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The Participation of Children With Multiple Disabilities In The Florida State Alternate Assessment: Parent Perspectives

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The Participation of Children With Multiple Disabilities In The Florida State Alternate
Assessment: Parent Perspectives

by

Lora Reese

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Curriculum and Instruction with a concentration in Special Education
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To my family and friends who supported my efforts in reaching this nearly impossible goal, thank you for believing in me. To my committee and mentor, thank you for teaching me to trust the process.
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Abstract

The perspectives of parents of children with multiple disabilities regarding their understanding and involvement in their child’s participation in the Florida State Alternate Assessment (FSAA) Performance Task and Datafolio are explored in this study. In the United States, federal policies require all students to participate in state-wide formal assessments, including students with multiple disabilities. Current research literature examines the perspectives of teachers and other education professionals regarding the many facets of formalized assessment. However, the perspective of parents of children with multiple disabilities and their child’s participation in formal alternate assessment is scant. Throughout this study, the reflections of six parents of children with multiple disabilities in formal assessment participation and the Individual Education Plan (IEP) meeting are examined. In this qualitative inquiry, data were collected through semi-structured interviews and an online focus group, then analyzed through the method of constant comparison coding with reflections captured in an ongoing research journal. According to their responses, the parents in this study had minimal knowledge of the FSAA and limited understanding of the criteria for assessment participation. Most parents had negative perceptions of the FSAA as they felt it did not measure knowledge on their children’s ability and level of learning.
Chapter One: Introduction

“Disability is a natural part of the human experience and in no way diminishes the right of individuals to participate in or contribute to society. Improving educational results for children with disabilities is an essential element of our national policy of ensuring equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency for individuals with disabilities.” - Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015

I chose this topic of inquiry based on my desire to extend my professional understanding beyond that of a special education teacher to learning how parents of children with multiple disabilities understand their child’s participation in the Florida State Alternate Assessment (FSAA) Performance Task and Datafolio and the decisions made for participation criteria during the Individual Education Plan (IEP) meeting.

In this inquiry, I sought connections of my experience as a special education teacher of children with multiple disabilities to that of the parents of these children. Through coursework and field experience, I was prepared to teach children with varying exceptionalities to include mild learning disabilities and some behavioral challenges. I was not prepared to teach children with multiple disabilities. My first year of teaching, all six children in my classroom ranged from age 12 to 19. Every child used a wheelchair, and all were non-verbal. Most of the children also used some form of communication device to participate in their learning and communicate their wants and needs. Three of the six children experienced significant seizure activity throughout the day for which I was not trained to handle. All six children required adults to feed and toilet them. One student was considered medically fragile as he relied on Gastro- Jejunal (GJ) Tubes for eating and removing waste from his body. Every child had an Individual Education Plan, and each was expected to participate in state-mandated standardized formal assessments. I was
terrified, confused, and motivated to find a way to teach these atypical learners and build
meaningful relationships with them and their parents.

This inquiry provided the opportunity to understand parent perspectives of their children
with multiple disabilities’ multi-faceted learning needs and how formal assessments impact their
lives. Four of the parents in this inquiry were those of my former students. Through
interpretation of the findings, I used my experience in the IEP process and test administration of
children with multiple disabilities to make connections to the parent perspectives.

Students with multiple disabilities are defined as individuals with a combination of
intellectual disabilities, blindness, and orthopedic impairments. According to the IDEA (2006),
the term multiple disabilities is defined as follows:

concomitant [simultaneous] impairments (such as intellectual disability-blindness,
intellectual disability-orthopedic impairment, etc.), the combination of which causes such
severe educational needs that they cannot be accommodated in a special education
program solely for one of the impairments. The term does not include deaf-blindness
(Sec. 300.8 (c) 7).

To fully understand the parent’s perspective, it is important to know the process of formal
assessment and understand participation requirements as defined under state guidelines in
accordance with Section 300.160 IDEA participation in assessments in the United States (2017).
In this chapter, I include a statement of the problem, purpose of the study, and rationale for the
inquiry. The guiding research question and definitions of terms are included. A definition of the
student population and a description of assessment policies of the Florida State Alternate
Assessment (FSAA) Performance Task and Datafolio are presented. The statement of the
problem and research question were framed to capture parent experiences with the FSAA Performance Task and Datafolio and parent involvement in the decision for participation as part of the Individual Education Plan (IEP) were examined.

Federal Government Policy

In the United States, all states are required by Federal Law to administer state-wide formal assessments, which may be in a format of their choosing, so long as it aligns with Federal guidelines. According to the IDEA: Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Sec. 300.160 participation in assessments: “A State must ensure that all children with disabilities are included in all general State and district-wide assessment programs, including assessments described under section 1111 of the ESEA, 20 U.S.C. 6311, with appropriate accommodations and alternate assessments, if necessary, as indicated in their respective IEPs” (IDEA, 2004, Sec. 300.160 (a)). Students with multiple disabilities are also required to demonstrate Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), which align with state-specific academic content standards and student academic achievement.

Student Population

The students referenced in this inquiry are identified as children with multiple disabilities in middle to high school grade level. As part of the identification process, these students are considered as having multiple disabilities due to the need for multiple adaptations to support their daily living skills and access curriculum in a non-traditional manner in the school environment (Horn & Kang, 2012). For a more detailed definition, according to the IDEA (2006), the term “multiple disabilities” is defined as follows:
concomitant [simultaneous] impairments (such as intellectual disability-blindness, intellectual disability-orthopedic impairment, etc.), the combination of which causes such severe educational needs that they cannot be accommodated in a special education program solely for one of the impairments. The term does not include deaf-blindness (Sec. 300.8 (c) 7).

According to the description found in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-5 (DSM-V) (2013), the characteristics of students with multiple disabilities may include intellectual delays, which may cause the student to struggle with reasoning and problem solving, and experience difficulties with abstract thinking, trial and error, and observation. Students with multiple disabilities, working at pre-academic levels, are often challenged with communication and independent functioning in the school or work environment. Students using formal modes of communication primarily use a picture exchange system, a speech-generating device, or manual signing (Van Der Meer, et al., 2012). For identification purposes throughout this study, it is important to note the term multiple disabilities may include students with significant intellectual disabilities and in some cases, specific medical diagnosis.

**Florida State Assessment Guidelines**

Under Florida Department of Education (2018) guidelines, students who are identified by their school district as ineligible to participate in a traditional formal assessment are required to participate in the FSAA. Students with multiple disabilities participate in one of two formats of the FSAA during the scheduled testing window according to state guidelines. The two formats of FSAA are Performance Task and Datafolio, which I will describe in detail in the next section of this chapter. The Florida school district testing window for the FSAA-Performance Task
administration spans a six-week period during the months of February through April. The FSAA-
Datafolio has three collection periods throughout the school year beginning in August through to
the closing of all state assessments in April.

