

# Verona District 2009 Parent Survey Analysis

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Provided By Children Having Individual Learning Differences (C.H.I.L.D.)

April, 2009

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## Purpose and Methodology

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# Purpose

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- A parent survey was developed by Children Having Individual Learning Differences (C.H.I.L.D.) in cooperation with the Verona District Special Services Department in order to evaluate Verona district parents' perceptions of the Special Services program.
  - Specifically, the survey addressed parent's impressions of:
    - Policies and processes regarding IEPs and evaluations
    - Communication between parents and the district and within the district
    - Parent's knowledge of Special Education
- The goal of the survey was to gain a better understanding of:
  - Opportunities to educate parents with regard to Special Education processes and policies.
  - Opportunities to facilitate collaboration between parents and Special Services.
  - Parents' needs as they relate to the Special Education instruction of their children.

# Methodology

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- The Verona Special Services Department distributed the survey to the families of 341 students that have IEPs:
  - This method of distribution ensured confidentiality.
- The survey was also distributed to C.H.I.L.D.'s membership email listing, approximately 80 individuals:
  - C.H.I.L.D. cannot verify that each of the individuals on the membership list has a child with an IEP.
- The survey consisted of 23 positive statements, 5 open-ended questions and one question regarding their child's age:
  - The 23 positive statements were organized into the following categories:
    - IEPs and Evaluations
    - Program and Process
    - Communication
    - Parent Education
  - The 5 open-ended questions asked:
    - Best experiences parents had with educator(s)
    - Workshops parents would like to attend
    - "Wish list"
    - Additional comments.
  - Finally, parents were asked to voluntarily identify their child's age range (3 to 5 years old, 6 to 11 years old, 11 to 21 years old).

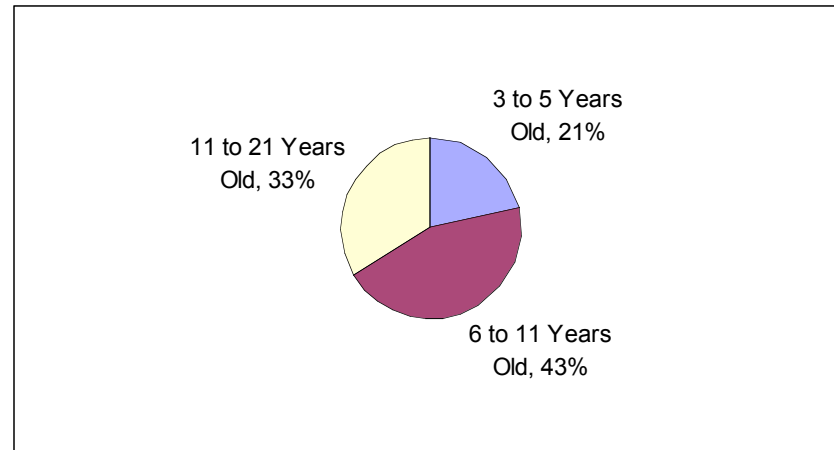
# Analysis

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# Analysis

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- Forty-two families responded to the survey and indicated the following ages for their children:



- One family did not respond to this question.
- Of the 64% of parents that chose to identify their child's learning challenge(s):
  - 30% reported Speech or some form of Speech disorder (e.g., articulation problems, Apraxia)
  - 30% reported Reading, Spelling, and/or Math
  - 19% reported Autism or some form of Autistic Spectrum Disorder (e.g., Aspergers, PDD – NOS)
  - 11% reported Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder/Attention Deficit Disorder and Auditory Processing Disorder
  - 11% reported other issues.

