Children.*, 497–510.

Wright, b. P. (n.d.). *The History of Special Education Law*. Retrieved July 29, 2020, from Wrights Law.