**Florida State Alternate Assessment Formats**

In the state of Florida, students with multiple disabilities participate in one of two formats
for the alternate assessment. “The Florida State Alternate Assessment (FSAA) is based on the
Florida Standards Access Points (FS-AP) for English Language Arts and Mathematics and Next
Access Points are academic expectations written specifically for students with significant
cognitive disabilities.” (Measured Progress FSAA, 2019, p. 2). Included under the parameters of
the FSAA is the Datafolio. “For students assessed via the Datafolio, teachers submit student
work samples across three collection periods throughout the school year. The Activity Choices
are teacher developed from typical classroom activities that are aligned to Access Point
Standards. Student evidence from all three collection periods are submitted by the teacher via an
online system and independently scored to determine the student’s progress.” (Measured
Progress FSAA, 2019, p. 2)

For students with multiple disabilities, participation in the FSAA-Performance Task and
FSAA-Datafolio is determined by each school’s IEP Team to be the most appropriate method for
assessing academic growth (Measured Progress, FSAA-Datafolio, 2019). In Florida, the
Measured Progress is a nonprofit organization that develops standards-based assessments, which
provide flexible assessment solutions for kindergarten through Grade 12 (K–12) students. The
FSAA-Performance Task is a tiered assessment aligned to Florida Access Points. Florida Access
points cover the core academic areas of Reading and Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies. The Florida curriculum planning and professional development program provides teachers with examples and recommended activities to support the development of content-based lessons at a reduced level of complexity, making general education curriculum accessible to students with significant cognitive disabilities. Each test item on the FSAA-Performance Task includes three separate tasks designed to gradually increase in difficulty to challenge the student at their highest cognitive level. In contrast to the mastery-driven Performance Task assessment, the FSAA-Datafolio allows students to demonstrate progress on a continuum.

**Statement of the Problem**

At the time of developing this study, I entered my 17th year of teaching in special education, where I gained insight into understanding formal assessment of students with multiple disabilities and the IEP process of identifying criteria for participation. Over time, I witnessed students with multiple disabilities successfully demonstrate cumulative progress on the FSAA. It was through this first-hand experience that I observed indications that students with multiple disabilities could learn and retain knowledge. What I lacked was the viewpoint of parents of children with multiple disabilities understanding of formal assessments and the process of identification for participation.

Over the past 16 years as an educator, I often found myself wondering about the impact of formal assessment on the parents and families of children with multiple disabilities. Just prior to the beginning of testing, parents receive district phone calls and flyers encouraging them to ensure their child gets adequate rest and nutrition the night before assessments begin. Parents of children with multiple disabilities have an entirely different set of challenges in simply preparing their child for daily attendance in school, let alone testing. I often heard parents share their
difficulties with the daily routines of providing personal and medical care for their child with multiple disabilities, while juggling the needs of siblings as they all prepared for school. My thoughts concerning parent perspectives led me to this inquiry. I chose to focus on understanding how parents navigate the formal assessment and IEP process.

To extend my knowledge beyond the role of an educator, while also aiming to contribute to the research literature, I embrace the role as a developing scholar in search of parents’ perspectives on formal assessment. I interviewed parents of children with multiple disabilities to seek their perspectives of how they understand their child’s participation in the Florida State Alternate Assessment (FSAA), and the decisions made for participation criteria during the Individual Education Plan (IEP) meeting.

**Purpose of the Study**

Through this study, understandings about parents of children with multiple disabilities in their child’s participation in the Florida State Alternate Assessment (FSAA) were explored. The aim was to understand how parents of children with multiple disabilities talk about their awareness of the two formats, FSAA-Performance Task and FSAA-*Datafolio* and further to understand how parents talk about the criteria used to determine eligibility for participation in the FSAA and the impact participation has on their child. Finally, in this inquiry I sought to understand how parents talk about their role in preparing their child for participation in the FSAA with discussions of their involvement.

**Theoretical Framework**

A qualitative, interpretivist framework afforded me the opportunity to explore how parents of children with multiple disabilities understand and make meaning of the FSAA process and decision-making criteria for participation (Manning & Kunkel, 2014). The explanation of
how “qualitative relationship studies evoke senses of feeling, emotion, experience, and latitude” by Manning and Kunkel (2014, p. 436) served as a compass for my qualitative inquiry. Litchman (2013) defines interpretivism as “a theory or philosophical doctrine that emphasizes analyzing meanings people confer on their own actions” (p. 323). Through an interpretivist lens, I focused my research goals on understanding how parents of children with multiple disabilities make meaning of their lived experiences or phenomenon of the FSAA (Litchman, 2013).

To examine parent perspectives of students with multiple disabilities participation in the FSAA, it was important to inquire how parents understand the FSAA formats and criteria discussion as part of the IEP. In the inquiry process, I sought to determine how parents view their role in the decision-making process for their child’s participation in the formal assessment as part of the IEP meeting. I wanted to know what parents understand about the administration formats of FSAA and to understand how parents describe the process of determining participation for FSAA-Performance Task versus FSAA-Datafolio as a member of the IEP team and how they perceive the impact that participation in the FSAA has on their child.

Throughout the inquiry process, I used an iterative approach in order to maintain explicit reflexivity to ensure common patterns, themes, and categories naturally emerged (Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009). I used semi-structured interviews to solicit and engage in meaningful conversations with parents who had prior experience with their children participating in the FSAA. My decision to use semi-structured interviews was based on Roulston’s (2010) description of how open-ended questions with follow up probes provide parents an opportunity to expand the detail and description of their experiences.
Rationale of Study

The focus on parent perspectives of children with multiple disabilities’ participation in the Florida State Alternate Assessment (FSAA) contributes to the discussion of including all students in formal assessments. The objective of this study was to explore how parents of children with multiple disabilities understand their child’s participation in the Florida State Alternate Assessment (FSAA) and their role in decisions made for participation criteria during the Individual Education Plan (IEP) meeting.

Research Question

I used the following research question to guide this inquiry:

- How do parents of children with multiple disabilities talk about their involvement in their child’s participation in the Florida State Alternate Assessment?

Research Design

I conducted a 60-minute semi-structured interview with each participant. The interviews were recorded with at least two audio devices to ensure quality and then transcribed and shared with the parents for member checking followed by analysis to identify emerging themes through constant comparison (Kolb, 2012) of the data. To further explore themes that emerged from the individual interviews, I conducted an online focus group session through Zoom (Zoom.us, 2020). Finally, I kept a research journal, throughout the research process, so that I was able to achieve a deeper understanding of my own perspectives on formal assessments and the IEP process for criteria participation. In my journaling, I recorded my plan for data collection through semi-structured interviews and an online focus group. It was vital to the reflective process that I outlined my research plan for recruiting participants through Facebook as this was a new concept.
for me. It was also important that I reflected in my journal how I researched online focus group formats, so that I could understand my role as the facilitator. The use of a research journal also ensured I consistently aligned the data collection process with the purpose of my study.

**Definitions of Terms**

Alternate Assessment (AA): designed for students who, even with appropriate accommodations, traditional assessments would not be appropriate measures of progress toward general education curriculum (Towles-Reeves et al., 2009).

Alternate Assessments based on Alternate Achievement Standards (AA-AAS): for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. (Cho and Kingston, 2015)

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP): AYP indicates satisfactory progress by a district or a school toward the goal of proficiency for all students. In English Language Arts, Mathematics, and Science, AYP is determined by comparing the percentage of students tested and the performance of tested students against defined standards. (Florida Department of Education, 2018)

The Florida Standards Alternate Assessment (FSAA) is designed for students whose participation in the general statewide assessment program (Florida Standards Assessments, Statewide Science Assessment, Next Generation Sunshine State Standards End-of-Course Assessments) is not appropriate, even with accommodations (Florida Department of Education [FLDOE], 2019).

FSAA-Datafolio: A component of the FSAA, this assessment is designed to measure progressive knowledge of students who typically do not have a formal mode of communication and may be working at pre-academic levels. Student work is aligned to pre-determined standards and
submitted via an online portfolio system during three collection periods throughout a school year (FLDOE, 2019).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Section 20, United States Code 1400 (2004) “Disability is a natural part of the human experience and in no way diminishes the right of individuals to participate in or contribute to society. Improving educational results for children with disabilities is an essential element of our national policy of ensuring equal opportunity, full participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency for individuals with disabilities” (Cornell Law School https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/20/1400).