# Analysis

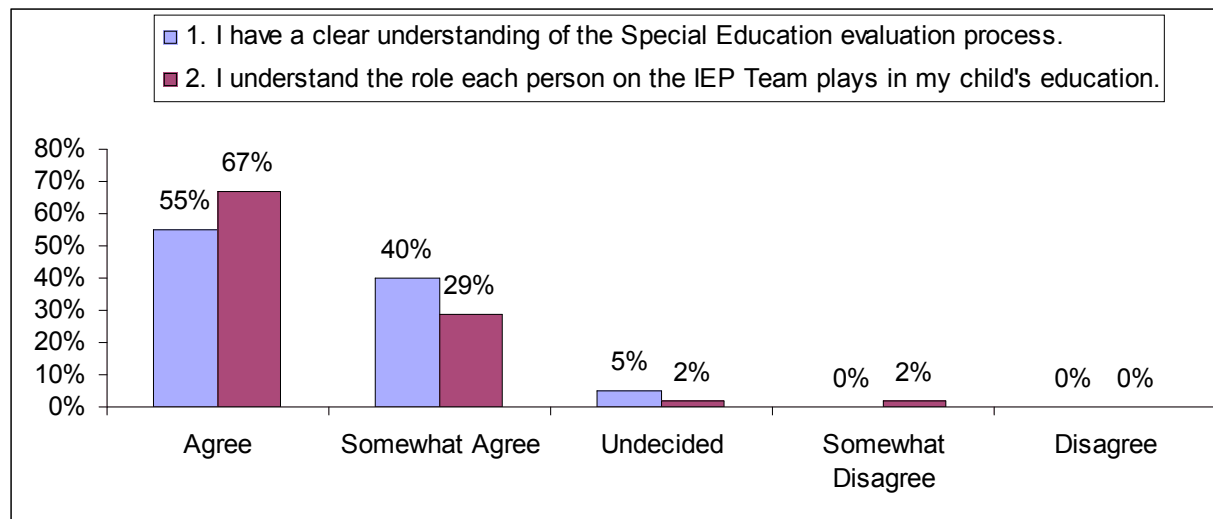
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- Overall, parents are very positive:
  - “Agree” was the most frequently-selected for all of the statements on the questionnaire.
  - “Somewhat Agree” was the second-most common answer.
- Many parents made comments:
  - Comments varied from positive, informative, outlining areas for improvement, and expressions of frustration.
    - Although a parent may have responded “Agree” or “Somewhat Agree” to the majority of statements, concerns were sometimes expressed in the Comments section.

# Analysis: The IEP

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- Parents express the greatest satisfaction with the IEP and the IEP process.
  - 76% of parents agree that they can call an IEP meeting at any time (#9) and they are accommodated with regard to meeting times and ways of meeting (#7).
  - Most parents also “Agree” or “Somewhat Agree” that they understand both the process and each IEP team member’s role:

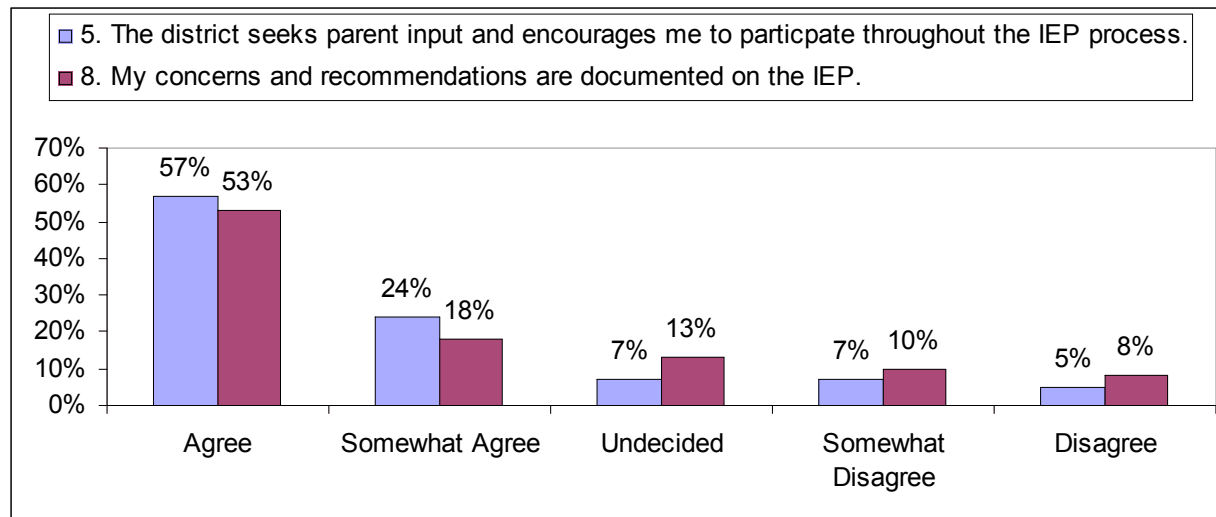


- Most parents are positive about other aspects of the IEP as well (question #3 regarding evaluation reports, question #4 regarding IEP goals).
  - However, the consideration of written requests for additional evaluations inside and outside of the district (#6) had 23% “Undecided” answers.
    - This might be due to the lack of parents’ first-hand experience with this situation.
    - In fact, 17% did not answer this question.

# Analysis: The IEP

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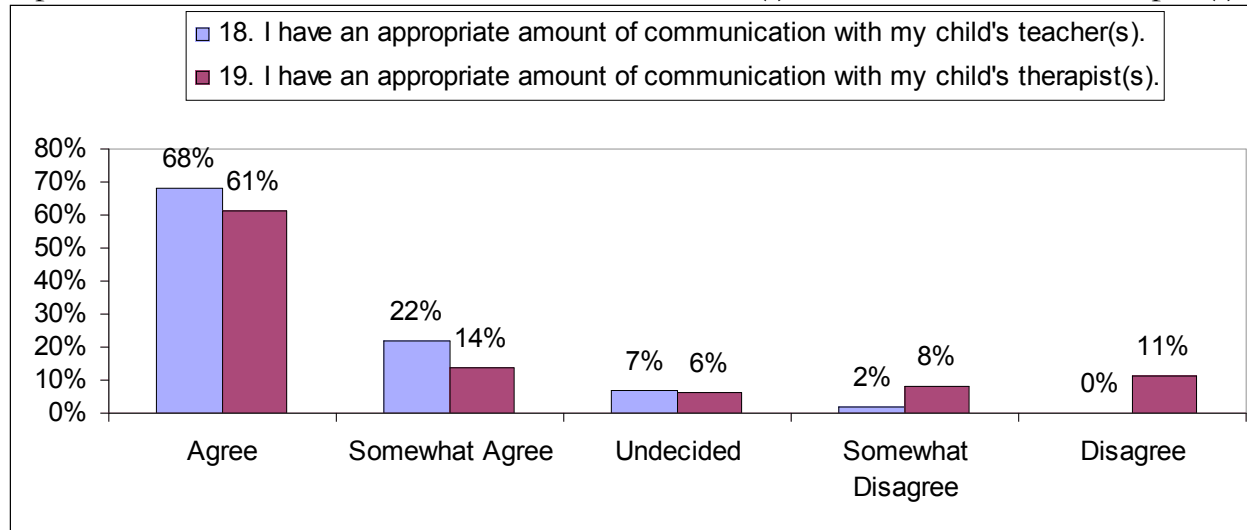
- When asked if they are comfortable expressing concerns in IEP meetings (#16), 71% of parents “Agree” and 12% “Somewhat Agree.”
  - However, less “Agree” that they are encouraged to participate in the process and that their concerns and recommendations are documented on the IEP:



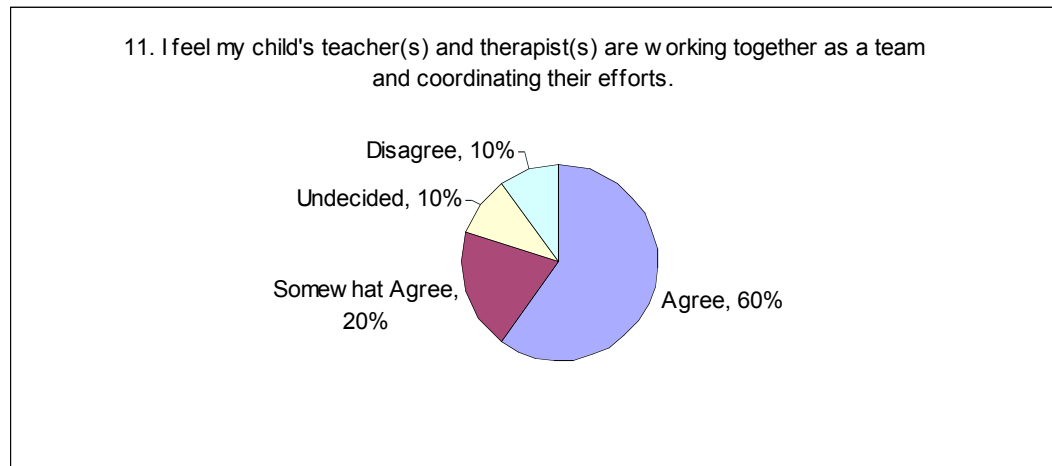
- Some parents made comments regarding the IEP’s application in the educational setting in the “Wish List” section:
  - [I wish] “that the children with IEPs are treated with as much importance as the rest of the students.”
  - [I wish] “that all teachers would understand and be able to adapt to many students’ different learning needs.”
  - [I want] “teachers (mainstream) to read IEPs.”

