THE SPECIAL EDUCATION REFERRAL AND EVALUATION PROCESS FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

by

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The following capstone project looks to answer the question, what accommodations need to be made to the special education process to ensure that English Language Learners are appropriately referred and evaluated? The research found supporting this project highlights the current reality of ELLs being over and underrepresented in special education. This discrepancy is explained through the issues observed in both the referral and evaluation process. By identifying the issues and researching best practices for referring and evaluating ELLs, I created a flowchart. This flowchart outlines the process and accommodations that need to be made for ELLs to ensure their referral is appropriate and that their evaluation provides valid data to determine if a student has a disability or not.

Scientifically, the percentage of ELLs in special education should be the same as the percentage of native speakers. However, the number of ELLs in special education does vary from grade level to grade level, school to school, and district to district. These discrepancies may be due to the fact that it is difficult to determine if an ELL is struggling academically because of their language deficits or because of an undiagnosed disability. General education teachers and special education teachers typically do not have expertise in the area of ELLs and language acquisition, which makes it difficult for them to determine if and when the special education referral process should start. This can lead to both over and underrepresentation of ELLs in special education.

These issues and the disproportionality of ELLs in special education led me to create a flowchart that systematically shows the process ELLs should go through when being referred and evaluated for special education. This flowchart begins when a teacher has concerns about an ELL student’s academic growth. The first section of the chart has a description of best practices for all classrooms with ELLs. It also has a link that provides more information on appropriate
strategies to implement before a student is referred for special education. Then the chart moves into the referral process. During the referral process, the classroom teacher will need to implement interventions. These interventions would be agreed upon by the classroom teacher and child study team. If the student continues to struggle, the chart describes how to move onto the evaluation process. The factors determining how to test the student are outlined in this section, along with appropriate accommodations. In addition, each section has a question to consider. These questions are important to consider before deciding if a student should continue in the referral and evaluation process. The purpose of the questions is to make sure that important information is gathered and appropriate accommodations are being made. Guiding information is provided for each of these question on the second page. Using this information, the team can make an informed decision on the next steps.

This flowchart was created for my school district, but I hope it can be used by any school district. To implement the chart fully, it would need to be accepted by administration because some of the steps require additional funding, like interpreters or language-specific assessments. Administration and schools can use this chart to help people understand their role and responsibility within the referral and evaluation process. A lot of people are involved in this process including, the general education teacher, EL teacher, special education teachers, parents, and the school psychologist. It is important that everyone understands their role in the process, so my chart can be used to outline who should be involved at each stage. My hope is that this flowchart would create consistency and a sense of shared responsibilities among team members, which would lead to better accommodations being made for ELLs during the referral and evaluation process.
Reference List


