

**An Investigation of the Perceptions of Teachers, Parents and Students with Disabilities
when Learning Remotely at a School District in East Tennessee**

By

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the perceptions of teachers, parents, and students with disabilities when learning remotely during the 2020-2021 school year. The sample consisted of nine teachers from varied grade levels, five parents, and five students in grades five and six. The students were identified as having a learning disability and had an Individualized Education Plan. The teachers provided instruction remotely during the school year and the students participated in remote instruction for at least half of the 2020-2021 school year. The participant interviews were semi-structured with open-ended questions. The teachers and parents participated via email. The students participated through the online Zoom platform. The interview questions were designed to elicit information on what lacked in the participants remote learning environment. The questions focused on safety, identity and procedural safeguards, whether participants provided or received quality education, and barriers to learning. Data were analyzed using inductive analysis process. The results yielded six themes including online safety, identity confidentiality of students with disabilities, similar implementation of accommodations for both in-person and online learning, convenience and support of online learning, disconnect for online learners, and negative effects of online learning. The results suggest that while there were some identified barriers to the remote learning environment, overall, it was a positive experience for the participants.

Keywords: accommodations, Individualized Education Plan, remote learning environment, procedural safeguards, Zoom

Dedication

To my favorite people, Matt, Stephen, Samantha, mom and dad, thank you for putting up with me and supporting me through this whole process. Your love and encouragement means the world to me.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

All school-aged children in the United States are entitled to receive an education provided to them at no cost. Federal and state guidelines are in place to ensure that educational services are provided so that all children have access to them. The former Commissioner of Education for the state of Tennessee, Penny Schwinn, said "We want to ensure that every student is on a path to success. When they graduate, every student should know that they can accomplish whatever dreams they set for themselves" (Education Commissioner, 2019). Schools do this by providing a safe and secure environment while recognizing each student's individual rights to receive a quality education and if needed, to have their identity and any associated health and/or disability determinations be held confidential.

Students with disabilities are also entitled to educational opportunities provided by the public education system. The needs of students with disabilities must be considered regarding evaluations, re-evaluations, service providers, and Individual Education Plans (IEPs), that are in place to help meet the student's individual learning needs. "IEPs aren't simple privileges bestowed to students—they're a right protected by state and federal law" (Gordon, 2020, p 1).

Furthermore, the unique circumstances resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic have changed the way schools deliver education. When the pandemic interrupted the 2019-2020 school year, the future and what school would look like was unclear. The Tennessee Department of Education issued several statements regarding educational delivery. One of which said, "School closures have impacted all of our students, families, and schools. Recoupment of skills and learning will take time, potentially beyond the next school year" (COVID-19 School

Closures, 2020). The department recognized that nothing could be done about the school closures and acknowledges that students will have gaps in their education. However, they also included that "schools can and must provide education to all students including children with disabilities during periods of school closure" (COVID-19 School Closures, 2020).

In another statement, the Tennessee Department of Education stated the following, "As virtual or distance learning takes place to the general student population during a school closure, the school or district must ensure that students with disabilities also have equal access to the same educational opportunities, taking into consideration the individual needs of students" (School Closures, 2020). A student with an identified disability has an IEP in place stating the extra support needed to support the child in their educational environment, whatever the least restrictive environment (LRE) has been determined to be. While some students have been required to stay home due to school closures, others have chosen to stay home and attend their classes in a remote learning environment. The remote learning environment has not let schools be absolved of meeting students' needs in their educational pursuits and is no less responsible for meeting the needs of students with an IEP.

One area of concern involves the protection of a student with a disability's identity. Student privacy must be maintained in the remote learning environment. Strategies have been developed that help to meet this need. "Zoom recordings, including video/audio/text of courses or chat sessions, that reveal the faces of students who are attending, should be considered education records that are FERPA protected and thus also not subject to public disclosure" (Rogers & Best, 2020). Efforts must be made to ensure that any identifiable information is masked.

In addition to student identity, professionals also must ensure that procedural safeguards and IEP requirements are monitored and followed. "The quick switch to virtual learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic has raised numerous concerns related to student privacy under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and other federal laws" (Onaga, 2020, p.1). In addition to ensuring procedural safeguards are provided and maintained, parents must be involved in the decisions made regarding their child's education and in the development of their IEP.

Lastly, teachers also have had to assess their educational role in the remote learning environment and make sure they understand how to provide educational opportunities appropriate for student growth while protecting the rights and identity of all students and specifically those with disabilities. It is essential to provide education services to all students and to make those services accessible. "The U.S. The Department of Education told K-12 districts that if they close due to COVID-19 and continue to offer instruction remotely, they must make that accessible to students with disabilities" (Belsha, 2020, p.1). Parental roles have changed as well in the remote learning environment. Understanding how parents and caregivers must now be involved in ensuring their child has access to educational opportunities is a role that should also be addressed and understood.

Because of these issues, educators have had to revise what service delivery looks like for all students, including students with disabilities. Meeting the needs of students with disabilities within the remote learning environment has its challenges. Ensuring that the students and families rights are protected, their identity is secure, and that their procedural safeguards are honored while receiving appropriate educational services while in the remote learning environment are areas of concern moving forward.

Statement of the Problem

Providing support within the remote learning environment without identifying students with disabilities is a challenge. General education teachers must also be aware of the rights of students with disabilities. They must do what is needed to protect these students in their classrooms and know what each student's IEP says so that they can provide the accommodations and support the individual student needs in their learning environment. Moving to the remote learning environment has also made some of these considerations more challenging. Zoom classrooms make it more difficult for teachers to keep their classrooms private. Procedural safeguards are in place for families and students with disabilities so that their educational rights are protected. These safeguards are in place to protect the students' safety and their identity. Also, these safeguards ensure that their educational services are appropriate to meet the students' needs through inclusion, consultation, direct services, and related services if needed. Ensuring that procedural safeguards are honored and implemented with fidelity has become a challenge that must be addressed. Therefore, this study was designed to investigate teachers, parents, and students' perceptions and how the remote learning environment has impacted their educational services.

Purpose of the Study

This study investigates the learning experiences of teachers, parents, and students with disabilities in the remote learning environment. It is to understand better their perception of the education environment and how their education delivery and progress have been affected. This study's primary goal is to understand if the participants feel that they have provided and received quality educational services in the remote learning environment and what they think has been lacking during their time in the remote learning environment. This study plans to examine each

of these subgroups and understand which barriers may have hindered the educational process while also identifying methods that have been successful.

Initial Research Questions

1. What guidelines have been provided and implemented to ensure the health and safety of students with disabilities in the remote learning environment? What measures are in place to protect the identification of students with disabilities in the remote learning environment?
2. What are the various ways parents/teachers perceive that students have been included in the remote learning environment, and how has the involvement and participation been different in the remote learning environment in relation to the general education activities and tasks?
3. What barriers exist for students with disabilities in the remote learning environment?

Significance of the Study

The purpose of this investigative study was to identify the perceptions of teachers, parents, and students with disabilities when learning remotely at a school district in East Tennessee. It was conducted to better understand their perception of the remote learning environment and how the students' educational delivery and progress have been affected. This study's main goal was to understand if the participants feel that they have been able to provide and receive quality educational services in the remote learning environment and ascertain what, if anything, they feel has been lacking during their time in the remote learning environment. This study plans to examine each of these subgroups in their role and understand which barriers they have found that may have hindered the educational process while also identifying those that have been successful. The study will investigate the area of student identity and security of

information while in the remote learning environment and what if any barriers have existed while trying to uphold procedural safeguards for students with disabilities.

The justification for this study is to gain a better understanding of each of the identified subgroup's experiences in the remote learning environment during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This understanding could provide insight into future decisions and support provided for remote learning in the future. It may add evidence to what is lacking and what further support may be needed for teachers, students, and parents to feel supported and engaged in the online learning environment.

The study's questions will focus on the health and safety of the remote learning environment, the perceptions of the instructional considerations that the students, families, and teachers feel have been utilized, and the procedural considerations that have been used throughout the time spent in the remote learning environment. The areas of focus will be on the students' privacy and safety, instruction delivery and access to services and procedural safeguards related to the development and implementation of the students' IEP.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions were adapted for this study. Unless accompanied by a citation, the researcher defined the terms below:

Accommodation - strategies or changes to an assignment, task, or assessment that allow a student with an identified disability to demonstrate their knowledge that does not alter the curriculum

Compensatory education - additional educational opportunities provided to a student in order for that student to make up lost instruction time

Eligibility for services - a decision reached by a team of people, including teachers, special education assessment staff, and parents, that will determine if a student will receive special education services based on assessment data

ESY - Extended School Year, a decision made by the special education IEP team that assesses the need for a student to receive educational services longer than the traditional school year based on data that the student has not made growth in their deficit areas

Evaluation - assessments and observations completed by team member involved in the education of a student that will determine eligibility for services

IEP - Individualized Education Plan - An individualized plan that describes the student's strength and areas of concern, including assessment data and goals to help meet their identified deficit areas

IEP team - Parent, regular education teacher, special education teacher, interpreter of testing, the administration that represents the school, related service providers (if applicable)

Inclusion - students with disabilities learning alongside typically developing peers in the general education classroom

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) - a determination made by the IEP of the location services for the identified student, it should be made so that the student will be educated with non-disabled peers to the greatest extent possible

Procedural Safeguards - list of rights, rules, and procedures that must be met and maintained by the special education staff involved in the child's education. It must be given to the parent at least once a year and must be given at times of evaluation/assessment for services

Re-evaluation - at least once every three years, a child must be assessed to determine if the need for the continuation of special education services still exists

Related Services - services that include occupational, physical, and speech and language therapies. May also include behavior and emotional support services

Remote learning Environment - an environment where the student is not physically present within the walls of a classroom but receives their educational services through an online platform

Zoom - an online platform utilized to provide educational opportunities to students that are not receiving in-person education

Limitations of the Study

Limitations of the study may include the population itself being studied. This population of students already has issues with learning, which may influence the study results. The issues that exist may be more related to their disability than the experience of remote learning. In addition to this, the study will only include a small population of students with disabilities. Generalization may be affected.

Another limitation of the study may include the inconsistent availability of the internet and not being able to access all that is being offered throughout the school year. Not being able to access the services being offered may impact the perception of the remote learning environment's involvement.

Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 presents an introduction to this study, including a statement of the problem, the study's purpose, research questions, the significance of the study, definition of terms, and

limitations. Chapter 2 contains a review of relevant literature and research concerning teachers and students with disabilities participating in remote learning. Chapter 3 presents the methodology and procedures used to gather data. The results of the analysis and findings are addressed in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 contains a summary of the study and findings, a discussion, conclusions drawn from the findings, and recommendations for further study.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

Introduction

Education Week reported that during the 2019 school year almost all 50 states ordered schools to be closed for the remaining school year of which the United States Department of Education reported that the student population included 12% of students with disabilities (Basham et al., 2020, p. 72). This number represents 2.5 million students within the education system. According to Basham et al. (2020), this meant that 2.5 million students with identified disabilities made the transition to the remote learning environment during the COVID-19 shutdown. While not all schools within the United States are continuing to participate in remote learning, some students and their families have chosen to continue to receive their education remotely. Teachers, students, and families have had to change the way teaching and learning takes place. The following concerns have surfaced regarding how to best meet the needs of students with disabilities in the remote learning environment, ways in which teachers and parents can work together to ensure student safety, and the best way to address procedural safeguards while providing and receiving appropriate and accessible educational opportunities.

A study was conducted that examined the prevalence of virtual schools in the United States' education system. Within this study, Muller (2009) stated that while many states did have a virtual platform, students with individualized education programs (IEPs) represented a small portion of the total student body participating in virtual public school (p. 5). Although the number of students with disabilities may remain small, the need to address how these students' educational needs are best met in the remote learning environment is vital and required by law.