# Analysis: Communication

- Communication, whether between parents and the district or within the district, received the most mixed responses from parents.
  - Parents perceive communication with their child’s teacher(s) versus their child’s therapist(s) differently:



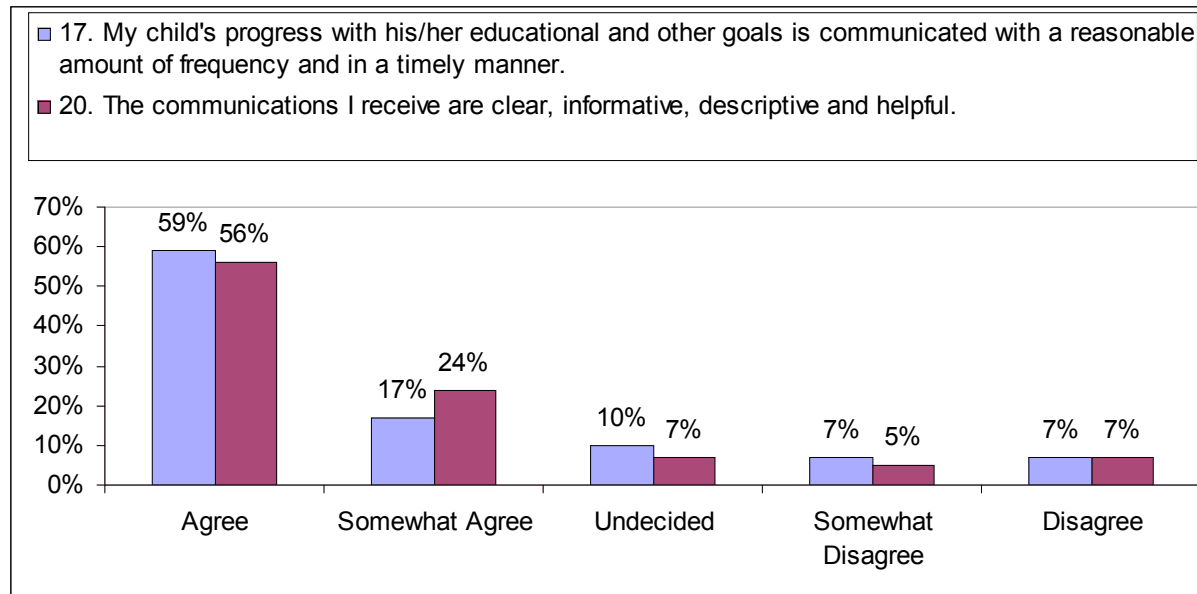
- Parents also have different perceptions with regard to how well teachers and therapists work together:



# Analysis: Communication

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- Most parents (60%) “Agree” that they receive responses to phone calls, emails and written requests “within a reasonable amount of time” (#15),
  - 25% “Somewhat Agree,” 5% were “Undecided,” 3% “Somewhat Disagree” and 8% “Disagree.”
- Parents have somewhat mixed feelings about the frequency, timeliness, and quality of communication:

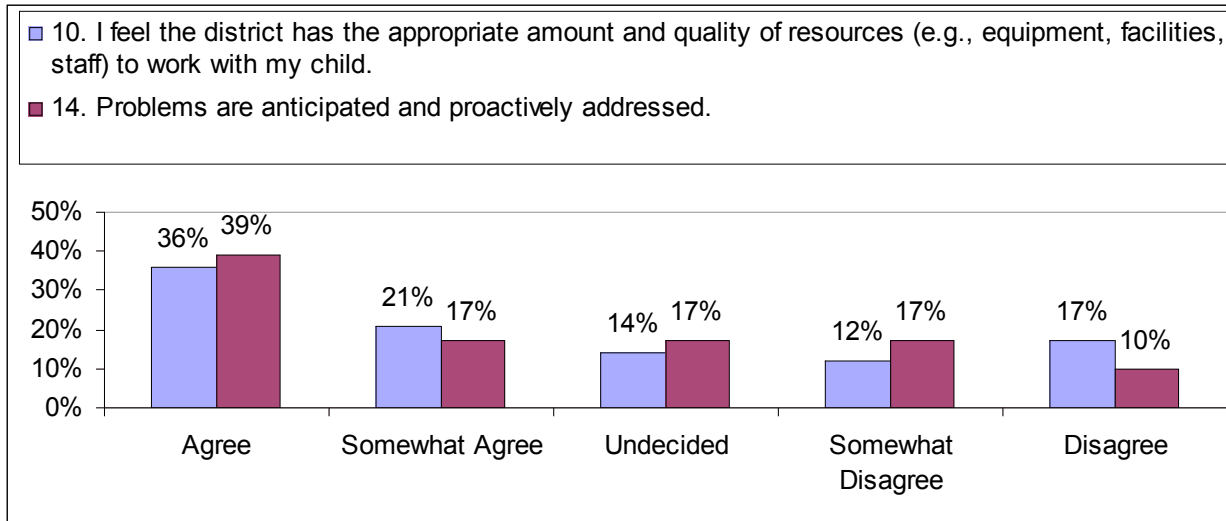


- Communication was also one of the most common themes in the comments section:
  - [My wish] “Would be that other teachers would keep parents up to date on what’s going on in class to help their child at home. Sometimes it’s hard to find out what’s going on in class.”
  - [I would like] “More communication with teacher, therapists other than notes.”
  - [I would like] “Bi-weekly contact from therapist; quarterly meetings in person.”

# Analysis: Other Areas

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- Parents express the greatest variety of opinions about the following:

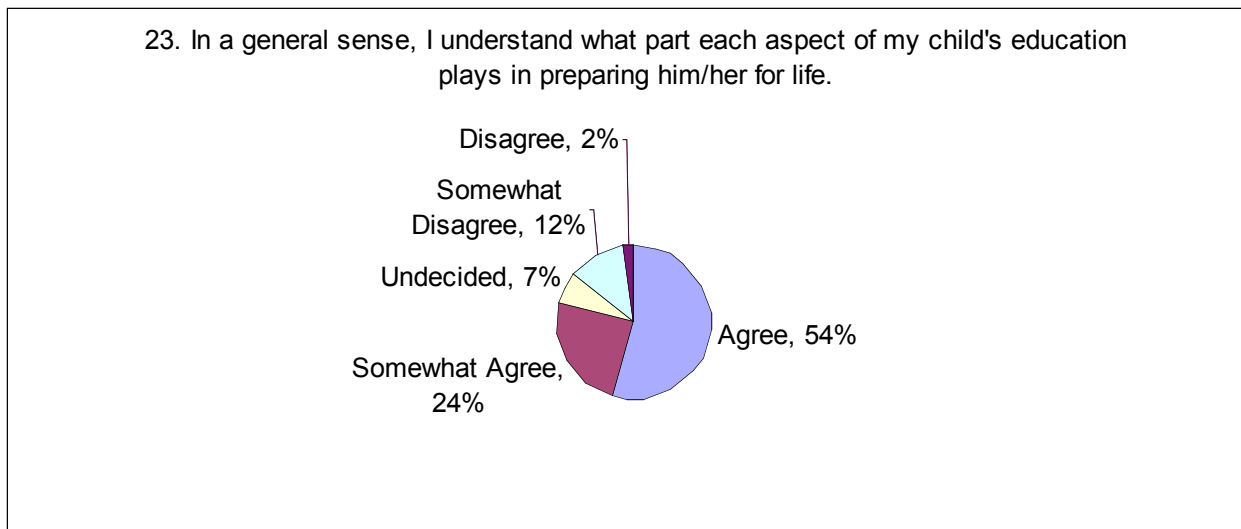


- A significant number of parents are “Undecided” about the following:
  - 35% for question #12, “The district is open to new educational approaches, ideas and methodologies where appropriate.”
  - 34% for question #13, “The district supports professional development for teachers and therapists.”
  - This may be because parents don’t typically have first-hand experience regarding these issues.

## Analysis: Other Areas

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- Parents express different experiences regarding whether they have the opportunity to work with educators on solutions to issues they experience with their child at home (#22):
  - 54% “Agree” and 20% “Somewhat Agree”
  - 10% were “Undecided,” 7% “Somewhat Disagree” and 10% “Disagree”
- Parents also vary in their opinions of understanding the “big picture” regarding their child’s education:



# Analysis: Comments – Best Experiences

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- Parents were asked to share their best experiences with a teacher or therapist and returned many positive comments:
  - “I met with my child’s teacher with a concern I had. She was very professional and kind and so helpful. I feel she is very involved with the children in her class.”
  - “They give good guidance and help to her.”
  - “I liked that the focus was always positive and encouraging.”
  - “All of my experiences with F.N. Brown teachers have been wonderful. Everyone seems kind, caring and attentive.”
  - The following were specific educators noted as being helpful and supportive:
    - Claire Duffy
    - Diane Conboy
    - Joan Serpico
    - Libby Skinner
    - Mr. Valente
    - Mrs. Bavolar
    - Mrs. Bielea
    - Mrs. Gionatti
    - Mrs. LaStella
    - Mrs. Miller
    - Mrs. Millin
    - Mrs. Passero
    - Mrs. Sapienza
    - Mrs. Wagner
    - Ms. Gelford
    - Ms. Grace
    - Nancy Gordon
    - Regina Clark
    - Vickie Cirigliano

# Analysis: Comments - Workshops

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- When asked about workshops they would like to attend, most responses fell into one of the three following categories:
  - Transitioning from one school to another or into adulthood:
    - “Transitioning from one school to another. Organizational tips as well as other tips in helping a student through Middle School and remaining confident about himself.”
    - “What the future holds for my child outside of school and academics. When I need to start preparing for future beyond 21.”
  - Programs after school or during the summer:
    - “Summer options – although there is extended year, there’s still 6 weeks with no therapy. Camp may not be an option, so I need ideas!”
    - “Programs for teenagers (after school). Support groups for adults with autism.”
  - Parental rights and information about IEPs and 504s:
    - “IEP document – getting what you need.”
    - “Parent/student rights, even if run by outside organization.”

# Analysis: Comments – Wish List & Additional Comments

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- Parents were asked what was on their “Wish List” and to make “Additional Comments.” Many of the comments returned fell into one of the following categories:
  - Desire for better communication and information:
    - “Better communication between team members themselves and between them and the parents. Regular conferences with entire team and parents. Get feedback on problems early on, and what can be done to address them both at school and at home.”
    - “What is a ‘Child Study Team?’ What documents do they produce? I should have access to any and all documentation produced regarding my child.”
    - “More communication with the therapist. Why she thinks his speech is getting worse and is she concerned or does she think it is all on track.”
    - “My IEP (classified) child’s team is accessible. [School] psychologist has not returned two attempts to reach her in the last month – one by voice mail, the other by email – that is frustrating!”
  - Missing therapy/policy for makeups:
    - “That accommodations be made when your child misses therapy sessions due to school closing, meetings, etc. One session is one thing, but when they miss 3 or 4 because we’re closed for 2 days, it’s not fair to him.”
    - “I think Special Services programs does a poor job in communicating when my child is getting therapy or when therapy and make-up sessions are being rescheduled. For example, no Occupational Therapy at Forest Avenue first 6 weeks of school. This was not communicated!”
    - “The only road bump we experienced was in kindergarten at holiday time he missed numerous therapies due to other things going on in class. When I asked about making up the time, I was told it was impossible to change the schedules. So for 2 ½ weeks the kindergarteners got no speech.”