Individualized Education Plan (IEP): A blueprint for any student receiving exceptional education services and accommodations outside the typical academic system (Weigert, 2012).

Large-scale assessment: often referred to as state-assessments where student progress is gauged towards general grade level performance (Nolet & McLaughlin, 2005).

No Child Left Behind Act No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) The Elementary & Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 currently known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) challenges states and school districts to increase efforts to improve student academic achievement. Its accountability provisions focus attention on low-performing groups of students, intending to close the achievement gap (National Center for Learning Disabilities https://www.ncld.org/archives/action-center/learn-the-law/esea-nclb).

Significant Cognitive Disability: Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM–5) defines intellectual disabilities as neurodevelopmental disorders that begin in childhood and
are characterized by intellectual difficulties as well as difficulties in conceptual, social, and practical areas of living (No Child Left Behind).

Multiple Disabilities – “concomitant [simultaneous] impairments (such as intellectual disability-blindness, intellectual disability-orthopedic impairment, etc.), the combination of which causes such severe educational needs that they cannot be accommodated in a special education program solely for one of the impairments. The term does not include deaf-blindness” (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act’s [IDEA] Sec. 300.8 (c) (7)).

Summary and Organization of Remaining Chapters

In Chapter One, the framework for the proposed study was established by describing a focus, “the perspectives of parents of children with multiple disabilities and the impact of their child’s participation in the Florida State Alternate Assessment (FSAA).” The discussion of children with multiple disabilities as they are situated in the literature on parent perspectives of state-wide alternate assessments is continued in Chapter Two. The questions of what an alternate assessment is and for whom alternate assessments are designed is shared. Chapter Three includes the theoretical framework influencing the proposed research methodology and research design I utilized to understand parent perspectives of children with multiple disabilities. Their participation in the FSAA includes an understanding of the decision-making process for eligibility criterion and the forms of administration. Data were collected through individual interviews, an online focus group and a reflective research journaling. In Chapter Four, I share the findings from this study and describe the coding cycles that led me to the overarching themes, which become an integral part of the discussion in Chapter Five. The overarching themes that emerged through parent perspectives and connections to literature are discussed in Chapter Five.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

In this chapter, I present a review of the research literature as it relates to the focus on perspectives of parents of children with multiple disabilities and the impact of their child’s participation in the Florida State Alternate Assessment (FSAA). I include a description of the Individual Education Plan (IEP) process, a definition of the FSAA, and an explanation of Florida Access Points Curriculum. I revisit the definition of students with multiple disabilities and expand on the criteria for their participation in the FSAA based on Access Points curriculum. Throughout this chapter, I reveal the significant gap in the research literature relative to parent perspectives of children with multiple disabilities and their participation in alternate assessments and understanding of the IEP process for participation criteria.

The parameters for this literature review were performed using the University of South Florida (USF) library search database and included inquiry searches for issues related to parent involvement and understanding of the IEP process and formal assessment decisions. Areas of specific focus include current literature from the years 2010 to 2019 on topics of parental perspectives of children with disabilities relative to standardized assessments, assessing/testing children with multiple and severe disabilities, and the characteristics of and implications for children participating in alternate assessments based on alternate academic achievement standards (Kearns, et al., 2011)

What was most noticeable in the literature was the lack of evidence of parent perspectives specifically relating to the decisions made regarding their child’s participation in alternate assessments as part of the IEP meeting. In Table 4, I outline search phrases used to guide my
inquiry of parent perspectives of children with multiple disabilities in the participation of alternate assessments. I used a wide variety of search phrases to ensure a broad-lensed view of issues surrounding the discussion of parent perspectives in the IEP process and statewide formal assessments. I discuss issues relevant to the focus of this inquiry. See Table 4: Search Phrases and Identified Issues in Appendices.

**Individual Education Plan**

Under the United States Department of Education regulations, and in accordance with the Individual with Disabilities Act (2004), an Individual Education Plan (IEP) must be developed for a student identified with specific learning disabilities to ensure appropriate “evaluations, eligibility determinations, individualized education programs, and educational placements” (IDEA, Subpart D, Sec. 300) are received. An IEP includes the student’s current performance and objectives with benchmarks to serve as objectives towards the student’s achievement of goals. A description of special education and related services, such as supplementary aides and therapies, an explanation of time spent with nondisabled peers, an outline of transition service needs, and a description of participation in state and district-wide assessments are required components of an effective IEP (Drasgow, Yell, & Robinson, 2001).

An important part of developing the IEP is the evaluation process and determination for appropriate assessment participation. Students with significant disabilities are required to participate in a form of alternate assessment as determined suitable by their state of residence. In Florida, the Florida State Alternate Assessment (FSAA) is used to measure the progress of student learning based on Access Point Standards (APS). The decision on which format of the alternate assessment a student should participate can vary. “IEP teams might tend to make subjective test-type decisions regardless of their belief in or understanding of the guidelines, or
the number of annual assessment assignment training sessions they had received” (Cho & Kingston, 2015, p. 18). Recently, the discussion of Individual Education Plan (IEP) development in alignment with academic achievement standards has moved deeper into the topic of quality curricular access and student performance on standardized assessment.

In Florida, the assurance to provide adequate access to the general education curriculum for students with multiple disabilities is achieved through Florida Standards Access Points (FSAP). The FSAP were developed to support the learning needs of students with significant cognitive disabilities as they access general education curriculum. The reduced complexity level of Access Points enables students with multiple disabilities to participate in core academics. For example, the English Language Arts Reading Standard for Literature (LAFS.6.RL.1.1) may ask the student to provide text-based evidence to support what is directly stated in the text by finding evidence to support an inference (CPALMS, 2020). For the Access Point Alternate version of this benchmark, the student may be asked to demonstrate essential understanding by identifying a detail or example in a text and explain what a text says explicitly (CPALMS, 2020). According to the Florida initiative Collaborate, Plan, Align, Learn, Motivate and Share (CPALMS), subjects covered under Access Points include Reading and Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies and Health and Physical Education (CPALMS, 2019, http://www.cpalms.org/CPALMS/about_us.aspx). As a Florida-based online toolkit for educators to utilize vetted instructional resources and standards, the web-based, (CPALMS) toolkit may be used for lesson planning and professional development collaborative efforts.

**Individual Education Plan Team and Process**

An IEP team typically consists of the student, a regular education teacher, the school system representative, a transition service agency representative, parents, a special education
specialist, an individual to interpret evaluation results, and the special education teacher (Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (Oser, 2000). The IEP team assembles initially to discuss the needs of a student who presents as a struggling learner. If the IEP team determines special education services are needed, the child is referred for evaluations with the parents’ consent. If upon completion the child qualifies as a “child with a disability,” as defined by IDEA (2004), an IEP meeting is scheduled. During the initial IEP meeting, appropriate accommodations and services to support the student’s learning become part of annual goals to be monitored for progress for an entire calendar year. According to the Florida Department of Education and IEP must include the following:

IEP-13. The IEP includes measurable annual goals, including academic and functional goals, designed to meet the student’s needs that result from the disability to enable the child to be involved in and make progress in the general education curriculum and meet the student’s other needs that result from the disability. Benchmarks or short-term objectives should be included for students with disabilities who take alternate assessments aligned to alternate achievement standards, or any other student with a disability as determined by the IEP team (Florida Department of Education, 2015, 34 CFR §300.320(a)(2)).