In addition, states must continue to provide data regarding the achievement of student subgroups, including those with an identified disability. The progress of students with disabilities on state and district assessments in reading and mathematics must be assessed and reported (Greer et al., 2015, p. 53). Ensuring that the needs of all students, including those with disabilities, must continue to be a part of schools across the country. This process helps to ensure that the correct strategies are in place for all students to succeed.

In addition, the Covid 19 Pandemic changed many roles and responsibilities within the remote learning environment. As a result, parents and other caregivers were given the opportunity to better understand the role and responsibilities of an educator, special educator, paraprofessional, or guidance counselor (Basham et al., 2020, p. 73). Teachers, parents, and students have had to examine how to provide, support and receive educational opportunities in the remote learning environment. New concerns and opportunities have surfaced highlighting needed changes to occur in order to provide the best strategies for implementing, redesigning, and supporting a more personalized learning environment, whether within the design of digital or blended learning environments, which include all students, both regular education students as well as students with learning disabilities (Basham et al., 2020, p. 78).

Identity and Safety of Students

The identity and safety of students is a top priority in education. Student data and confidentiality must be observed. In an article titled Equity Matters presented by the Center on Online Learning and Students with Disabilities, it states:

“Two major federal laws impact the use of student data: The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) prohibits the disclosure of education records, and the

Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA), regulates marketing to children under 13 years old. These pieces of legislation quite likely were not written with the digital learning environment in mind: FERPA legislation is 40 years old; COPPA has been in effect for 20 years" (Basham et al., 2015, p. 68).

While these pieces of legislation might be dated and were not written with a COVID-19 Pandemic in mind, the issues that these laws influence, and address, are relevant to what teachers, parents and students are facing today. The same article adds that there are more complications with confidentiality and data privacy when students with disabilities engage in online learning. Regulations in record keeping of the IEP, which includes student goals, must be followed for students with disabilities. The IDEA and FERPA legislation protect important data. In addition, any and all information that indicates any personally identifiable or student performance information, must be protected by the state and kept private from the public. It remains crucial that student rights and privacy be protected even in the remote learning environment (Basham et al., 2015, p. 671).

Teachers

Schools and students with identified disabilities have had to face and deal with many issues. One very critical issue is the need for open and continuous communication between special education teachers that write the IEPs for their identified students, and their virtual teacher (Muller, 2009, p. 8). IEP teams that met prior to the COVID closures of schools were not discussing what education may look like in a remote learning environment. With the start of the 2020-2021 school year, teachers needed to know who students with disabilities were along with their accommodations and/or modifications as stated in their IEP's. Communication was critical between teachers and may have been lacking while teachers explored how to navigate the new

educational landscape in the remote learning environment. Identification of students with disabilities may have been overlooked.

As stated above, students with disabilities come with a significant amount of data associated to their identity and to their eligibility status. This data must be protected and always kept confidential. Therefore, privacy issues have become especially important in the digital learning community. So much so that concerns have been raised that the security of student data in these environments does not meet federal or state regulations. To have effective online learning, these issues must be adhered to, or they become a major barrier to successful learning in the online learning community (Basham et al., 2015, p. 68) Teachers have had to learn how to access data, modify teaching strategies and not identify students within their general education classrooms as having a disability. Little guidance has been provided. The educator then becomes the leader who must create a remote classroom environment that promotes positivity for all students. In order to do this successfully, teacher needs are evolving for financial support in areas of professional development and proper guidance for teachers learning legal and policy issues in the remote learning environment (Shariff, 2005, p. 6).

Parents

Parents must also be part of maintaining and securing the private identity of their child. so that their student can access material while using the available accommodations and modifications that are needed. In addition, parents have the same need for ongoing training in ways to support and provide the needed tools for their child's education.

There is already a need for parents to be watchful of their child's online activities. Adding school in the remote world has added the need to be more mindful of their child's safety concerns at a different level.

Students

Furthermore, students also must be active in their own identity protection and safety. The International Association for Online Learning states as part of their mission the wish to ensure topnotch, high quality, blended and online learning opportunities that prepare all students for future success (2014). In an article posted by LD Online, it states that parents, teacher, and guardians cannot always monitor inappropriate behavior, language, and material that their child might come across while he or she is online. Children are spending extensive time online, and the immediate view of the computer screen is not always available for monitoring. It becomes all the more important to prepare all students to use the interactive online tools safely. It is especially important to be aware of the risks that students disabilities face when they are online (Brann, 2011, p. 1).

In addition, students must learn how to be an advocate for themselves. In the remote learning environment, this may be more difficult to achieve, but it must still become a part of the online curriculum. Students must do what they can to ensure that they are practicing safe online behavior. While research shows higher risks of bullying and harassment occur to young people with disabilities, it is unclear how these risks extend to online behavior. In all probability, it is safe to believe that these same risks occur in the online community (Brann, 2011, p. 2). Students in the online environment must still be taught how to protect themselves and be safe. Teachers and parents play a vital role in educating their students to protect themselves against bullying and harassment. Teachers and parents need to realize that standards and codes of conduct need to be

implemented and upheld when using the Internet and cell phones. There must be agreed upon boundaries with respect to Internet and cell phone use. Acceptable boundaries also extend for their students' social behavior in cyber-space (Shariff, 2005, p. 6). This issue must be addressed and revisited throughout the time spent in the remote learning environment.

Procedural Safeguards

There are several important factors and regulations that schools must follow in the identification and education of students with disabilities. "Within the U.S., IDEA (2004) provides the general structure for identifying and supporting students eligible to receive special education services. This law outlines the requirements associated with Free and Appropriate Public education (FAPE), such as requiring Individual Education Programs (IEP), ensuring access to the general education curriculum, and guaranteeing those services occur in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)" (Basham et al., 2020, p. 79). These procedural safeguards must continue to exist and support teachers, families, and students in the remote learning environment. While the remote learning environment might present more challenges, student rights that fall under IEP provisions must still be followed. While these legal rights and protection within the special education system were developed before the digital age and the onset of the Pandemic, special education services are no less important today than they were when the laws and protection were first established (Basham et al., 2020, p. 79).

With the emergence of online learning in the world of education, comes additional questions with regards to how the application of FAPE and LRE will be implemented (Greer et al., 2015, p. 54). Regardless, students with disabilities must still be protected and supported within the online learning setting. Teachers must still provide support and follow the IEP. Parents must still be afforded the right to participate in the development of the IEP and the

evaluation process. Students must still be provided their educational rights as a student with a disability as stated in their IEP. The appropriate support, accommodations and/or modifications to the curriculum must be given to all identified students with disabilities.

Teachers

Special education teachers and general education teachers must work together to ensure that students with disabilities are being supported in the general education classroom. The IEP is a tool used in order for teachers to be aware of the learning deficits of the students they serve. The IEP also states the information and strategies needed to best meet student needs in the classroom. According to the United States Department of Education, IEPs, which are legally binding, are jointly created by district staff and parents. It does not matter whether the mode of learning is in person, online or virtual, districts are responsible for implementing the IEPs with fidelity (2020).

An issue lies therein that all educators involved with the education of a child with a disability should be involved and understand the development and implementation of the IEP when appropriate. In an article by the Council on Online Learning and Students with Disabilities, they discuss how the IEP team must convene in order to make the determination of the best placement for the child. It states that there must be a review by the team prior to placement so that the best fit can be made for the needs of the student. (Basham, 2015, p. 22). The online learning environment may present obstacles in this process. However, these obstacles, such as time to prepare and understand the implementation of the IEP, whether within the special education classroom or the regular education classroom, must be addressed.

In addition, obstacles may occur when assessing the progress of students with disabilities. Progress monitoring has become a part of ongoing assessments for all students, especially special education students. Deficit areas must be assessed on a regular basis to ensure that students are making progress in alignment with their educational goals as stated in their IEP. Also, monitoring state and territory special education, through the use of performance indicators, is one way in which the IDEA legislation was written in order to improve the education of students with disabilities. However, student monitoring within the online learning process also affords new challenges (Basham, 2015, p. 30).

Parents

The Tennessee Department of Education posts procedural safeguards on their website. These procedural safeguards must be presented to parents at least once a school year. These safeguards are part of the IDEA and explain the rights that are attached to a student that has been identified with a disability. This ranges from identification and eligibility to invitations and involvement in meetings. It includes the process for filing a complaint and the basic outline of rights and expectations a parent can and should have as a parent of a child with a disability (2016). Parents should play an active role in representing their child and participating in the decisions effecting the best interest of their child's education. It is important to understand what this looks like and what parents can do to support their child in the educational setting.

There are many procedural safeguards that must take place with a child that has an IEP. Parents must be involved in the decision making and planning process that involves their child. One such area impacted by the move to remote learning is in assessment and progress monitoring. As families make the choice to participate in the remote learning environment,

parents should also be aware of how this may impact their child and the monitoring progress. Prior to online learning, all students receiving some type of intervention support are regularly monitored and assessed to make sure that they are making progress towards their learning goals. As more and more parents are choosing to enroll their children in a fully online learning environment, they must realize the importance of the screening and the monitoring assessment process that is required for addressing the full range of disabilities including sensory, motor, or intellectual challenges. (Basham, 2015, p. 25). This may be a concern for some, and one that parents should make as part of their role as their child participates in the remote learning environment. Implementing the correct procedural safeguards helps to ensure that regular progress monitoring is taking place and used to assess learning gains as the child participates in remote learning.

Students

Students with disabilities that are participating in the remote learning environment must still receive the supports and accommodations that are written in the IEP. The IEP is a legal document that must be followed and used as support and guidance for meeting the needs of the child in the general education classroom, as well as the child in a digital learning environment. The IEP team must consider how the child can receive services in a digital learning environment. Will the child be able to access appropriate technologies and receive needed accommodations and supportive services? How will communication occur between all parties responsible for implementation of the IEP? Can any changes in the child's learning environment be met (Basham, 2015, p. 23)? These are all part of meeting the prescribed needs of a student with disabilities, and if stated in the IEP, must be documented, and met.

As stated above, students must receive the support that is written into the IEP. However, when faced with the remote learning environment, it has been found that the special learning needs of many students were left unmet because of circumstances that were out of their control. Lack of capacity of schools, internet access, and diverse students' special needs could not always be met. Parents were not always able to meet their student's needs due to lack of time, content knowledge or pedagogy, communication, and/or resources (Garbe, 2020, p. 59). These issues affect students and lessen the accessibility of general education classrooms and materials. Oftentimes, students with disabilities have an extra support, in the form of an educational assistant, within the general education classroom. This support may not always be able to be provided at the home level. In addition, special services such as speech therapy, occupational therapy, or counseling may be difficult to access in the home environment (Blagg et al., 2020, p. 6). If these extra support services have been deemed necessary to the child's success, the services may be lost in the remote learning environment. However, it is still required by law to ensure that students have appropriate accommodations embedded into their educational experiences (Basham, 2015, p. 24). IEP's may need to be changed to make sure that what can happen in the remote classroom are appropriate supports and services. Students may lose needed accommodations, and this should be part of a discussion in looking at the appropriateness of the remote classroom.

Teaching and Learning in the Remote Environment

Tennessee's governor and Department of Education in the state of Tennessee released their predictions for learning loss due to school closure related to COVID 19. The estimates include a prediction of 50% decrease in reading skills and 65% decrease in math skills. This, they say, is about 2.5 times more than normal expected learning losses (Governors, 2021). The

COVID-19 Pandemic saw a shift in service delivery for educational services. Teachers, parents and students experienced a change in how education was delivered. The platform and space was different. During this time, the roles and responsibilities changed so quickly for all students, parents, and teachers (Basham et al., 2020, p. 73).

