

MIDWEST SCHOOL DISTRICT TRANSITION ACADEMY:
A QUALITATIVE, PROCESS EVALUATION OF A PROGRAM FOR
STUDENTS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS
OR EMOTIONAL DISTURBANCES

Paul D. Myers

Dr. Paul Watkins, Dissertation Supervisor

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to examine the implementation of a special education program designed to support students with autism and social/emotional disturbances in a large, suburban school district. The study examined how services are delivered to students, staffing/personnel aspects, and budgetary considerations relative to programming. Consistent with Rossi, Lipsey, and Freeman (2004), a process evaluation model allowed analysis of provisions specific to program implementation within the Midwest Transition Academy.

The study was considered through the lens of social justice leadership theory in terms of how leaders address subgroups within the typical public school environment (Theoharis, 2007). The findings identified in the study highlight a program that was meeting students' needs, but struggling to facilitate communication between stakeholder groups. Although environmental structures and financial supports were identified as positive, there were concerns about Transition Academy personnel feeling isolated from other district personnel. The findings also indicated that the program model was effective from a financial viewpoint. Concerns related to staff attrition suggested improvements in procedural, communication, and supervisory elements are essential to improving program continuity in the future.