Parent Perspectives

Parents are stakeholders in their child’s IEP and are required by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004) to be part of the IEP process. Although parents are vital members of the IEP team, the parent-school partnership is not always representative of balanced power in the decision-making process towards common goals for students with multiple disabilities (Tucker & Schwartz, 2015). In my teaching experience, parents of students with
multiple disabilities tend to be present for the IEP meetings, remain quite interested in the long-term goals for their child, but often are confused by the process. Mueller and Buckely (2014) report, “parents report feeling overwhelmed and confused with the special education system, specifically IEP meetings, sharing that it is laden with jargon and confusing procedures thereby leading to less active participation” (p. 120).

A challenging factor is that traditional IEP meetings appear to be facilitated in a business-like-manner by the school professionals with parents viewed as passive customers of the IEP team (Chambers & Childre, 2005). One study reveals 96 parents of students with disabilities were asked questions regarding teacher involvement, the IEP invitation process, and the receptiveness of parent input or recommendations to the teacher; parents indicate overall satisfaction (Fish, 2008). However, when the topic of developing the IEP arose, parents indicate their role to be of lesser value than the professionals around the table. Although legislation mandates the involvement of parents in the IEP process, parents report feeling undervalued, uninformed, and untrained in making sound decisions for their child’s educational needs (Fish, 2008).

**Informed Consent**

Decisions for participation in the Florida State Alternate Assessment (FSAA) are based on certain criteria, which must be discussed during the development of a student’s IEP. According to the National Center for Special Education Research (NCSER), under the Department of Education, each state must notify parents that their child’s participation and achievement is based on alternate achievement standards (NCSER, 2019). It has been my experience, as a teacher and parent, that the decision for formal assessment participation is limited to informed consent during the IEP and minimal discussion takes place. Parents may
choose to agree or disagree with the decisions made by the IEP team for participation in the
FSAA.

According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1997, all students
with disabilities must participate in statewide alternate assessments. Parents of children with
multiple disabilities face a different set of challenges in the decision-making process for
participation in the FSAA. In rare cases, a student may qualify for an extraordinary exemption
from statewide assessments following an extensive process. In Florida, for a student to be
considered for extraordinary exemption from statewide assessments, criteria must be met and
submitted to the school district superintendent and forwarded to the Commissioner of Education.
These criteria include:

● Written description of the student’s disabilities, including specific description of the
  student’s impaired sensory, manual or speaking skills;
● Written documentation of the most recent evaluation data;
● Written documentation, if available, of the most recent administration of statewide
  standardized assessments;
● Written description of the effect of circumstance or condition, as defined in section
  1008.212, FS., on the student’s participation in statewide standardized assessments
  and on the student’s achievement;
● Written evidence that the student had the opportunity to learn the skills being tested;
● Written evidence as to whether the student has had the opportunity to be assessed
  using the instructional accommodations on the student’s IEP that are allowable in the
  administration of a statewide standardized assessment;
Written evidence of the circumstance or condition as defined in subsection (1) of Rule 6A-1.0943, F.A.C.;

(Florida Department of Education, Rule 6A-1.0943, 2017, p. 3)

In the event the Commissioner of Education denies a request for extraordinary exemption, parents may pursue an expedited due process hearing to the Department of Education. In some cases, an exemption is granted based on medical complexity in accordance with s. 1008.22(9)(b)1, F.S. for a one to three year or permanent approval period. In the case of a medical complexity exemption, the parents must provide medical documentation by a licensed physician in accordance with chapter 458 or 459, Florida Statute (Florida Department of Education Code, 2015, Rule 6A-1.0943). As defined by the Florida Department of Education, in the case of medical complexity, the student must have severe neurological or cognitive impairments or rely solely on technology for communication (Florida Department of Education Code, 2015, Rule 6A-1.0943). A school superintendent may grant a one-year exemption, while the Commissioner of Education may grant a one to three-year exemption or permanent exemption based on the level of evidence presented to the severity of the student’s medical complexity (Florida Statutes Title XLVIII, 2019, K-20 Education Code § 1008.22).

Inclusion and Standards-Based Formal Assessment

In the search for parent perspectives on standards-based formal assessment, the definition of inclusion arose as a consistent issue. Since the late 1980s, the definition of inclusion has been discussed and interpreted in varying forms. In his review of literature Loreman (2014) identifies a list of internationally recognized characteristics of the definition of inclusion. In his interpretation, all children are welcome to attend school and participate in all curriculum and social programs with adaptations and modifications provided as needed. Polat (2011) identifies
inclusion as a requirement for “all schools to be open to all children and to seek to respond to diversity” (p. 53). The intent of inclusion appears to ensure all children receive equal access to educational opportunities as reported through the lens of education professionals. In search for the parent perspectives on inclusion, despite legislation and policy, parents report feeling marginalized as their involvement in the decisions made for their child continues to rest in the hands of the professionals (Scorgie, 2015).

**Parent and Teacher Perspectives on Alternate Assessment**

In the literature on parent and teacher perspectives on alternate assessments, the issues of standards-based versus traditional report cards arises. The idea of measuring all students by state assessment standards excludes the consideration for “student behaviors, attitudes, work habits, study skills, and efforts” (Swan, et al., 2014, p. 290). Teachers measure a student’s educational growth as opposed to the ability to produce a product (Swan, 2014). In this scenario of standards-based report cards, students receive a numerical value for each standard in the curriculum subjects as opposed to a single letter grade with no detailed explanation of student progress. The results of Swan’s survey indicate parents prefer the standards-based report card over the teachers who indicate the traditional letter-grade based report cards.

The discussion of the literature includes an in-depth description of the IEP process and parent involvement. In the next section, I offer specific details of the FSAA formats based on Florida Standards Access Points.

**Florida State Alternate Assessment**

The FSAA is comprised of two formats: Performance Task and Datafolio. While these two formats assess students with disabilities based on alternate achievement standards, there is a stark difference in the administration process. As defined by the Florida Department of
Education, “the FSAA-Performance Task (FSAA-PT) is designed to assess students at three levels of complexity and the results are reported through achievement levels. The FSAA-Performance Task and FSAA Datafolio is designed to address the needs of a small population of students who typically do not have a formal mode of communication and may be working at pre-academic levels.” (Florida Department of Education, http://www.fldoe.org/accountability/assessments/k-12-student-assessment/fl-alternate-assessment.stml, 2019, paragraph 2). The IEP team must identify the most appropriate FSAA format to administer to a student based on their level of communication and physical ability to attend to the assessment.

**FSAA Performance Task and FSAA Datafolio**

The FSAA Performance Task follows a tiered format designed to measure a student’s understanding of Access Points Standards-based content to the fullest level of their cognitive ability. In this tiered system, the student is offered three tasks ranging from least to most complex. (See Appendices, Figure 4a)

The test administrator, typically the special education teacher, presents a picture-based response booklet to the student while reading the script provided in the administration manual. Students are presented with a Student Response Booklet for picture and symbols to indicate their answer by gesturing, using eye gaze, or directly pointing to an item. (See Figures 6a-6c for Task Levels) Each of the student’s responses are recorded directly in the student’s individually-coded response booklet provided by the state assessment administration office. If the student answers Task 1 incorrectly, the teacher then scaffolds the task by covering the incorrect response and repeats the scripted prompt. If the student correctly answers the question, the teacher then moves onto Task 2. If the student answers the question correctly, the teacher moves on to Task 3. If the
student answers Task 2 incorrectly, the teacher does not present Task 3 and moves onto the next test item on the assessment. (See Appendices, Figure 4b)

**FSAA-Datafolio**

The FSAA-Datafolio is “designed to support students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who typically do not have a formal mode of communication and are working at pre-academic levels” (FSAA Guide, 2018, p. 2). The Datafolio is used for students with the most complex disabilities who typically perform at a pre-academic level and use a formal mode of communication such as Assistive Technology or adaptive communication devices used “to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of a child with a disability” (IDEA, 2017, Sec. 300.5, p. 1). Students using formal modes of communication primarily use a picture exchange system, a speech-generating device, or manual signing. (Van Der Meer, et al., 2012).