To begin with, the classroom changed. A one size fits all curriculum may no longer be able to be used to fix all that is needed to succeed (Basham et al., 2020, p. 78). The emphasis on technology and the opportunities that it provides for students that are learning remotely became a major topic in education, especially for students with disabilities. The additional opportunities do not come without challenges (Basham et al., 2020, p. 78). Teachers, parents, and students had to figure out how to manage teaching and learning while figuring out how they could make it work for their circumstances. With the possibility's came frustration. Perhaps one of the most frequently heard concern was the extensively increased screen time usage during the Covid-19 Pandemic. It has proven exhausting for all concerned individuals across all levels of education. In addition, video-based classes have also further highlighted and increased issues of equity and access (Fogo & Requa, 2020).

Teachers

Online learning is not a new forum for education, but it is something that became widespread during the COVID-19 shutdown. With online learning came shifts in teaching and delivery methods. "Educators from around the world are learning the online medium offers new possibilities for the design of learning environments and experiences. This new medium expands formalized learning from the structure of the classroom and distributes it across the learners to multiple digital and physical environments" (Basham et al., 2020, p. 78). As with any change,

there comes challenges. Teachers who had not taught using a digital platform had to learn how to deliver their teaching and curriculum in a remote learning environment.

Possibilities opened that were not utilized in the traditional classroom, and teachers could implement new and different teaching strategies to reach their students. New paradigms came into play including environmental design, identification of disability, delivery and instruction, socialization, and engagement of all personnel involved (Basham, 2016, p. 70). While these shifts in education are viewed by many to be positive, many find them a struggle to achieve.

Courses should be written so that all students benefit from the learning opportunity. Students with disabilities should be able to access every course within the curriculum, while receiving support and accommodations, the same way as a regular education student can (Rose, 2014, p. 10). Teachers should still use their expertise to modify and adjust their methods to ensure equitable access for all students. Time to achieve this goal may be difficult for all teachers to achieve, causing emotional distress for some.

Another area of concern is simply the physical space and presence of a teacher that is not in existence in the remote learning environment. Teacher presence is vital to the learning experience (Bhamani, 2020, p. 16). Some students, those with a disability included, can react and calm themselves with the help from the teacher or assistant being near to them. However, modeling correct behavior is hard to convey in the remote classroom. Students may not be learning how to behave or how to learn because they cannot see it, or practice it, with guidance from a teacher or other adult that understands the strategy.

Parents

Parental roles have shifted during the move to online learning. Parents have had to find ways to support their children in the remote learning environment including parents of children with disabilities. Without the resources and supports that can be found inside the classroom, parents may feel that their child will suffer. A study conducted out of the University of Wisconsin-Steven's Point found that the parent's readiness level was a major area of concern. Another major concern was the need and ability to keep children on task and safe (Garbe, 2020, p. 58). It found that not all parents understand the strategies and the different ways to implement them that can be used to keep a child engaged and safe at home while learning.

During the time of school closures, new fears and concerns have also presented themselves. With the onset of remote learning, parents of children with developmental disabilities, have added fears. Many fear that their child will not only lose what they have learned but will regress as well. In addition, parents fear that the social skills their child as learned over time, will erode without in person learning. Families have experienced firsthand this regression since school doors have closed, and fear that this may continue throughout the summer (Gordon, 2020, p. 1).

In a study conducted in 2017 by the Center on Online Learning and Students with Disabilities parental input included how parents see their roles in the remote learning environment. It found that parents see themselves in the educator role as being their child's teacher. Within this role, parents indicated that they feel that they are the guides for leading the instruction, and they had to find ways to engage and interest their child in the materials that were given to them by the school. Some parents in the study were able to communicate a sense of pride in taking on this role. Others indicated that they were not "satisfied with the role of being

teacher.” Another role that was identified by parents in the remote learning environment was that of a teacher’s aide. The parents that felt this way did not see themselves as the “provider of instruction, but as a person who modifies the assessment process by accepting verbal answers.” Parents that felt more like they fit in this role, saw themselves more as managers of their child’s learning and made sure that “the child was keeping up”. A third role identified in this study was that of an educational consultant or advocate. The study found that when parents saw themselves in this role, the parents thought “highly of the school” and that the parents “felt involved in their child’s educational process, while also not thinking that they had to do all the work”. This study found that no matter what the role was that the parent identified with was that the parent “wanted to be able to consult with the teacher or someone at the school regarding ways to work with their children more effectively” (Ortiz et al., 2017, pp. 6-10).

Students

The change to remote learning has impacted students. Many of the traditional learning strategies that teachers use within the physical classroom are not possible with the remote learning environment. One such strategy that is also an accommodation found in an IEP and utilized by teachers to help support students with a disability is peer tutoring. This valuable strategy is lost without other students in attendance within the classroom to act as tutors for those that need additional support (Bhamani, 2020, p. 16). While there are ways to do things like this in the remote learning environment, it is not the same as being in person and having the peer-to-peer interaction happen in a physical space.

Another area affected is in the routine and self-regulation skills students need to display. The remote learning environment assumes that the student will keep himself on task and do what is expected of him by the online teacher. This is especially difficult for students with disabilities.

Self-regulation strategies do not automatically exist in all students with disabilities. However, they can be encouraged by effective use of specific instructional strategies and learning supports within the online system (Basham, 2015, p. 43). Students have had to learn how to successfully perform in the remote learning environment and have lost some of the supports that they would normally have received while in the physical classroom. Within the physical classroom they can be encouraged to use various strategies and methods to learn their lessons. They can also be supported to display proper discipline that they have learned, and follow simple steps of routines, such as the routines they have learned to complete tasks such as getting ready for school. These supports are hard to maintain in the online classroom (Bhamani, 2020, p. 16).

Lastly, students have found themselves without the opportunities to have social interaction beyond the screen. Another strategy used in schools is modeling. Without being able to physically model what some learning and social situations should look like, some children have fallen behind. A study conducted in Pakistan found that the “social development” of “children was affected”. It found that this was “especially in the case of younger children” which impacted the “development of their social and emotional skills” (Bhamani, 2020, p. 17)

Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic has made teachers, parents and students rethink what learning can look like. Changing to the remote learning environment has made these stakeholders take a step back and evaluate their roles and responsibilities in the education process. Students with disabilities have extra supports in place as directed by their IEP. Ensuring that these students' identity and safety is upheld, that their procedural safeguards are communicated and intact, and that the educational experiences are accessible and equitable in the remote learning environment are key factors to support for the success of all.

Chapter 3

Research Methodology

Introduction

The remote learning environment has become a major topic in education since the pandemic has impacted schools and how teachers teach, and students learn. The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions teachers, parents, and students with disabilities had regarding their experiences in the remote learning environment. This study's findings will contribute to the research and implementation of online learning as schools look to the future to implement remote learning.

This section is organized into the following categories: research questions, research design, site selection, school demographics, participants in the study, participant demographics, role of the researcher, data collection methods and procedures, implementation of the study, data management, data analysis, trustworthiness, ethical considerations, and transferability.

Research Questions

1. What guidelines have been provided and implemented to ensure the health and safety of students with disabilities in the remote learning environment? What measures are in place to protect the identification of students with disabilities in the remote learning environment?
2. What are the various ways parents/teachers perceive that students have been included in the remote learning environment? How has their involvement and participation been different in the remote learning environment concerning the general education activities and tasks?

3. What barriers exist for students with disabilities in the remote learning environment?

Research Design

The methodology used for the study was a qualitative design that used purposeful sampling. This method was used to obtain personal and individualized input from all participants. This methodology allows for purposeful and meaningful data collection.

This strategy allows for responses to be considered when planning for the future in regard to the topic of the study. It provides insight into the barriers all stakeholders have perceived in their experiences and how these barriers may be removed. The obtained responses can provide information for future program planning and efficacy for the school system.

Site Selection

The site selection used for the data collection in this study was from one urban school district in east Tennessee. Teachers across several school locations and grade levels provided input. These teachers were from the intermediate school which includes grades five and six, the middle school which includes grades seven and eight, and also the high school which includes grades nine through twelve. A selection of parents and students with disabilities from the intermediate level school including grades five and six located within the district provided input.

School Demographics

The school district involved in the study is located in what is considered a semi-urban area. CensusReporter (2019) reports the population the district serves to be at 60,694. There was a median household income of \$40,194 and a poverty rate of 21.7%.

According to the Public School Review (2021), the school district involved in the study consists of 11 schools with a total of 7,925 students and 502 teachers. There was a student-teacher ratio of 16:1. There was a minority rate of 31% and a graduation rate of 93%. According to the annual report posted for the 2019-2020 school year posted on the school district's website, of the district's total number, 13.2% were identified with a disability and served with an IEP.

Participants in the Study

Prior to beginning the study, permission was obtained from Milligan University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). After this, permission was then granted from the school district's review panel.

Participation in this study was voluntary. Teachers involved in the remote learning environment were identified, and invitations were sent asking for their responses to questions related to the study. Requirements for the participation of teachers were that they were involved in providing remote instruction for the 2020-2021 school year, and the instruction had to include students with an identified disability served with an IEP. Nine teachers responded to the study.

Families that were invited to participate included students served with an IEP. These students had to have received instruction in the remote learning environment for at least the first semester of the 2020-2021 school year. Consent by the parent/guardian was obtained along with consent for their child to participate in the interview portion of the study. Participation for family members and students was voluntary. Five families responded and participated in the study.

Participant Demographics

Multiple subgroups participated in this study. The consent forms used for the parent/guardian participants are available in Appendix B, and the student consent form is

available in Appendix A. The open-ended questionnaire provided to teachers is available in Appendix E. The open-ended questionnaire provided to the parents is available in Appendix D. The interview question guide used with students is available in Appendix C.

Teacher demographics

Nine teachers responded to the invitation to participate in the study. Five teachers participated from grades 5 and 6, one teacher participated from grades 7 and 8, and three teachers participated from grades 9-12. Two of the teachers in grades five and six taught either math or English/Language Arts. One of the teachers taught a combination of English/Language Arts and Social Studies. Two of the teachers taught a combination of science and social studies. The teacher that responded at the seventh/eighth-grade level taught Social Studies. Of the three teachers that responded at the high school (grades 9-12), one taught English 9, another taught English 11 and 12, and the remaining taught Spanish.

Parent demographics

A total number of five families provided consent to participate in this study. The five families that chose to participate were families at the Intermediate School, grades five and six. Of these families, three of them have remained in the remote learning environment for the duration of the 2020-2021 school year, while two returned to in-person learning for the fourth nine-week term of the year.

Student demographics

Two of the students participating in the study were in fifth grade, and three were in sixth grade. Four students identify as White/Caucasian, and one student identifies as Black/African American. Each of the participants was served through an IEP for their eligibility area. All the

students were fully included in general education classes for core instruction. Two of the sixth-grade students received consultation services, which consisted of checking in and monitoring progress through teacher input. The other three students received intervention services that consisted of less than one hour related to their identified deficit area.

The two fifth-grade participants included in the study were also fully included in their general education classes and intervention services with the special education teacher for 45 minutes each day of the school week. One student was served under a learning disability for reading, and the other student was served under a learning disability in both reading and math.

One of the sixth-grade students received consultation services and was identified under the disability category of Other Health Impaired (OHI) due to an Attention Deficit Disorder with Hyperactivity (ADHD) diagnosis. Another of the sixth-grade students also received consultation services and was identified under the disability category of Autism. Both students fully participated in general education classes and received minimal accommodations. The other sixth-grade student received intervention services in reading and math for 45 minutes each day, five days per week due to a Specific Learning Disability.

Role of the Researcher

The primary researcher is a teacher at one of the schools included in the study and therefore is considered as an active participant. Furthermore, the researcher is a special education teacher involved in teaching within the remote learning environment students who participated in the interview portion of the study. The one-on-one interviews conducted included five students that the researcher is directly involved in teaching or working with as their special education service. The interviews were conducted individually so that the students were not aware of what

the other students said in their responses. Only one student was on the researcher's special education caseload, meaning that the development of the IEP and its programming was the researcher's responsibility. The other students involved in the study had another special education teachers as their caseload manager and involved in the development of their IEP.