# Analysis: Comments – Wish List & Additional Comments

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- Desire for more services:
  - “I wish my daughter could receive Occupational Therapy in school. She currently goes to [hospital] one time a week, but does not qualify for Occupational Therapy in school.”
  - “Reading specialist to work one-on-one with my child.”
  - “More liberal Occupational Therapy services for children with sensory integration issues.”
- Concern about child’s perception by educators:
  - “That all teachers would understand and be able to adapt to many student’s different learning needs. That they understand that ADD is a label of symptoms that cause distractibility and inability to focus. That mainstream teachers were more knowledgeable about learning challenges.”
  - “I would not like my child blamed for his/her disabilities!
    - I think the staff should be educated on learning challenges.
    - Myth of Laziness; Driven to Distraction; Driven From Distraction should be required reading for all staff.
    - There is a misconception that if the output is poor, the child is not ‘trying hard enough,’ ‘not working hard enough!’”

# Analysis: Comments – Wish List & Additional Comments

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– General observations:

- “I have been proactive in finding information and seeking additional help outside of the school system since 2 ½ years old. I think that’s why our experience has been good. I think Verona’s Special Ed system can be very successful for a proactive parent. I have never had any negative experiences during the entire time of my son’s classification and I am very grateful for that as well.”
- “We have sought guidance of outside assistance of LDC, advocates, tutors. We have tried to work within the system, but we were unsuccessful. The frustrations of trying to get the right educational strategies for our child are enormous.”
- “In these times of financial challenges, I am so grateful these services were provided by the district free of charge!”
- “The teachers and therapists’ insights are very helpful. We so appreciate our child being in the program.”
- “I am very happy with the progress my child is making in speech. Thanks!”

## Conclusions and Next Steps

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# Conclusions

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- Conclusions
  - The majority of parents perceive the IEP process as well-managed and well-explained.
    - However, some parents appear to be unaware of the full scope of their roles in the process, specifically when it comes to contributing to the documentation of their concerns and recommendations.
    - Some parents would also like more information and education regarding the process and their rights.
  - Communication with and within the district is perceived differently among parents.
    - Some parents are having different experiences receiving responses from educators in spite of the district's policies to ensure responsiveness.
    - Some parents are also experiencing a lack of communication between members of education teams.
  - Although most parents are satisfied with the program, they are seeking more information and resources:
    - Parents have had mixed experiences with regard to having help addressing issues at home and with problems being anticipated and proactively addressed.
    - Parents could benefit from additional guidance in understanding how Special Education interventions fit with their child's overall education and life skills.
    - Parents need more information regarding policy issues such as therapy scheduling and "makeups."
    - Parents need guidance regarding transitions between schools and into adulthood.
    - Parents also need guidance and possibly services for their children during the summer or after school hours.

# Next Steps

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- The following are actions currently addressing the issues raised in the survey:
  - C.H.I.L.D. and Special Services’ “Parent/Teacher Collaboration Workshop” is a great start to helping improve communication between parents and the district:
    - At the recent workshop, helpful communication strategies were presented for parents to use during and outside of the IEP process.
      - Parents also were forth-coming with feedback for educators in how they can better approach parents.
    - C.H.I.L.D. is also developing a “Parent-to-Parent IEP Guide” to help educate parents with the benefit of other’s experience.
    - C.H.I.L.D. will continue to work with Special Services to continue to present this workshop periodically during the school year.
  - C.H.I.L.D. has also made a commitment to introduce helpful topics to parents:
    - Topics will cover some of the issues parents highlight in the survey (e.g., transitions between schools and into adulthood)
    - These topics will help to educate parents regarding Special Education and how it relates to their child’s needs.
- Although Special Services makes a great effort in communicating with parents, C.H.I.L.D. recommends the following:
  - The district should emphasize the Case Manager’s role as the go-between for parents and the rest of the education team so parents’ issues are addressed in a timely and effective manner.
  - The district should consider issuing a written explanation of the policy surrounding therapy scheduling and “makeups.”