The decision to assess a student using the Datafolio format is determined by the IEP team based on Datafolio Participation Guidelines (FSAA Guide, 2018, p. 8). The IEP Team must agree that the student meets a criterion for participation based on the student’s answers to the questions in the following decision-making process:

1. Does the student primarily communicate through cries, facial expressions, eye gaze, and/or change in muscle tone that requires interpretation by listeners/observers?
2. Does the student respond/react to sensory (e.g., auditory, visual, touch, movement) input from another person BUT require actual physical assistance to follow simple directions?
3. Does the student exhibit reactions primarily to stimuli (e.g., student only communicates that he or she is hungry, tired, uncomfortable, sleepy)?
4. Previous FSAA-Performance Task (If Applicable) Has the student’s previous performance on the FSAA—Performance Task provided limited information and/or reflected limited growth within Level 1? (FSAA Guide, 2018, p. 8)

The FSAA-Datafolio is a continuum-based option designed to track the progress of a student’s ability to access content as opposed to demonstrating content mastery. The Datafolio allows the teacher to record observations where a student is exposed to content-based activities in alignment with the Florida Standards Access Points. The teacher is responsible for collecting student work samples over three collection periods throughout the school year. The teacher is responsible for offering students with at least two to three activity choices in each content area. The student receives instruction on the content-related activities, which must align with state Access Standards. Student responses are then recorded on a running record such as the FSAA-Datafolio Running Record Template. (See Figure 7)

Children with Multiple Disabilities and the FSAA

According to Section 300.8 (c) (7) of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), students with multiple disabilities means, “concomitant impairments (such as intellectual disability-blindness or intellectual disability-orthopedic impairment), the combination of which causes such severe educational needs that they cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for one of the impairments. Multiple disabilities do not include deaf-blindness” (IDEA, 2017, p. 7).

Summary

“Efforts to balance flexibility for students and test validity are a national issue.”
(Goldstein & Behuniak, 2011, p. 180)

In Chapter Two, I presented and discussed the search criteria for the literature review focusing on parent perspectives of children with multiple disabilities and the criteria for
participation in alternate assessments. A description of the Individual Education Plan (IEP) process and an explanation of the FSAA were provided. Further, literature relative to parent perspectives of children with multiple disabilities and their participation in alternate assessments and understanding of the IEP process for participation criteria was discussed.
Chapter Three: Methodology

In this chapter, I provide the methodology used to explore how parents of children with multiple disabilities understand their child’s participation in the Florida State Alternate Assessment (FSAA). This aim of this study was to understand how parents of children with multiple disabilities talk about their awareness of the two formats, FSAA-Performance Task and FSAA-Datafolio. Further, the understanding about parent perspectives on the criteria used to determine eligibility for participation in the FSAA and the impact participation has on their child was explored. Finally, in this inquiry I sought to understand how parents talk about their role in preparing their child for participation in the FSAA through discussions of their involvement. A description of the parent participants, an outline of the methods for data collection and analysis, and considerations for ethical influences are discussed.

Philosophical and Theoretical Foundations

As described in Chapter One, I followed a qualitative method of phenomenological inquiry exploring lived experiences through the lenses of parents of children with multiple disabilities who participate in the FSAA. Through an interpretivist lens, I employed Litchman’s (2013) definition of interpretivism as emphasis on how parents of children with multiple disabilities make meaning of their child’s lived experiences or phenomenon of the FSAA.

In qualitative research, we strive to answer the who, what, where, when, and why questions to topics we experience on which we wish to expand our knowledge. “Research is about systematically obtaining and analyzing data to increase our knowledge about a topic in which we are interested” (Rojon & Saunders, 2012, p. 55). In phenomenological inquiry, the qualitative researcher engages in direct interaction with the participants in the context of real-
world experiences relevant to the study. The closer to the subject the researcher is positioned, the more authentic the study (Creswell, 2007).

In this inquiry, I situated myself as a teacher of students with multiple disabilities with familiarity of the IEP process and a parent of two children who participated in state-wide formal assessments. Both professional and personal perspectives afforded me the opportunity to have a focused inquiry for capturing authentic experiences through semi-structured interviews, an online focus group, and a research journal. Parent responses invoked a reflective process that allowed me to make experiential connections in my research journal after each interview.

**Restatement of the Research Question**

The research question constructed to guide this inquiry was framed in such a manner that I was able to solicit the perspectives of parents of children with multiple disabilities in their participation in the FSAA. It was my intent to utilize the research question to capture authentic experiences, opinions, attitudes, values, and processes about alternate assessment participation for literary contribution (Rowley, 2012).

The following research question on parent perspectives of the FSAA allowed parents to describe their understanding of the process:

- How do parents of children with multiple disabilities talk about their involvement in their child’s participation in the Florida State Alternate Assessment?

The research question which drove this inquiry arose from my previous experience as a teacher administering the FSAA to students with multiple disabilities. I recognize the importance of maintaining a neutral stance when interviewing the parents in the study. It was through an interpretivist lens that I solicited an open dialogue where parents felt comfortable to share their
understanding of formal assessments of students with multiple disabilities. To ensure I understood the importance of my role as a researcher using an interpretivist philosophy, I searched for experienced perspectives. I found that I admired the simple way Lindsay Mack (2010) explains the philosophical underpinnings of educational research as she describes ontology as “one’s view of reality and being, and epistemology as the view of how one acquires knowledge” (p. 5). I understood this to mean my theoretical framework needed to begin with my ontology. It was through an ontological lens that natural responses from the parents flowed through the inquiry process. To maintain focus and collect meaningful data, I followed an interview protocol (Appendix E) and semi-structure interview probes (Appendix H), which aligned with the primary research question.

Prior to posting the invitation to recruit participants, I conducted a pilot interview to ensure my inquiry was perceived as a relevant topic. I solicited the support from the parent of a former student with multiple disabilities to participate in the pilot interview. Feedback from the pilot interview helped to ensure the interview questions were transparent to solicit rich descriptions of parent perspectives.

Pilot Interview

I selected the parent of a former student who met the inclusion criteria to participate in a pilot interview to elicit feedback. The pilot interview ensured the interview questions would achieve reliability and trustworthiness to the inquiry. The parent in the pilot interview provided no recommendations for edits to the interview questions.

Primary Interview Questions:

- Describe to me your involvement in your child’s participation in the FSAA.
- Talk about which type of FSAA format your child participates in.
● Talk about the differences between the FSAA-Performance Task and FSAA-

\textit{Datafolio}.

Semi-Structured Interview Probes

● Tell me about your understanding of the Florida State Alternate Assessment.

● What is your understanding of how it is determined for a student to participate in the FSAA?

● Can you tell me what criteria would you consider for making the determination of a participation in the FSAA?

● Do you agree or disagree with the way students are considered eligible for the FSAA? Can you explain why you agree or disagree?

● What role do you play in your child’s participation in the FSAA?

● How do you feel about your role in preparing your child for participation in the FSAA?

● Can you share how your role contributes the decision of your child’s participation in the FSAA?

● Can you describe in what ways to you contribute?

● How do you feel about your child participating in the FSAA?