Data Collection Methods and Procedures

Three subgroups were involved in this study. The subgroups consisted of remote learning teachers, parents, and students with disabilities in the remote learning environment. Providing these three subgroups' views and perspectives of the remote learning environment demonstrates the triangulation of data in order to enhance the reliability and validity of the study.

Before the Study

Before beginning the study, a proposal was submitted to the IRB at Milligan University and the school district's approval committee. Approval was obtained from Milligan University and the school system. The study was then able to move forward.

Target Schools

The school system involved in the study was chosen to represent what the remote learning environment looks like for teachers, parents and students with disabilities when put into practice. Teachers were asked to participate from all grade levels throughout the system in the hopes of obtaining representation from all grade bands within the system. Six of the eight remote teachers at the intermediate level participated, only one at the seventh/eighth grade level, and three at the high school level participated. The district was chosen as the target sample because the researcher was employed there.

Selection of Participants

The teachers surveyed were identified as working directly with students with a disability in the remote learning environment for at least the Fall term of the 2020-2021 school year. Participation was voluntary, and the participants were informed their participation would remain confidential.

The parent/guardian and student participants were invited to participate due to their enrollment in their home school. The researcher is a teacher at the grades 5/6 Intermediate level school. The family and student participants were identified from this school to provide family and student input. The researcher had firsthand knowledge of these students and the identification of students with IEPs. Because of this familiarity, involvement was easier to obtain.

Attempts were made to involve students at all school locations within the district, but those attempts were unsuccessful. Due to FERPA privacy issues, the school district review committee's identification of students and direct contact with those students was not permitted. Special education personnel at other school locations were asked to contact the students with an IEP. The students must also have been involved in the remote learning environment. From there, the students were asked to contact the researcher regarding their voluntary participation in the study. No students outside of the researcher's home school agreed to participate.

Implementation of the Study

Obtaining consent for parent and student participants took time. While waiting for consent forms to be received, the researcher was able to identify willing teachers to participate in the study. These teachers were provided an open-ended questionnaire to fill out regarding remote

learning. These questions are provided in Appendix E. Once received, the survey responses were coded. Participants were assured that their participation in the study would remain confidential. Only grade level and subject taught were used as identifying categories.

Once consent was obtained for the parent/guardian, the open-ended questionnaire provided in Appendix D was sent to the parents via email. The parent/guardian participants were able to answer these questions at their convenience. Parent/guardian participants were assured that their involvement would remain confidential.

The parent/guardian also provided consent for their child to participate. The student interviews were conducted once this consent was received. The interview guide used is provided in Appendix C. All interviews were conducted via zoom. Student participants were assured that their participation would remain confidential and that their participation had no impact or influence on their grades in their classes in any way. Only their grade level was used as an identifying factor within the study.

Data Management

The open-ended questionnaires were sent to teachers and to the parent/guardian participants via a secure email server provided by the school system. The responses were printed, and the emails were transferred into a digital folder within the email system.

The interviews of student participants were recorded via zoom on a Dell Laptop owned by the school system and loaned to the teacher for her use. This Dell laptop is password protected. The password is known only by the researcher so that the recordings can be kept confidential. The interviews were scheduled at the convenience of the student participants and their families. The researcher made sure to conduct the interviews in a private setting with no

outside observers at any time. The interview responses were also transcribed into a word document.

The zoom recordings of the student interviews will be transferred from the laptop onto a USB drive. The transcription of the interviews will be stored on the USB drive as well. Copies of emailed responses from the participants, notes, and the USB drive containing both the interviews and the transcription of the interviews will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's home for five years from the date of the successful defense of the study.

After the five-year storage timeframe expires, all papers associated with the study will be shredded and disposed of properly. Any digital recording device will also be disposed of properly.

Data Analysis

John Creswell's six-step method was used to examine responses. The steps included in his method are to prepare and organize the data, explore and code the data, build descriptions and themes, represent and report qualitative findings, interpret the findings, validate the accuracy of the findings (Creswell, 2014, pgs. 197-201). The data were analyzed, and themes were identified in all of the subgroup's participation pieces. Individual pieces from the open-ended questionnaire response from both the teacher and parent subgroups created the major themes presented in the data. Excerpts from the transcribed students' interviews were also used in the data analysis to represent the students' viewpoints. The findings are discussed in chapter 4.

Trustworthiness

Validity and reliability is important for the accuracy of the findings in this study. Triangulation was formed with the three subgroups of teachers, parents, and students with

disabilities. These three groups represented those people directly involved and impacted by the shift to the remote learning environment. Part of Creswell's procedure mentioned previously is to also re-interact with the members so that member checking becomes part of the validation process. This rechecking required the interviewer to revisit the participants to validate any emergent themes gleaned from their collective responses (2014). Member checking took place in the form of personal conversations with those teachers at the researcher's home school. Due to COVID and the number of cases to be on the rise again, the follow-up took place in the form of email with those participants at other sites. Member checking was also in the form of an email to parent participants. Follow-up zoom conversations took place via zoom with the student subgroup.

Validity is a key component in any qualitative research study. Credibility, dependability, and confirmation were part of the data analysis process to help ensure that the research and the data collected were valid and reliable. Credibility was established through member checking. As the data from the questionnaires and interviews will be stored for five years post successful defense, dependability will be established. In addition to these three parts, as themes began to emerge through the responses from the different subgroups, transferability was established. All this process together lead to establishing the trustworthiness of the research and findings.

Ethical Considerations

Maintaining ethical practices while conducting research and reporting the results is crucial to the success and outcome of any study. It is vital that there were no possible interactions and/or issues that arose that could cast a shadow or doubt on the validity of the research. Any issues that could arise could negatively impact the researcher, the school system in which the research was conducted and the validity of the study itself (Golafshani, 2003).

To maintain valid and reliable participation and findings, the following was implemented by the researcher:

- (1) Each participant's participation was voluntary.
- (2) Each participant received a description of the study and what would transpire through the process. Each participant was assured that their participation would remain confidential.
- (3) Student participants were assured that their involvement would have no impact or influence on their classes and/or grades.
- (4) A consent form was provided and signed by each of the parent participants.
- (5) A consent was signed by each of the parent participants acknowledging permission for their minor child to participate.
- (6) Security of all data collected will be of greatest importance. Responses via email will transpire through a secure server provided by the school system. These will be printed off and kept securely in the researcher's possession before being locked in a cabinet in the researcher's home. Recorded student interviews will be kept secure in a password protected laptop in the possession of the researcher and eventually transferred onto a USB drive that will then be kept in a locked cabinet in the researcher's home. Any notes will also be stored in the locked cabinet.

All these safeguards assisted the researcher in maintaining safety and security. The risks to the participants will be non-existent (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Transferability

While not all school systems within the country have the same demographics of the school system included in this study, the responses provided by those participants provide insight

into the perceived struggles that each of the subgroups have dealt with during the 2020-2021 school year. These perceptions can add to the discussion of how to implement a remote learning environment best and how to break down the barriers that it presents. The findings can be used to understand the difficulties teachers have faced in the change to remote teaching and how to best handle sensitive information that students with disabilities may have. The findings may assist parents in better understanding how their role fits into their child's needs and what they should expect in the remote learning environment. The findings from the student interviews can shed light on their perceptions and perceived needs in the remote learning environment and what students themselves feel they need to be successful while in a remote classroom. The research and findings can help school districts better understand the struggles and possible solutions in the remote learning environment.

Chapter 4

Data Analysis and Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore the perspectives of three stakeholder groups involved in the remote learning environment during the 2020-2021 school year at a school district in upper East Tennessee. One of the groups was teachers involved in teaching in the remote learning environment and whose classes included students with an identified disability. The other two groups were parents and their children who were identified with a disability that participated in the remote learning environment during at least one semester of the 2020-2021 school year. These three groups were interviewed to understand their perspectives on the barriers and limitations of online learning related to teaching students with an identified disability. The goal was to understand; (a) what if anything the participants felt had been lacking during their time in the remote learning environment, including safety, identity and procedural safeguards and; (b) if the participants felt that they had been able to provide and receive quality educational services in the remote learning environment.

As stated in chapter 3, this study is a qualitative design with a purposeful sampling. The researcher was the primary instrument of data collection and analysis. Adult participants of the study provided feedback via emailed questions and responses. Student participants were involved in semi-structured interviews conducted by the researcher. Table 1 identifies the demographics of the school system used in this study.

Table 1 *Target School Demographic Information*

Target School	School Setting	Grade Band	Total Enrollment	Total Teachers
1	Urban	5-6	1232	71
2	Urban	7-8	1190	59
3	Urban	9-12	2277	141

Fifteen remote learning teachers were asked to participate in the study. Nine teachers participated. These teachers taught a variety of subject material across grades five through twelve. Teachers were emailed six survey questions. Participants were assured that their participation would remain confidential. Table 2 includes specific information regarding the grade level information and subject matter taught of the teachers involved in the study.

Table 2 *Target Teacher Population Information*

Grade Level	Teacher	Subject Area
5 th grade	1	Language Arts/Social Studies
5 th grade	1	Science/Social Studies
6 th grade	1	Science/Social Studies
6 th grade	1	Language Arts
6 th grade	1	Math
7 th grade	1	Social Studies
9 th grade	1	Language Arts
11 th & 12 th grades	1	Language Arts
Multi	1	Spanish

Six families were contacted to participate in the study. Five families participated. Of the five families, five students were interviewed, and four parents responded to the emailed survey. The survey and interviews were conducted in two formats. Parents were emailed six survey questions. Students were interviewed through zoom. The participants were assured that their participation would be kept confidential. Table 3 includes the grade levels of the student participants.

Table 3 *Target Student/Family Population Information*

Grade Level	Number of Student Participants	Number of Parent Participants
5 th grade	2	2
6 th grade	3	2

Analysis of Data

John Creswell (2014) provides six steps to follow when analyzing qualitative data. The first step is to organize and prepare the data for analysis. Surveys and interviews are transcribed. The second step includes reading and looking at all the data, and the third involves coding the data. The fourth step includes coding the data and developing categories and themes. The fifth and sixth steps include presenting the themes and interpreting the findings of the results. Themes were generated by reviewing the input gathered from the surveys and interviews. The researcher developed themes related to the research questions.

Research Questions

1. What guidelines have been provided and implemented to ensure the health and safety of students with disabilities in the remote learning environment? What measures are in place

to protect the identification of students with disabilities in the remote learning environment?

2. What are the various ways parents/teachers perceive that students have been included in the remote learning environment, and how has the involvement and participation been different in the remote learning environment in relation to the general education activities and tasks?
3. What barriers exist for students with disabilities in the remote learning environment?

