

Public Abstract

First Name: Jake

Middle Name: Wilson

Last Name: Boswell

Adviser's First Name: Carole

Adviser's Last Name: Edmonds

Co-Adviser's First Name:

Co-Adviser's Last Name:

Graduation Term: SP 2017

Department: Educational Leadership & Policy Analysis

Degree: EdD

Title: EXPLORING THE K-5 SPECIAL EDUCATION REFERRAL PROCESS IN ONE MIDWEST SUBURBAN SCHOOL DISTRICT

Studies have shown referrals for special education evaluations and the evaluation process itself is marred by teacher subjectivity and a lack of quantitative data (Dunn, 2006; Mamlin & Harris, 1998; and Ysseldyke et al., 1982). Consequently, this behavior leads to over-identification of students from minority cultures due to their struggle to assimilate into the school environment (Deninger, 2008; Klingner & Harry, 2006; Parette, 2005; Poon-McBrayer & García, 1994; Skiba et al., 2008; Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 2001). This study seeks to better understand the special education referral process in one Midwestern school district. Specifically, this qualitative study employed focus groups, interviews, and artifact collection to engage K-5 regular education teachers in conversations about common academic behaviors that prompt a referral for special education evaluation. The research was conducted in three elementary schools in a suburban school district. Of the teachers questioned, the majority stated referrals were made due to a lack of progress. Furthermore, all teacher participants believed the school district did not offer enough support for professional development in the area of special education referrals. Teachers generally felt supported by their building level administrators. The administrators interviewed and documents analyzed provided information about district processes that support teachers' perceptions. These findings support a need for professional development at the district level and an on going support system for teachers by way of providing easily accessed reference documents and media.