● Do you feel supported by the school with your role in determining your child’s participation in the FSAA?

Follow-up Prompts:

○ How would you like your involvement to be in your child’s participation in the FASS in the future?
What successes or challenges have you seen emerge from your child’s identification for the FSAA?

Parents Who Participated in The Study

Participants in this study self-identified as the parent of at least one child with multiple disabilities with prior participation in the Florida State Alternate Assessment (FSAA) in the previous five years. All parents in this study were the biological mother to a child with multiple disabilities with experience in at least one IEP meeting. Four of the six parents in this study were the parents of my former students. Parent One and Parent Two each have one child over the age of 18 with cerebral palsy, and both children are non-verbal students. Parent Three is the parent of three children, one a former student who is blind with cerebral palsy and the ability to communicate verbally. Parent Four has two children, one with ASD who I was familiar with, but not a former student of mine. Parent Five has three children with one child having multiple disabilities, another former non-verbal student whom I taught. Parent Six has one child with cerebral palsy who I was familiar with but did not teach.

Inclusion Criteria

A purposeful sample was used to identify parents for this inquiry. The goal of the study was to explore the perspectives of parents of children with multiple disabilities regarding how they understand their involvement in their child’s participation in the Florida State Alternate Assessment (FSAA) Performance Task and Datafolio and identification criteria as part of the IEP meeting. Children with multiple disabilities are defined as;

Multiple disabilities refer to “concomitant [simultaneous] impairments (such as intellectual disability-blindness, intellectual disability-orthopedic impairment, etc.), the combination of which causes such severe educational needs that they cannot be
accommodated in special education programs solely for one of the impairments. The term does not include deaf-blindness” (IDEA, Sec. 300.8 (c) (7)).

All parents were invited to participate in this study on a voluntary basis. Parents were recruited for participation in this study through a private Facebook (web.facebook.com/Facebook, 2020) group, which I created on March 15, 2020 titled Parent Perspectives on Florida State Alternate Assessment.

Parents were recruited through a USF Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved social media recruitment process. Requirements to ensure anonymity and confidentially according to the IRB research protocols were met. Participating parents were based on self-identification, as having at least one child with multiple disabilities who had participated in the FSAA in the past five years and had previous experience in the IEP process. Parents were required to answer the following questions to participate in the study:

Screening for Facebook Recruiting

- Are you the parent of at least one child with multiple disabilities who has participated in the Florida State Alternate Assessment in the past five years?
- Do you have previous experience in the IEP process for your child who has participated in the FSAA in the past five years?
- Are you a current Florida resident? (stateofflorida.com)

A total of eight parents responded to the invitation to participate in this study. I selected six out of eight parents based on the criteria described above. It was important to the requirement for face-to-face interviews that participants were current residents of Florida. Two of the eight parents had recently relocated outside Florida making them ineligible to participate in this study.
The invitation for participating in the study was posted to the private Parent Perspectives on Florida State Alternate Assessment group and shared on my personal Facebook page and the AERA Division K: Teaching and Teacher Education Facebook Private Group March 17, 2020. The first of six parents to participate joined the private Facebook group on March 20, 2020, the remaining five parents joined between March 20, 2020 and March 27, 2020. Based on the criteria for this study, six parents were selected to participate according to their self-identification as described above. Once all participants were approved to participate in the study, an explanation of the research purpose and eligibility requirements outlined in the consent form was posted. (Appendix I)

In compliance with IRB requirements, it was agreed upon by all committee members that face-to-face interviews would be most appropriate for this human subject inquiry. Again, it was for this reason, the requirement of being a Florida resident was part of the eligibility criteria and two of the eight parents were not selected. Only students receiving special education services as defined under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004), as indicated by parents to the researcher, were included.

**Ethical Consideration**

Each volunteer participant received a personal hard copy of the informed consent used to submit to the USF IRB at the time of the face-to-face interviews. My contact information was provided in the event any questions or concerns arose at any point in the research process and each participant was advised of their freedom to withdraw consent at any time. The documents required as elements of recruitment and informed consent comply with the USF Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) policy manual as part of the IRB process. (Appendix I)
In accordance with the USF Office of Research Integrity and Compliance, I followed the IRB process in compliance with federal and state regulations. Anonymity was ensured as pseudonyms were used throughout the inquiry and reporting of data collected. All data collected has been stored electronically on a password-protected external hard drive in my home office under lock and key only accessible by me. All hard copy documents are stored in a locked filing cabinet only accessible by me.

According to the USF IRB policy, an initial informed consent from each participant was obtained once it was explained that they may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any point without consequence. Parents were informed their participation would not impact the assessment or educational program of their child. I personally hand-delivered each volunteer participant their own hard copy of the informed consent used to submit to the USF IRB prior to the interview and data collection. My contact information was provided in the event any questions or concerns arose at any point in the research process and each participant was advised of their freedom to withdraw consent at any time. The documents required as elements of recruitment and informed consent comply with the USF Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) policy manual as part of the IRB process. (Appendix I)

**Informed Consent**

According to the USF IRB, “An individual’s voluntary agreement, based upon adequate knowledge and understanding of relevant information and the potential risks and benefits to participate in research or to undergo a diagnostic, therapeutic, or preventive procedure. Informed consent is an ongoing process throughout the duration of the research; the IRB approved consent form document is the written record that contains information communicated to the participant

**Research Design**

In the research design, my data collection process included multiple interconnected qualitative data sources to address the research question. The research design embraced an iterative process through face-to-face semi-structured interviews, an online focus group, and a research journal to record my reflections of the inquiry process. (See Figure 1) Throughout the research process, consistent reference to the primary research question and protocols was important to maintain the integrity of inquiry. Collecting data by each of these methods supported research efforts in capturing authentic parent experiences of children with multiple disabilities in the FSAA process and the criteria for their child’s participation.

**Figure 1**
*Research Design*

It was important for me to understand the lived experiences of the parents as I embraced a phenomenological approach to holistically solicit implicit meaning in the inquiry process (Finlay, 2012). It was vital to the qualitative inquiry process that I maintained a reflexive mindset throughout the inquiry and that I journal my ongoing reflections throughout the data collection process. Further, it was important that I utilized a practical iterative framework (Srivastava, 2010), which I achieved through reflections after each interview. I reflected on connections made
with parent responses through the lens of a teacher and researcher. For example, after the first interview, I recorded the following reflection:

This was an interesting experience. I was so excited and nervous to do this interview. The parent had always shared her struggles with her English as her primary language is Hungarian. She was hesitant to answer questions at first. I felt like I was back in the classroom when I was her daughter’s teacher reassuring that her English was good and her input is so vital to this research. (Research Journal Entry on 3/20/2020)

Data Collection

Interview Protocol

The development of the interview protocol for this inquiry was based on an Interview Protocol Refinement Framework (IPRF) process (Castillo-Montonya, 2016).

The IPRF process according to Castillo-Montonya in 2016 includes the following four phases:

- Phase 1: Ensuring interview questions align with research question
- Phase 2: Constructing an inquiry-based conversation,
- Phase 3: Receiving feedback on interview protocols
- Phase 4: Piloting the interview protocol. (p. 812)

In this line of inquiry, it was important to pay attention to Phase 2, constructing an inquiry-based conversation. To accomplish an inquiry-based conversation I was sure to:

a) construct open-ended interview questions structured to solicit meaningful responses to avoid yes or no answers; and, b) follow social rules of natural conversation. For example, the parents in this study have shared experiences as parents of children with multiple disabilities participating in the Florida State Alternate Assessment. In 2016, Castillo-
Montoya recommend utilizing the use a variety of questions and to follow a script with likely follow-up and prompt questions. (p. 813)

See Table 1 for an illustration of how the interview questions align with the research question.