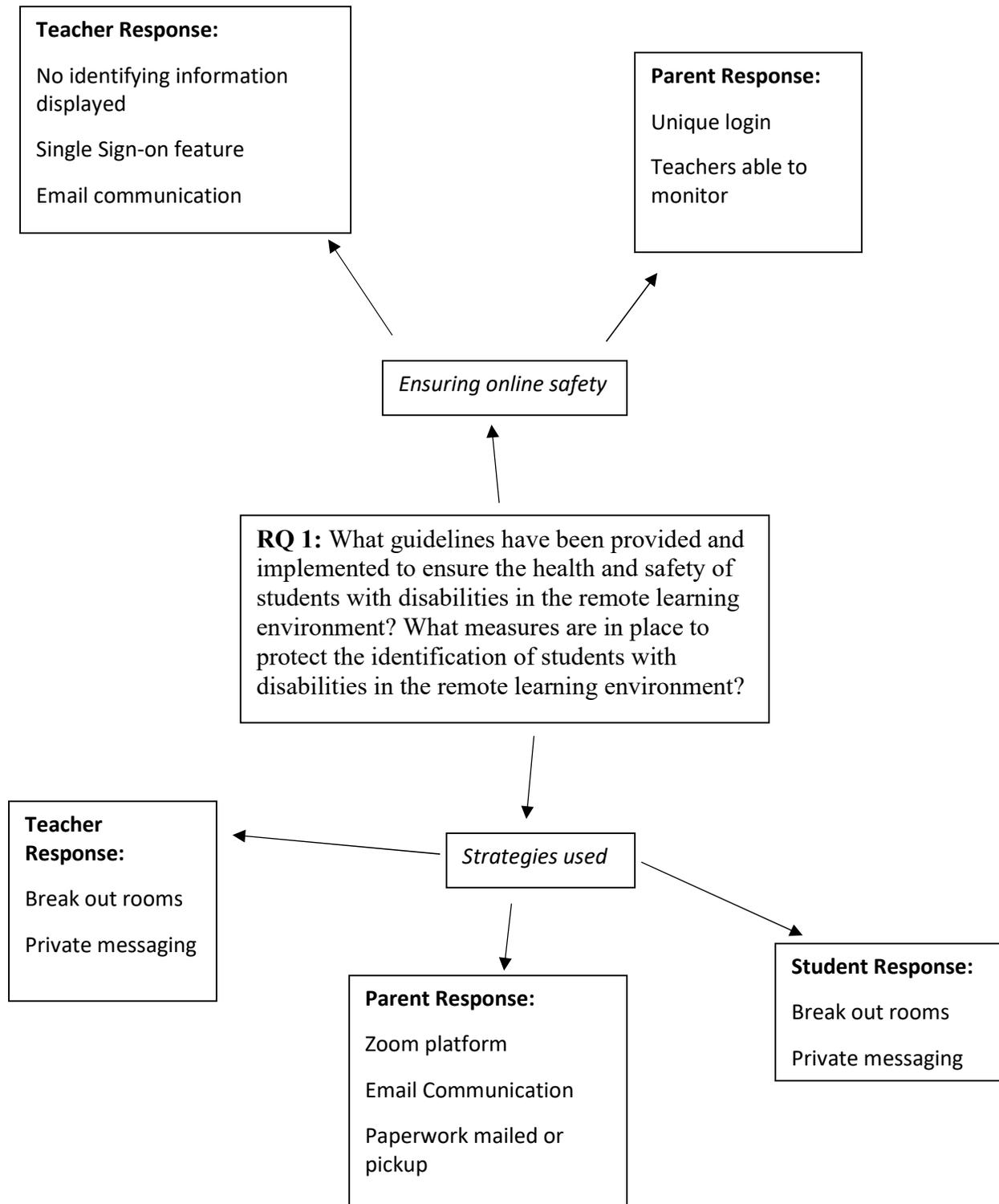
The data collected were analyzed inductively. Using inductive analysis, both thematic and narrative analysis were used to interpret the data. Several themes emerged related to each research question.

Research question one was related to the safety of students online and keeping students with disabilities identity secure. All three groups indicated that measures were taken to ensure online safety. All three groups also indicated that there were strategies in place to allow the identity of students with disabilities to remain confidential. These themes and supporting statements are displayed in Figure 1.

Research question two was related to the inclusion of students with disabilities in the online learning environment. It looked at the perception of each group and how they felt about how students were included in the online learning environment and how the accommodations and learning experiences were provided. One theme that emerged was that implementation of accommodations were similar or even easier to implement for online learning than in person learning. Another theme that emerged was the convenience and support of learning at home. These themes and supporting statements are displayed in Figure 2.

Research question three addressed the perceived barriers to the online learning environment. Each group was able to identify the perception of a disconnection in being at home and each group was also able to share personal effects of learning at home and the negative aspects related to it. These themes and supporting statements are displayed in Figure 3.

Research Question 1 - Figure 1 - Themes and Supporting Statements



Research Question 1 Findings

Two main themes emerged throughout the analysis of Question 1. Research Question 1 asked: What guidelines have been provided and implemented to ensure the health and safety of students with disabilities in the remote learning environment? What measures are in place to protect the identification of students with disabilities in the remote learning environment? One theme that emerged was that the safety and identity of students with a disability were kept secure. Another theme that was identified was in the use of strategies to maintain the security of students in the online learning environment.

Teacher Responses

The first theme that presented itself was that teachers felt that students were safe online and that student identity was kept secure. Data collection revealed that all nine teachers felt that student identity and safety were kept secure. As a collective group, the teachers felt that keeping the safety of students was manageable through the Canvas online management system. It uses a single sign-on that is individualized for each student logging in. Five of the nine teachers answered the question saying that there were no identifying features in Canvas and that this part was similar to in-person learning. Names are displayed, but there are no other identifying characters. Email communication was also a feature that was utilized so that communication was safe and secure through the online server.

All but one teacher answered as part of the question that they would never publicly identify a student as having a disability. Four of the teachers also mentioned that the information regarding students with an IEP was communicated from the special education staff the same as it has always been. The information regarding students with an IEP is conveyed through paperwork being handed out or emailing through a secure server. In addition to this, teachers are

still in the building teaching even in the online format, so communication and support among teachers are the same as in-person learning.

Another theme that emerged was in the use of strategies that allowed teachers, parent to communicate safely and securely with parents and students while maintaining student privacy. In working with students, teachers felt that they were able to use the online tools to provide support while maintaining confidentiality with student identity. Two teachers mentioned the ability to communicate one-on-one with students through canvas. One mentioned that they regularly ask students to stay on zoom after the whole group class is over. One teacher mentioned the use of the chat feature and messaging as way to communicate with individual students.

Parent Responses

Parents echoed the safety features that the teacher group mentioned. Four parents responded to the survey. These four respondents mentioned strategies that allowed their child to maintain their identity as a special education student. They felt that their child was safe in the remote learning environment. The sign-on, password-protected log in, to the Canvas online management system itself was one way that was mentioned to protect their child's identity. Other strategies included the Chromebook provided by the school in itself was limiting in what websites a student is able to access, and teachers are able to monitor what their child is on remotely.

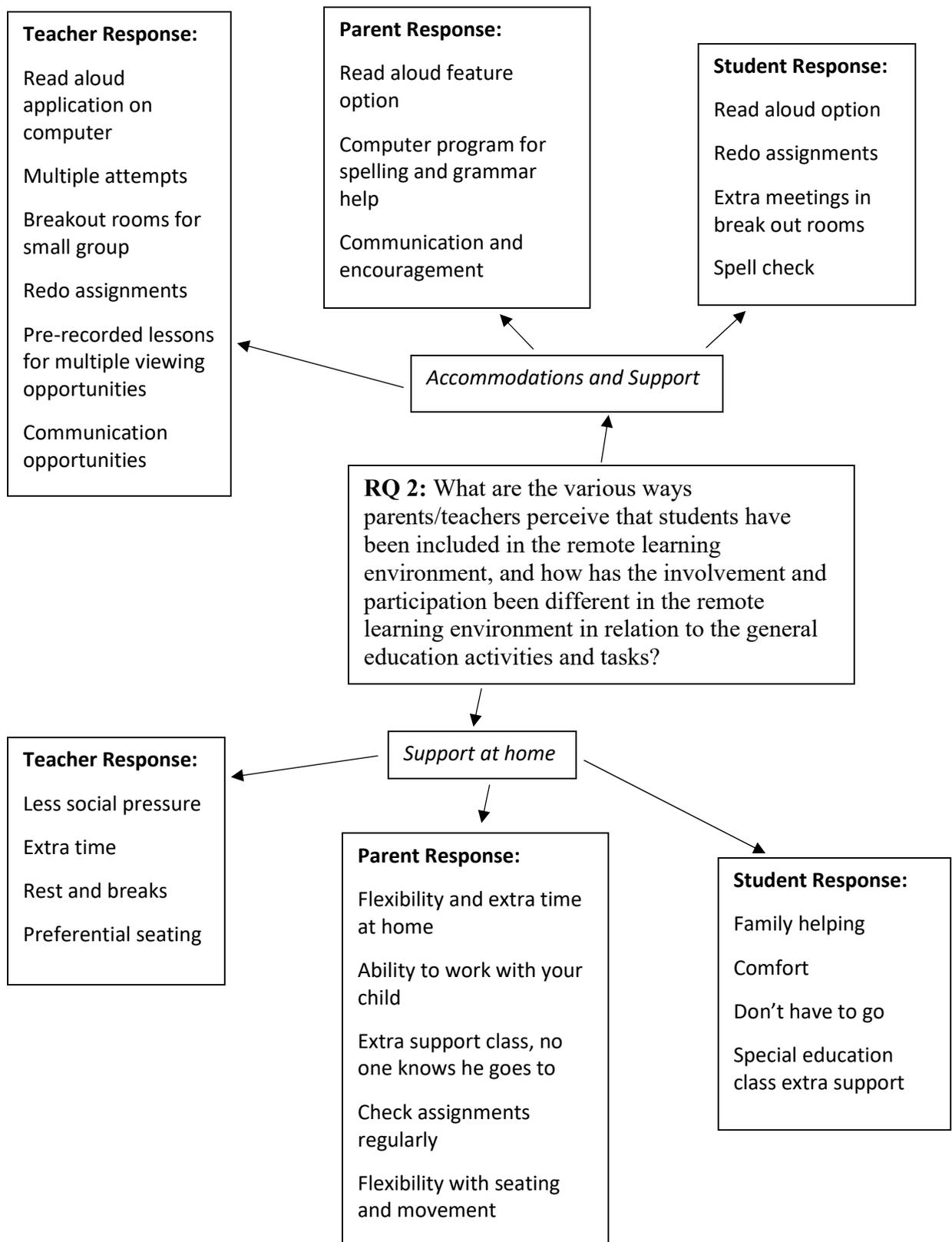
Parents also felt that strategies were in place to keep communication and teaching secure and their child's identity as a student with a disability safe, the parent response indicated that they felt that the paperwork and meetings required due to their child being identified as having a disability was secure. It was indicated that meetings occurred through the zoom platform and that signatures were attained using email or mail. If there was schoolwork to pick up, they felt that

this was done securely and safely as well indicating that there was a drive-through option so that they could have little contact when picking up packets of schoolwork.

Student Responses

Student responses were in line with the themes identified although not specific to their online identity and safety. They were able to identify strategies that they felt allowed them to communicate with their teachers without being identified as a student that needed extra help. Five students were able to participate in the survey questions. Through the survey, the students mentioned that the use of break-out rooms in the zoom platform was used in order to provide more one-on-one time with their teacher. They also mentioned the use of private messaging as a private way to communicate with their teachers.

Research Question 2 - Figure 2 - Themes and Supporting Statements



Research Question 2 Findings

Two themes emerged throughout the analysis of Question 2. Research Question 2 asked: What are the various ways parents/teachers perceive that student have been included in the remote learning environment, and how has the involvement and participation been different in the remote learning environment in relation to the general education activities and tasks? The first theme that emerged was in the identification of accommodations and support that were utilized to make the learning content more accessible for students with disabilities in the online learning environment. Another was in the perspective of the support and convenience of learning at home.

Teacher Responses

The first theme identified regarding accommodations and supports provided was answered by all nine teachers. All felt that they were able to provide several accommodations in the online learning environment making the lessons more accessible for all students. One teacher said that they felt that this was “the same as if in person”. Six of the nine mentioned the ability to provide multiple attempts and the ability to redo assignments and tasks. Six of the nine teachers also commented on the ability to provide the read-aloud feature through the online platform. Five teachers mentioned the ability to modify assignments through the online platform.

One strategy that three teachers identified was in the use of prerecording/recording lessons. One comment regarding this was that “students can go back and see the lecture anytime”. One teacher mentioned that they were able to record a live lesson and post it so that students could go back and watch when they wanted since she did not require regular daily attendance. One mentioned that they pre-recorded their lessons for students to access. One other way it was described was that the teacher would upload audio files for their lessons. These three

felt this was a beneficial tool for online learning. Lastly, teachers felt that the use of breakout rooms through the zoom platform allowed them to provide extra support opportunities without students being identified or singled out.

Three of the teachers mentioned a form of private messaging. One way that this was accomplished was using the chat feature in the zoom platform. Canvas also has a messaging system like email and teachers would utilize this to communicate with students. These communication tools allowed for teachers and students with disabilities to communicate without anyone in their classroom to know. Teachers reported that they were able to send any modifications to the lesson or tasks assigned to student so that no one knew.

The other theme that emerged was the support at home. The flexibility that online learning at home allows shows itself in the ability to provide extra time. Rests and breaks are built into the day and may be easier to accomplish due to the home environment. One teacher mentioned that there appears “to be less social pressure” and another mentioned that preferential seating is “taken care of because the screen is right in front of them”.

Parent Responses

Parent responses included several of the accommodations and learning opportunities that were provided in the online learning environment. Parents were positive about the online learning platform itself and the support the teachers were able to provide to better help them and their child. The parents felt that teachers were responsive and that they felt that communication was positive and encouraging. It was also mentioned that the computer itself in its support in the programs that were available for spelling and grammar checks. The read-aloud feature that computer offers is another learning tool that parents identified as a tool that helped to support their child at home.

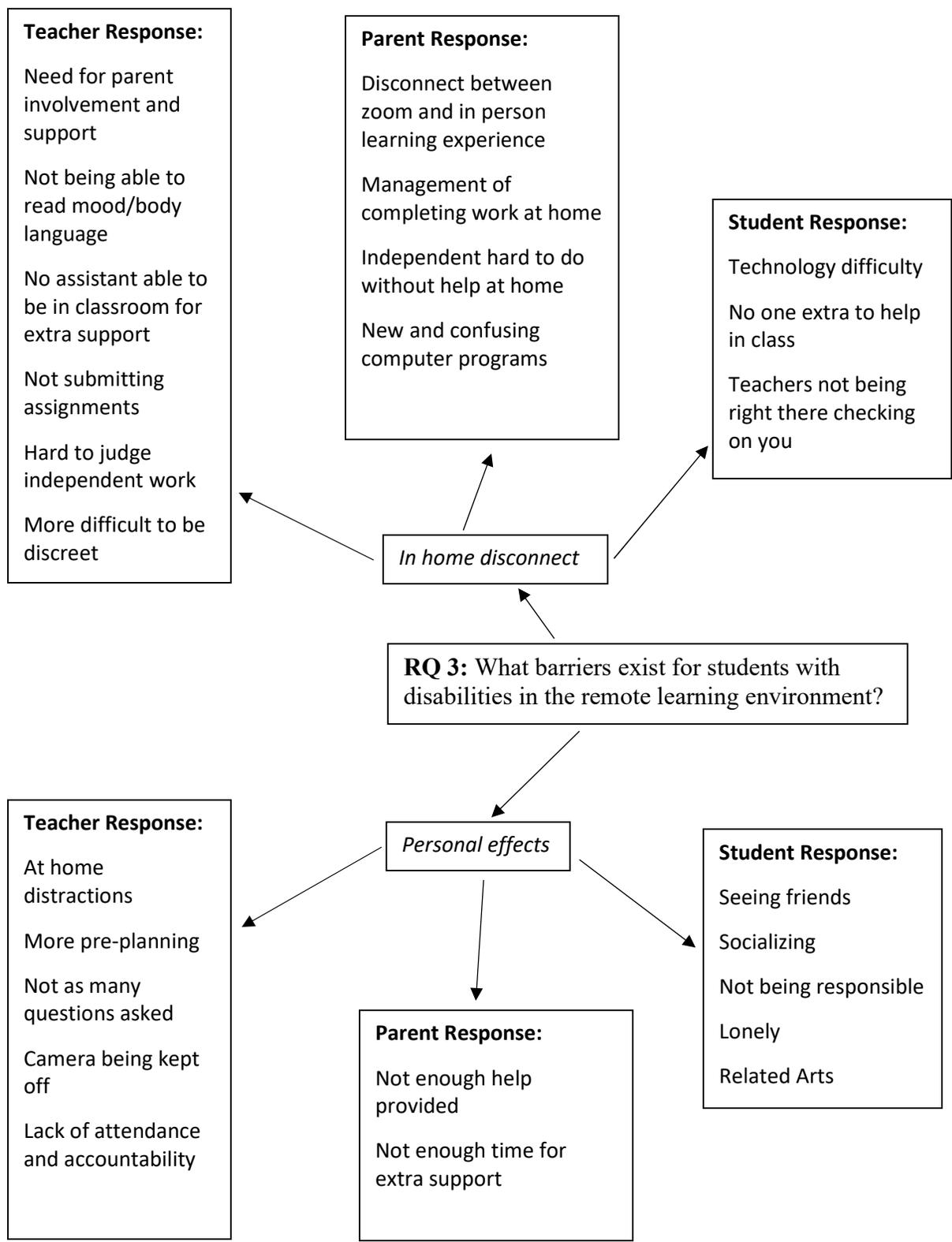
Regarding the second theme, parent responses discussed the flexibility that the students had at home to complete tasks and with seating and ability to move around. One parent responded about how positive it was that their child was able to go to their extra special education class “without anyone knowing they were going to it”. Parents felt that the teachers were responsive and checked assignments regularly. Lastly, one response included the ability to work with their child at home.

Student Responses

The first theme presented itself for students in a similar manner as the parent responses. Students mentioned accommodations and support in the online learning environment. Their answers included the opportunity to redo assignments and that they had extra time to work on the tasks assigned to them. Student responses also included the spell check feature included on their computer that helped with their work. One student mentioned that they felt they were treated the same as the other students in their zoom classroom. Two students mentioned being read aloud to. Two students mentioned the use of breakout rooms or extra private online sessions with their teachers that were helpful. One of these students said that “the teachers were amazing” and that “they helped as much as they could”.

The second theme was also identified by student responses. Students felt that there were advantages to learning from home. Two students mentioned that they had a person at home with them working with them on their schoolwork. Another student mentioned the ability to work from the comfort of their home and to be more flexible with their time were positive characteristics of the online learning environment. One student mentioned that they enjoyed not having to go to school. Another student mentioned that they were able to attend their special education support class and they were supported there “100%”.

Research Question 3 - Figure 3 - Themes and Supporting Statements



Research Question 3 Findings

Two themes emerged throughout the analysis of Question 3. Research Question 3 asked: What barriers exist for students with disabilities in the remote learning environment?

The first theme that emerged was in the disconnect between home and school identified by all groups. The second theme identified was in the perceived effects that the online learning environment had on the participants personally.

Teacher Responses

The disconnect identified by the teachers manifested itself in a variety of ways. One way that this was felt, was related to the feelings, body posture and expressions and how they are lost in the online learning environment. Four teachers remarked that they found this most challenging for them. They felt that it was hard to get a real picture of the level of frustration that the students may be feeling. In addition to this, one teacher further explained that in working with one child, she found it difficult to build confidence.

One teacher responded that she did not feel that students are able to receive the support and educational experience that in person learning provides. This teacher felt that it was hard to judge independent work. She provided an example of a student that had taken their first checkpoint test which is take at three points throughout the year previously and not scored well. The second checkpoint, they came into the building to take, and the student was more successful on the in-person test that was provide to them. They felt it had to do with the independence that it takes to do learning at home. This same teacher felt that it is difficult to fully implement an IEP with the people at home not fully understanding what it takes to fulfill the IEP's requirements.

Two other teachers echoed this sentiment saying that they felt it was harder at home for students that do not have a supportive environment. Another teacher was able to provide an

example of a very involved and supportive grandparent that is always online and not only helps her own grandchild but is able to be a support for other students through the zoom platform in the break-out rooms. This teacher has valued the support of the grandparent at home. Two teachers remarked that they feel that students with an IEP, in the in person learning environment have access to an assistant in the classroom for more of a constant support.

Students simply not submitting their work emerged from this study as well. While in person learning activities can be collected, submitting assignments and tasks through the online platform is a struggle.

Parent Responses

The parent concerns were in line with what the teachers expressed as challenges as well. Regarding the theme of disconnection, the parent group expressed concerns with the disconnect happening with online learning. One parent expressed that they “felt that their child’s learning was not a concern”. Parents expressed concerns regarding work completion at home and managing that. One other frustration was found in the organization of the classes and assignments themselves. This parent felt that the organization system was not user friendly, and they struggled with keeping up with the day-to-fay tasks that their child needed to complete.

Personal effects felt at home included frustration with not proving enough help for their child. Two parents expressed challenges with not receiving the support that in person learning provides. Assistants are in place in classrooms where in person learning is taking place to provide an extra level of support for students that have IEP’s. This is not something that is available or easy to use in the online learning environment. These two parents expressed that they felt their child was not getting attention that they would be getting during in person learning.

Student Responses

Students were able to identify barriers related to learning at home. One major way that the theme of disconnection presented itself is in technology. Three students mentioned the internet itself. There was frustration expressed in the accessibility and frustration that occurred when the internet did not work or when it would “kick” you off the internet during class. In addition, not all programs seemed to work or be as easy to use. An example that was provided was google slides. Other ways that this disconnection was identified was in the tasks themselves that were assigned. Writing an essay was one task that was difficult to do because teachers could not check the work as you went along. They felt that waiting until you turned it in was hard to do to figure out what you were doing wrong. One student brought up the idea that their teacher was not always available to provide the extra help that they needed during class.

Each student was able to express their concerns related to the second theme that emerged related to barriers of online learning. One student mentioned the idea that there was a lack of responsibility in the online learning environment. He felt that the discipline and management of student behavior was a concern. He felt kids could get away with a lot more of not paying attention. He commented that the teachers could not do much other than to “kick the kid out of the zoom room”. This same student also expressed that he also felt less responsibility personally in the online learning environment in paying attention and turning in work.

All five students mentioned that they missed their friends and socializing. One student mentioned feeling “lonely”. One student mentioned missing school lunches. One student mentioned that they were unable to attend related arts classes. These classes include gym, chorus, or computers.

Overall, the students seemed to provide positive insight into their experiences but were able to pinpoint areas that were a struggle through the online learning environment. Two of the students did return to in person learning for the last quarter of the 2020-2021 school year. When I asked a follow up question to one of them. This student responded by saying that it was to prepare them to be back in person the following year.

Summary

This chapter describes the perceptions that the three groups that participated in this study felt about the online learning environment and the experiences that they had. The surveys and interviews showed that safety and security were able to be kept while online and that the identity of students with disabilities was able to be maintained. It also showed that teachers felt they were able to provide supports to their students with disabilities and opportunities for learning in the online learning environment. Overall, parent participants expressed that they were pleased with the learning experience but had concerns about their student missing the opportunities for small group exercises and individual support in the classroom. Barriers were identified in all three groups. Although, the students expressed that while they missed their friends, they were able to participate in their classes, especially if they had someone supporting their learning at home.

Chapter 5

Summary, Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions that teachers, parents and students with disabilities had regarding their experiences in the remote learning environment during the 2020-2021 school year in a selected school district in East Tennessee. Surveys and interviews were conducted to gain a better understanding of the; (a) guidelines and safety measures put in place to protect the identity of students with disabilities in the remote learning environment; (b) how students with disabilities were actively involved in the learning process delivered through remote learning; (c) how participation and involvement were perceived by students with disabilities in the remote leaning environment; (d) the barriers that may have existed for teachers, parents, and students with disabilities in the remote learning environment.

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What guidelines have been provided and implemented to ensure the health and safety of students with disabilities in the remote learning environment? What measures are in place to protect the identification of students with disabilities in the remote learning environment?
2. What are the various ways parents/teachers perceive that students have been included in the remote learning environment, and how has the involvement and participation been different in the remote learning environment in relation to the general education activities and tasks?
3. What barriers exist for students with disabilities in the remote learning environment?