Table 1
Correspondence of Research Question to Interview Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Interview Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| How do parents of children with multiple disabilities talk about their involvement in their child’s participation in the Florida State Alternate Assessment? | ● Describe to me your involvement in your child’s participation in the FSAA.  
● Talk about which type of FSAA format your child participates in.  
● Talk about the differences between the FSAA-Performance Task and FSAA-Datafolio. |
| Follow-Up Prompts:                                                               | ● How would you like your involvement to be in your child’s participation in the FASS in the future?  
● What successes or challenges have you seen emerge from your child’s identification for the FSAA? |

Semi-Structured Interview

Semi-structured interviews provided insight into parent perspectives of their understanding of the alternate assessment process relative to their child’s experience (Rowley, 2012). Semi-structured interviews were important in capturing the perspective of parents of children with multiple disabilities in how they make meaning of their experiences with the FSAA. Sarah J. Tracy (2013) “compares qualitative interviews to wearing “night-vision goggles” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. vii) because interviews enable the researcher to stumble upon and further explore complex phenomena that may otherwise be hidden or unseen” (p. 132). Just like
night-vision goggles consume the light to amplify images in the dark, semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to look beyond their own experiences to understand perspectives. Tracy asserts that interviews provide a forum for open dialogue for the parents to speak to “get to heart of the matter” of a specific topic (2005, p. 133). In the magical process of collecting data through semi-structured interviews, I experienced the “night-vision goggles” effect as unexpected viewpoints were holistically unveiled.

**Unique Challenges**

A unique circumstance impacting the interview process was the world-wide Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. In accordance with Florida Governor DeSantis’ recommendations during the pandemic, it was necessary for me to follow proper social distancing rules of maintaining a minimum six-foot distance in an open-air space, while conducting the face-to-face interviews in accordance with the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendation.

Social distancing, also called “physical distancing,” means keeping space between yourself and other people outside of your home. To practice social or physical distancing: stay at least 6 feet (about 2 arms’ length) from other people, do not gather in groups, stay out of crowded places and avoid mass gatherings. (cdc.gov, 2019)

Further, it was important that I respect parents who chose to exercise self-quarantine practices and social distancing rules applied according to the Center for Disease Control (CDC) as described below:

WHEREAS, the CDC currently recommends mitigation measures for communities experiencing an outbreak including staying at home when sick, keeping away from others who are sick, limiting face-to-face contact with others as much as possible, consulting
with your healthcare provider if individuals or members of a household are at high risk for COVID-19 complications, wearing a facemask if advised to do so by a healthcare provider or by a public health official, staying home when a household member is sick with respiratory disease symptoms if instructed to do so by public health officials or a health care provider. (flgov.com-executive-orders, 2020)

The interviews for five parents took place outside their homes. Per the request of one parent, the interview took place at a public park. Interviews were not without interruption by sounds of lawn mowers in the background, dogs barking in the neighborhood, cars passing by, and the occasional need to pause the interview due to noise from the general public in the area.

Each participant was given additional opportunities to withdraw from the inquiry should they have any concern about the spread of the virus. I used an interview protocol (Appendix E) to ensure focus on the primary research of how parents of children with multiple disabilities talk about their involvement in their child’s participation in the Florida State Alternate Assessment. Two recording devices were used to ensure back-up evidence for the transcription and additional verification for validity. Upon completion of transcription, parents were given an opportunity to member check their respective transcription for accuracy within a two-week time frame.

**Member Checking**

The intentions were to honor the parents’ participation in the study by performing a member check to affirm interview transcription was accurately translated. Upon completion of the interviews and transcription, I provided each parent a copy of their transcribed interview via the private Parent Perspectives on Florida Alternate Assessment messenger as an attached document. Parents were asked to review their respective transcripts for accuracy in a two-week
time frame. On April 2, 2020, I posted the following to the private Parent Perspectives on Florida Alternate Assessment group:

THANK YOU!!!! To all the participants, I am SO grateful to you for allowing me to have the awesome opportunity of capturing your authentic experiences of your child's participation in the FSAA. Your transparency has made my research process magical. So what's next....Once all the interviews are transcribed, I will send each of you a copy of your interview for member checking, which means to check for accuracy. Next, I will schedule an online Focus group through Zoom, where we will openly discuss similar questions and you will all have an opportunity to share your experiences. As you have read in the consent form, all names and recordings are anonymous, and confidentiality is of my utmost priority. Again, I am incredibly grateful to have worked with your children and for this chance to give your voices a platform through my doctoral dissertation! Chat soon!

All six parents returned feedback within five days and edits were made accordingly. No additional member checking for interviews was requested.

**Focus Group Protocol**

The use of a focus group protocol was based on the desire to ensure the parents “feel comfortable, respected, and free to give their opinions without being judged” (Krueger, 2014, p. 46). Included in the protocol (Appendix G) parents were asked to give verbal consent to record the focus group and agree to maintain privacy during the session. All parents were asked to maintain confidentiality to be established through signature of a non-disclosure form (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2013). Parents were asked to use respectful language and allow each
person to have ample time to speak uninterrupted for purposes of clear audio recording and transcription. To ensure consistency in the data collection, questions included in the focus group protocol were similar to that of the interview questions. See Table 2 for an illustration of how the focus group questions align with the research question.

Table 2

Correspondence of Research Question to Focus Group Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Focus Group Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| How do parents of children with multiple disabilities talk about their involvement in their child’s participation in the Florida State Alternate Assessment? | ● Talk more about your involvement in your child’s participation in the FSAA.  
● Talk more about which type of FSAA format your child participates in.  
● Talk more about the differences between the FSAA-Performance Task and FSAA-Datafolio. |

**Online Focus Group**

Online focus groups offer additional opportunities for the parents and researcher to engage in meaningful conversation during focus group discussions (Stewart & Shamdasni, 2015). Focus groups enhance the ability to solicit real-time responses, which offer the benefit of authentic data collection. (Stewart & Shamdasni, 2015) Stewart and Shamdasni offer an interesting discussion revealing some of the benefits of using focus groups. In their perspective, the researcher is positioned in a “one-way mirror” observatory role as parents shared first-hand experiences.

Further, an online focus group discussion enables all parents and the researcher to engage in open dialogue about the inquiry topic. “Focus group methodology is a key research approach where interpretive, political and pedagogical inquires and interanimate” (Liamputtong, 2011, p. 16). The discussion of parent perspectives of children with multiple disabilities in their
participation in the FSAA amongst a group of parents created an opportunity for shared experiences to be expressed. As parents described their understanding of the alternate assessment process, additional details were revealed that were not otherwise covered in the semi-structured interviews (Liampittong, 2011). As described in Chapter One, it was important to ensure explicit reflexivity throughout the inquiry process. This was achieved through the online focus group session as it ensured a natural emergence of common patterns, themes, and categories from participant discussions (Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009), which I describe in the coding process.

I chose to use Zoom (Zoom.us, 2020), as the online platform for the focus group because it is an approved online meeting platform by USF. Parents were asked to provide dates and times of availability for the focus group through the private Parent Perspectives on Florida Alternate Assessment group. I posted the following Facebook announcement to the private Parent Perspectives on Florida State Alternate Assessment group, inviting the parents to a focus group Zoom (Zoom.us, 2020) session.

“Hello wonderful parents! I would like to schedule the online Zoom focus group for this week! Please respond to this post with your available date and time. Thank you!”