This study used a purposeful sampling design. The researcher was the primary instrument of data collection and analysis. Participants were selected due to their participation in the remote

learning environment during the COVID 19 pandemic for at least half of the 2020-2021 school year. Emailed survey questions were utilized for the adult participants, both teachers and parents. Interviews were conducted via zoom for the student participants. The responses from all participant groups were analyzed. Categories and themes were identified. This study and the results have implications for the researcher, school district administration, educators, students, and their families.

Summary of the Findings

Several themes emerged from this study regarding the successes and challenges of teachers, parents, and students with disabilities in the remote learning environment. In all three groups, there were some noted examples of how the remote learning environment was beneficial and that teachers and students alike felt that they could provide and receive educational opportunities that allowed for success. Safety and confidentiality of student information was a positive experience commented on by all three groups. The secure log in was cited as a useful tool that helped with this. One teacher commented that the remote learning environment was “fabulous” because she could go into breakout rooms with students in zoom and discuss accommodations with students. Accommodations could be provided, and students were able to be successful. Two of the most cited accommodations were the ability to provide extra grade opportunities and extended time. There were some noted difficulties with the online learning environment in that success was linked to a home environment that was structured and where there was support in the home. Technology was noted as part of the problem but also was a huge part of the successful implementation of some of the accommodations provided to a student with an IEP.

Discussion of Findings

Themes regarding perceptions of safety and identity of students with disabilities in the remote learning environment

Research question 1 examined the perceptions of the participants on how the safety concerns of students learning and accessing their educational opportunities online were addressed and how their identity was kept secure. Both the teacher and parent groups expressed that student identity was addressed in the online learning platform.

Teachers and parents both felt that the secure login feature was helpful in maintaining student identity and safety. Teachers felt that email was a positive way to have secure communication. Parents pointed out that teachers were able to monitor their child's online activity which was an added level of security. All this combined to provide a positive perception of how online safety was established.

Different strategies were identified by all three groups that helped to promote keeping the identity of students with a disability secure. Both the teacher and the student groups identified the use of break out rooms and private messaging options as ways that allowed them to give and to receive extra help without anyone knowing that it was happening.

Parents also mentioned that emailing was a positive way to provide supports without anyone else knowing that it was being provided. The parent group also mentioned that they felt that when needed, the ability to pick up or drop off any paperwork involved with their child was an added benefit and security to establish the confidentiality of their child. One parent noted that they had gone to the school a couple different times to pick up paperwork and she said, "It worked well keeping everyone remote on the safe side".

Themes regarding perceptions of student involvement in the remote learning environment

Research question 2 addressed the perceptions of the three identified study groups on what was being done to include students with disabilities in the online learning environment and how participation was like and/or different from the general education students' activities and tasks. The Center on Online Learning and Students with Disabilities reported that there are distinctive differences between what can be provided in the online learning environment and in-person schooling and that students must adapt to having more roles while in the online learning environment (Basham, 2015). Identified themes included the accommodations and support in the online learning environment and the support provided at home.

Accommodations provided in the online learning environment were easily identified. The read-aloud option provided using the computer was a feature identified by all three groups. The teachers and students both identified the opportunity to redo assignments and tasks multiple times was an important feature that was available. Parents and students both identified that use of spell check on the computer as an accommodation was beneficial. Teachers and parents both commented on the ease of communication through the computer.

One main feature that several teachers mentioned regarding this question was the availability to pre-record lessons and upload them for students to use at any time. Students were able to watch and rewatch lessons as they needed to reinforce the material as much as they needed to. One high school teacher cited feedback from some of her students. She said that they "have reported they really like the availability of lecture and instructions as it allows them to review it multiple times".

The second theme identified related to this question was in the support from being at home. All three groups remarked about the option to be able to have rests and breaks as needed

and being able to work with more flexibility and movement. This translated to the kids being more comfortable at home and not having to go to the actual building. Both parents and teachers mentioned the idea of having extra time to complete tasks being offered from the online learning environment.

In addition to the extra time and flexibility, both the parents and students mentioned the offering of an additional support class offered through zoom. The parents mentioned that through the online platform, no one else knows their student goes to an extra class for support which they viewed as a positive. In addition to this, both groups also mentioned the opportunity to provide and receive help from family members in the home as a positive support.

One other item that the teacher group mentioned was the idea of having less social pressure. No one sees what you are doing or not doing so students may feel less pressure at home. One teacher mentioned that one of his students “doesn’t like to talk live on the meeting” so the teacher will communicate more with the mother so he understands what he is to do. Another teacher feels that the remote learning environment has been beneficial for “students with ODD or ADHD.” This teacher feels that “the remote environment also allows these students to participate in a social setting, but to also turn off a Zoom camera when fatigued”.

Themes regarding the barriers that exist for students with disabilities in the remote learning environment

Research question 3 addressed the perceptions that the three groups had in relation to the barriers that existed for students with disabilities in the online learning environment. Two main themes were identified regarding perceived barriers in the online learning environment. One involved the disconnect that the participants felt and the second included the personal effects on the people involved.

The disconnect identified manifested itself in several ways through the survey questions posed. One common response all three groups had was that the help was not readily there for them when needed. Teachers noted the need for more parental involvement. Parents noted that it was difficult to complete independent work at home and the student noted it was difficult without the teachers being there to check on you. One parent provided a suggestion “that might help special education needs children in regular classes might be where the teacher took aside the special education students for an extra 5 minutes at the end of each class to answer any questions or concerns those students might have”.

Parents and teachers identified a common barrier in that teachers felt they struggled to read body language and frustration and parents said there was a disconnect between learning online and in person. One teacher stated that “It’s been hard not having them physically here so that I can see them and see their body language and “really” know that they are okay.” These two groups also identified another common barrier. This barrier was identified in the management of independent work and work completion was a barrier for learning at home. Teachers identified this as a barrier due to lack of support from parents. One teacher, while supportive of online learning, said that “for students that do not have the at-home support, the success rates are much lower”. Another teacher mentioned that she felt “it is harder for students who do not have a supportive home environment”.

Teachers and students identified a common theme among themselves. Both groups identified the barrier of not having an extra person in the classroom to help support students with disabilities with their in-class work. At times, in-person learning will have extra support staff in the room to provide a level of support for students with disabilities. While not all in-person

classrooms have an extra person in the room, it was not a resource that was offered during the remote learning environment. The lack of this resource was noted.

Lastly, the parents and students noted that the technology itself was at times a barrier. Parents identified new and confusing programs as an issue they had. Students identified that the technology was a barrier because of connectivity and not having access to programs.

The second theme identified was personal effects. The responses related to this theme varied for each group. The barriers that the teachers identified seemed to be more related to management. They noted too many distractions at home and a lack of attendance and accountability. They also mentioned that some students prefer to keep their computer videos tuned off. They identified that there was more pre-planning involved and they felt that there were not as many questions asked.

Parents identified barriers in the amount of support needed. They felt that there was not enough help provided by the classroom teacher. They also identified that there was not enough time for extra support that they needed to support their children.

Students identified several barriers that they felt were involved in the remote learning environment. They identified the lack of seeing friends and socializing as a barrier. They felt that there was some lack of responsibility in the setting and that they felt lonely at times. Lastly, the student group identified not being able to attend or be a part of related arts like Physical Education or band as another barrier to the online learning environment.

Similarities and differences among study participants

This study provided several similarities and differences among the participants. Each of the groups was able to identify factors that they felt contributed to the success of the time online and the barriers that existed within it as well.

All three groups could identify that they were safe in the online learning environment. There were identified strategies implemented that all three groups could express that kept their identity secure and the student's safety maintained. All three groups identified specific tools that were implemented to help aid in this endeavor as well.

Overall, the teachers were able to express that they were able to provide the appropriate supports to assist in student participation. Parents and students seemed to echo this as well. Several identified accommodations were utilized in the online learning environment by the teachers and students. Each group could identify the benefit of the accommodations that were utilized and that they were supportive in the online learning environment.

Barriers were also identified. One main common barrier identified was the lack of extra support in the online learning environment. This seemed to be something that greatly affected all three groups. The personal effects that were identified varied among all three groups. Each group could identify the effects that the online learning environment had on them and the barriers that those personal effects caused.

Limitations of the Study

The following limitations unfolded as the study progressed. Due to confidentiality restraints, the interview pool for students and parent participants was limited in size. The students and families that participated were isolated to the grades 5-6. These participants were identified due to the researcher's role in their school and allowed access to their records. No participants could be identified in the lower grades, K-4, or the higher grades, 7-12. There also were no teachers willing to participate in grade K-4.

The adult participants were able to provide free responses to emailed questions and students were able to provide their answers through a semi-structured interview question. These

responses were solely representative of their individual experiences. There was no consideration for socioeconomic status. The school system is in a semi-rural area which may limit the representation of experiences and perceptions. School systems and their students that are more rural may have a different experience. Accessibility to online services may be a factor that does not allow opportunities for students that do not have online access limiting their exposure to instruction and supports.

Conclusions

There are three general conclusions drawn from this study. The first is that student identity and security in the online learning environment were able to be secure. Each of the study groups could relay how this was done by the technology used and the strategies implemented in the online platform. Identity as a student with a disability was also kept secure and the three groups could express that they felt this was accomplished by the implementation of strategies in place by special education teachers providing information in a confidential manner to the general education teachers. This was also expressed in how students and teachers were able to use the messaging systems in place.

The second conclusion that could be drawn was in the delivery of instruction and inclusion of students with disabilities in the online learning environment. Overall, accommodations and supports could be provided to allow students with disabilities to access the instruction and material with success. The programs used allowed students' opportunities to receive similar supports to in-person learning. These supports and flexibility of being at home also allowed this to be seen in a positive perspective from all groups. The Center on Online Learning for Students with Disabilities reports that there is no easy answer for how to make this happen for students with disabilities in the online learning environment (Basham, 2015).

The third conclusion showed common barriers felt by all three groups. The need for more support and involvement was identified as a barrier among the disconnect felt by all three groups. There were several factors identified that contributed to the feelings of disconnect including the lack of extra support and teachers not being able to be right there in the learning environment to read their students. One teacher said, “I wish we had a virtual assistant provided through the school like we would if we were in person.” Personal effects were also identified that contribute to the barriers of the online learning environment. One teachers’ comment sums up how much the barriers can impact students. The comment was that while barriers exist, “the success of the student is heavily reliant on the support the student receives at home, in addition to his or her own motivation for success.”

Recommendations for Practice

In looking at recommendations for practice, support was a common theme that was seen as both positive and a barrier. Teachers being available in chats and messages were positive perceptions identified. However, at a deeper and more involved level, this was seen as a barrier in that students felt that there was not enough support at the instructional level in their classes and in their independent work. One way this can be remedied is by providing an extra person in the online learning environment so that that students with disabilities would be able to receive more instructional support and attention as their in-person counterparts are able to receive.

Another area of recommendation would be to address the disconnect identified by the participants. While this is an area that all students could benefit from, students with disabilities may need extra support in this area so that their disability is not something that contributes to the disconnect. Strategies that provide opportunities to provide ways for students to connect with each other and with their teachers would help to remedy this area of concern. Counselor

involvement may help to provide students an extra opportunity for connection. This, along with the extra classes that are lacking from the online learning environment like physical education or art may be ways that students can branch out and feel more involved and connected to the total school experience

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are for future research. The study was limited in participant sample. Due to the protection of identification of students with disabilities, there was a limited sample size in age and grade level. The parents and students interviewed were in only two grade levels. Expanding the participant pool would allow more perspectives from different age groups to be considered.

The demographics of the school system also may be limited. The school system is in East Tennessee and may not be representative of other schools in the area and in other places throughout the country. The identified system is in more of a semie-suburban community compared to surrounding systems and may not be representative of schools in more rural settings or suburban areas with higher populations. Expanding this to include both rural schools and school systems with high populations would add more perspectives to the study.

Two other areas to consider in looking forward are in investigating training and support opportunities for parents to be able to learn how to access the technology being used in the remote learning environment and in offering explicit training for students and parents in online etiquette. Both ideas were discovered as barriers or limitations identified by the teacher and parent groups during this study.

Chapter 5 concludes this study. This study's findings will contribute to the scholarly research regarding the experience of teachers, parents, and students with disabilities in the online

learning environment regarding their safety and identity, the access of instruction and availability of support, and the barriers and disconnect that exist for those that are participating in the online learning environment.

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Appendix A

Milligan IRB Approval Letter



MILLIGAN

UNIVERSITY

Date: March 2, 2021

From: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Milligan University

Re: *An Investigation of the Perceptions of Teachers, Parents and Students with Disabilities when Learning Remotely at a School District in East Tennessee*

Submission type: Expedited Review

Dear Christy Henegar:

On behalf of the Milligan University Institutional Review Board (IRB), we are writing to inform you that your study, *An Investigation of the Perceptions of Teachers, Parents and Students with Disabilities when Learning Remotely at a School District in East Tennessee*, has been approved as expedited. This approval also indicates that you have fulfilled the IRB requirements for Milligan University.

All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission, meaning that you will follow the research plan you have outlined here, use approved materials, and follow university policies.

Take special note of the following important aspects of your approval:

- Any changes made to your study require approval from the IRB Committee before they can be implemented as part of your study. Contact the IRB Committee at IRB@milligan.edu with your questions and/or proposed modifications.
- If there are any unanticipated problems or complaints from participants during your data collection, you must notify the Milligan University IRB Office within 24 hours of the data collection problem or complaint.
- Your Milligan IRB Approval Code is: MU2103021441

The Milligan University IRB Committee is pleased to congratulate you on the approval of your research proposal. Best wishes as you conduct your research! If you have any questions about your IRB Approval, please contact the IRB Office and copy your faculty advisor if appropriate on the communication.

On behalf of the IRB Committee,

Trini Rangel, Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board
Milligan University



Appendix B

Johnson City Schools Approval Letter

**JOHNSON CITY SCHOOLS
APPROVAL FORM FOR RESEARCH PROPOSALS**

REQUESTOR'S NAME Christi Henegar

TITLE OF RESEARCH PROPOSAL Students with Disabilities Learning Remotely

STEP 1: RESEARCH REVIEW OF CURRICULUM DIVISION

We temporarily withhold approval of your proposal until you address the questions we have raised about it in the attached letter. (Include this form with re-submission of your proposal.)

We conditionally approve your proposal and you may proceed with making contact with principal(s) of the appropriate school(s), but it is necessary for you to address the questions we have raised about your proposal in the attached letter.

We approve your proposal. Proceed with obtaining approval of the principal(s) of the appropriate school(s). **NOTE! Parents must contact researcher to participate.**

[Signature]
Signature, Curriculum Division Reviewer

2/22/21
Date

STEP 2: PRINCIPAL'S EVALUATION

I temporarily withhold approval of your proposed research being conducted in my school for reasons stated in the attached correspondence. (Include this form with the re-submission of your proposal.)

PRINCIPAL #1: _____ DATE: _____

PRINCIPAL #2 _____ DATE: _____

PRINCIPAL #3 _____ DATE: _____

I approve your proposal. Please forward this form to the Central Office for approval of the Superintendent.

PRINCIPAL #1 NA _____ DATE: _____

PRINCIPAL #2 _____ DATE: _____

PRINCIPAL #3 _____ DATE: _____

STEP 3: SUPERINTENDENT'S EVALUATION

I withhold approval of your proposed research being conducted in our schools for the reasons stated in the attached correspondence. I am forwarding a copy of your proposal, a copy of this form, and a copy of our correspondence to the Curriculum Division reviewer. They will communicate with you further.

I approve your proposal. Proceed with your research according to the conditions agreed upon in the preceding sections of this form and your research proposal.

[Signature]
Signature of Superintendent

02-22-21
Date

NOTE: The signed copy of this form should be returned to the Curriculum Division for their records. (Reference: Johnson City Board of Education Policy 4.210)

Appendix C: Sample of Parent/ Guardian Consent Form

Consent to Participate in Research

You are invited to have your child participate in a research study of the perceptions of their experiences in the remote learning environment. This form is a part of the informed consent process, which allows you to understand more about the study before you choose to participate or not.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Christy Henegar, who is a doctoral student at Milligan University, and is a special education teacher at Indian Trail Intermediate School. This study is separate from the role of special education teacher at Indian Trail Intermediate School.

Background Information:

The purpose of this qualitative study is to investigate perceptions of the remote learning environment for students including their safety, access and participation, and procedural safeguards.

Procedure:

If you agree to participate in this study, your child will be asked to participate in a one-on-one interview with the researcher, Christy Henegar. This interview will be video/audio recorded, and will be transcribed for the purposes of collecting the data.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

This study is voluntary. You and your child can volunteer to participate. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not to choose to be in study. If you choose to participate, you can change your mind and stop your participation at any time during the study. The expected time of participation is approximately 1 hour for individual student interviews and 30 minutes to complete the parent questionnaire. A time and place will be arranged with you via phone or email. To ensure the comfort and privacy of your child, the interview can be conducted over the phone, through zoom or in person practicing social distancing safety procedures. If at any time, your child does not want to answer a

question, they may say “skip” and if at any time they feel like they want to conclude the interview or does not want to be a part of the interview any longer, they may stop. There is no requirement to participate and there is no connection to any school assignment and/or grade.

Risk and Benefits of Being in the Study:

Participation in this study could involve some risk of discomfort during the discussion about the participation in the remote learning environment and its differences from in person learning.

This study will benefit educators in gaining a better understanding of the perceptions of parents and students while participating in the remote learning environment in regards to their safety and protections regarding having an IEP. It will also include information regarding the perceptions about access to and participation in educational services in the general education and special education remote learning environment. Procedural safeguards will also be addressed with all three groups and what each group feels their perception is regarding the information provided in order to meet the students needs.

Payment:

There will be no monetary or gift payment for participation in the study.

Privacy:

Any information your child provides will be kept confidential, and the researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Video/audio recording and data will be kept secure by keeping the transcripts in a password protected or locked location. Data will be kept for a period of 5 years, as required by Milligan University.

Contacts and Questions:

You may ask any questions you have now, or contact the researcher with any questions as they arise. You may request the outcomes determined in the study upon completion of defense by contacting the researcher at henegarc@jcschools.org or at the researcher's google voice number (423) 377-4904

through phone call or text. For a private discussion about the participation of your child and your rights, you can contact the Milligan University Institutional Review Board at IRB@milligan.edu. You may also contact Dr. Patrick Kariuki, Director of Educational Research at Milligan University, (423) 461-8744.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By signing below, I understand that I am agreeing to the terms described above. I am also acknowledging that I understand that I can drop out of participation at any time during the study.

Printed Name of Parent/ Guardian _____

Date of Consent _____

Participant's Signature _____

Parent or Guardian Signature if participant is under 18 years old

Researcher's Signature _____

Appendix D: Sample of Participant Consent Form

Consent to Participate in Research

You are invited to participate in a research study of the perceptions of you and your child's experiences in the remote learning environment. This form is a part of the informed consent process, which allows you to understand more about the study before you choose to participate or not.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Christy Henegar, who is a doctoral student at Milligan University, and is a special education teacher at Indian Trail Intermediate School. This study is separate from the role of special education teacher at Indian Trail Intermediate School.

Background Information:

The purpose of this qualitative study is to investigate perceptions of the remote learning environment for students including their safety, access and participation, and procedural safeguards.

Procedure:

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in an open-ended questionnaire provided by the researcher, Christy Henegar. The answers will be analyzed and used to investigate the perceptions in regards to your experience with the remote learning environment.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

This study is voluntary. You and your child can volunteer to participate. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not to choose to be in study. If you choose to participate, you can change your mind and stop your participation at any time during the study. The expected time of participation is approximately 30 minutes to complete the parent questionnaire

Risk and Benefits of Being in the Study:

Participation in this study could involve some risk of discomfort during the discussion about the participation in the remote learning environment and its differences from in person learning.

This study will benefit educators in gaining a better understanding of the perceptions of parents and students while participating in the remote learning environment in regards to their safety and protections regarding having an IEP. It will also include information regarding the perceptions about access to and participation in educational services in the general education and special education remote learning environment. Procedural safeguards will also be addressed with all three groups and what each group feels their perception is regarding the information provided in order to meet the students needs.

Payment:

There will be no monetary or gift payment for participation in the study.

Privacy:

Any information your child provides will be kept confidential, and the researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Video/audio recording and data will be kept secure by keeping the transcripts in a password protected or locked location. Data will be kept for a period of 5 years, as required by Milligan University

Contacts and Questions:

You may ask any questions you have now, or contact the researcher with any questions as they arise. You may request the outcomes determined in the study upon completion of defense by contacting the researcher at henegarc@jcschools.org or at the researcher's google voice number (423) 377-4904 through phone call or text. For a private discussion about the participation of your child and your rights, you can contact the Milligan University Institutional Review Board at IRB@milligan.edu. You may also contact Dr. Patrick Kariuki, Director of Educational Research at Milligan University, (423) 461-8744.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By signing below, I understand that I am agreeing to the terms described above. I am also acknowledging that I understand that I can drop out of participation at any time during the study.

Printed Name of Parent/ Guardian _____

Date of Consent _____

Participant's Signature _____

Parent or Guardian Signature if participant is under 18 years old

Researcher's Signature _____

Appendix E: Interview Guide (Student)

Statement to student prior to interview:

Please understand that your participation in this is voluntary. If you want to stop the interview or skip a question at any time, let me know. Your participation in this is not associated with any grade or assignment. My questions are only to understand how you feel you are doing during your time in the remote learning environment.

Interview Guide for Student Interview

1. What do you enjoy about being able to work from home?
2. What experiences have been the most meaningful to you while working from home?
3. What things have your teachers done to make sure you are a part of the class?
4. What assignment and/or tasks are too difficult to do at home?
5. Do your teachers help you with some of your work or change some of the assignments or tasks that they assign to help you do better on them? (examples provided: make them shorter, give you some of the notes, take away answer choices)
6. What do you miss from being at school?
7. What kinds of things are your teachers doing to help you understand and complete the work they give to you?
8. Is an assistant able to be in online lessons to help support you?
9. Do you feel the interaction with your teacher is enough for you to learn the material?
10. Do you spend time with your teacher in small group activities?
11. Do you have a support/intervention class being provided to you?
12. What types of things are you doing extra in your special education classes to learn more?
13. Have you felt supported by special education resources?

14. Any other thoughts you would like to share about your experience in the remote learning environment?

Appendix F: Open-ended Questionnaire (Parents)

1. What has been done to ensure that your child's online safety and identity is protected in regards to identification as a special education student?
2. What strategies, accommodations, and/or modifications have been implemented for your child in the remote learning environment?
3. How do you feel that instruction and support has been going for your child in the remote learning environment?
4. What are some areas that you feel have been the most challenging while participating in the remote learning environment?
5. What are some areas that you feel have been the most beneficial while participating in the remote learning environment?
6. How have your procedural safeguards been maintained during your time in the remote learning environment? (IEP rights, IEP meetings, paperwork, signatures)

Appendix G: Open-ended Questionnaire (Teachers)

1. What has been done to ensure that your student's online safety and identity is protected in regards to identification as a special education student?
2. What strategies, accommodations, and/or modifications have you implemented for students with special needs in the remote learning environment?
3. How do you feel that instruction and support has been going for students with IEP's in the remote learning environment?
4. What are some areas that you feel have been the most challenging for meeting the needs of students with IEP's while participating in the remote learning environment?
5. What are some areas that you feel have been the most beneficial for students with an IEP while participating in the remote learning environment?
6. How have your procedural safeguards been maintained during your time in the remote learning environment? (IEP information for needs of students with IEP's, IEP meetings, paperwork, signatures)