Once I received acknowledgement by every parent, the focus group was scheduled for May 15, 2020 at 7 PM Eastern Time. I provided a Zoom link for the online focus group session through the Parent Perspectives on Florida Alternate Assessment messenger (Facebook, 2020).

In the beginning of the focus group session, I reviewed the Informed Consent (Appendix I) and reminded parents they may withdraw from the research at any point. I requested all parents give verbal consent to keep the session private and asked that all input be shared with respect and consideration that each parent brings to the discourse their own perspective. Further, I requested all parents provide verbal consent for me to record the session through Zoom (Zoom
Focus Group, 2020) and two additional digital recording devices to ensure reliability. The focus group lasted for one hour and five minutes. To maintain focus of the research topic and elicit rich discussion, I facilitated the session with the focus group questions and the semi-structured interview probes. (Appendix H) Throughout the data collection process and my interpretation of participant understandings, it was important that I maintained my role as a reflective member of the focus group session as the facilitator. It was important that my professional experience, as a special education teacher and personal knowledge as a parent of a child with learning disabilities that I remove any personal bias during the discourse.

Transcription was performed through the Trint software (Trint Ltd. 2020) and reviewed by me prior to submitting to parents for member checking. I allowed several days to lapse before reviewing the transcribed focus group. Once I reviewed the transcript, I provided the parents a copy of the transcription as a document attachment through the private Parent Perspectives on Florida Alternate Assessment group messenger with an announcement.

“Good afternoon parents! I want to thank you again for participating in my research. I will be uploading a copy of the transcribed focus group session, for your review and feedback, into the messenger. If you have any changes you would like made, I will need your feedback within the next two weeks. If you have no recommended edits, I would appreciate a message to say, "no changes." Thank you!!!!”

Parents were given a period of two-weeks to review the transcription and provide feedback to ensure validity of the data collected during the online focus group discussion. No changes were requested. Each phase of the data collection was reflected in my research journal.
Research Journal

As a developing scholar, I believe it vital to my understanding of the research process to have ongoing reflection, which I chose to maintain through a research journal during my inquiry. It was important that I use my 16 years of experience as a special education teacher to reflect on my understandings of FSAA and IEP processes when collecting data. The decision to use a research journal was based on a desire to ensure self-orientation and self-analysis throughout the research process (Bashan & Holsbat, 2017). The process of researcher reflection through written expression, such as recording thoughts in a journal, supports critical thinking of one’s own understanding of the lived experiences of others (Moon, 2004). A research journal provides meaningful reflection to consider the data collection and process of analysis more thoroughly. A research journal encourages the researcher to maintain a running record of personal thoughts while ensuring observations are documented in a methodical manner (Lamb, 2013). I reflected in my journal after each phase of the data collection process.

A research journal ensured that I maintained an open-minded perspective in the data collection process. To ensure my intentions of the study and findings would be transparent to the participants, I continuously searched for internal and external validity in my effort to contribute to the existing body of knowledge (Petty, et al, 2012). I acknowledged the significance of recording my reflections after each phase of the data collection to ensure an accurate depiction of the natural flow of thoughts that occurred from the parents. For example, I recorded a reflection after each Facebook entry, each interview, and each communication to my committee regarding the progress of my research. The research journal served as a significant tool in my data analysis, as it provided a space to visually connect parent responses to my primary research question and my background knowledge as a teacher. I considered the use of a paper-bound journal before the
data collection began. I quickly recognized my comfort with recording my thoughts rested in technology; therefore, I created a running document on my password-protected personal laptop to record my reflections throughout the data collection process.

To ensure I maintained an iterative inquiry, I continuously returned to the purpose of the study to explore how parents of children with multiple disabilities talk about their child’s participation in the Florida State Alternate Assessment (FSAA). It was important that I record the parent perspectives of the FSAA-Performance Task and FSAA-Data folio and their understanding of the criteria used to determine eligibility for participation in the FSAA. I reflected how parents talked about their role in preparing their child for participation in the FSAA and any impact participation had on their child. In my research journal, I recorded categories, which emerged after each phase of data collection. Categories were identified based on the interview protocol and semi-structured interview questions developed to answer the primary research question of how parents of children with multiple disabilities understand their child’s participation in the FSAA.

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis was performed through a coding process using the constant-comparison qualitative research methodology (Fram, 2013). Procedures outlined in Johnny Saldana’s (2015) *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* were followed. Saldana refers to codifying and categorizing of data to arrange data in a systematic order for classification and categorizing into “families.”

**Constant Comparison Coding**

In this qualitative inquiry, I used the constant comparison method to analyze data collected from the semi-structured interviews and the focus group discussion. Constant
comparison (Kolb, 2012) data analysis was utilized to identify common themes from the parent perspectives of children with multiple disabilities in formal statewide alternate assessments and their understanding of distinct differences between the FSAA-Performance Task and FSAA-Datafolio. The constant comparative method “combines systematic data collection, coding, and analysis with theoretical sampling in order to generate theory that is integrated, close to the data, and expressed in a form clear enough for further testing” (Kolb, 2012, p. 83) Constant comparison afforded me the ability to collect data, identify common themes, and perform theoretical analysis through multiple coding phases.

“Coding is a process in which data is categorized by themes and can be organized in a variety of manners, for example, by research question” (Stake, 2010, p. 32). It is rare that a researcher completes coding correctly in the first cycle of coding (Saldana, 2015, 212). For this reason, a second cycle of focused coding was employed in which codes were removed, combined or separated into previously determined categories (Nyumba, et al., 2017). Throughout both levels of coding, it was imperative to keep a codebook in a separate file (Saldana, 2015).

Coding took place after each phase of data collection until final themes emerged to answer the question of how parents of children with multiple disabilities understand their child’s participation in the FSAA. To initiate the coding process, I first downloaded each transcribed file into the software. My next step required a detailed search for common phrases in each transcribed interview and focus group file. I highlighted the common phrases, then ran a search in the software to create a coded file, which was how I arrived at the number of occurrences. Three cycles of coding were performed to identify overarching themes. During cycle one, I compared codes based on participant responses to the interview questions and follow-up prompts. Twenty-four themes were identified in total, which I will discuss in my findings in
Chapter Four. In cycle two of coding, I compared codes sorted into categories to locate patterns of frequency, sequence, similarity, and difference, which would eventually become the overarching themes. Codes not directly associated with the purpose of this inquiry were removed. All remaining codes were sorted into the nine overarching themes: In cycle three, I based the coding on how it related to my methodological and theoretical framework. Through an interpretivist lens, it was important to ensure the coding maintained a level of validity and analytical clarity through rigor and thoroughness to align with the identified categories. Categories aligned to the primary research question and phrases from the semi-structured interview probe to identify themes.

The search phrases include:

- Understanding of the Florida State Alternate Assessment.
- Criteria for making the determination of a participation in the FSAA.
- Agree or disagree with the way students are considered eligible for the FSAA?
- Role do you play in your child’s participation in the FSAA.
- Feel supported by the school.
- Involvement in your child’s participation in the FSAA.
- Type of FSAA format your child participates in.
- Successes or challenges.

After each phase of the coding process, I reflected in my research journal to ensure I held myself accountable to the primary research question and purpose of the study. It was vital to the data analysis that I ensured my coding process was reliable, valid, and transparent. I accomplished this by consistently returning to a reflexive mindset after each stage of the coding. For example, it was important that I made connections between my experience of teaching
students with multiple disabilities and parent responses. I achieved this by creating a separate coding document for all three cycles to ensure transparency when identifying overlapping themes and sorting into categories (Saldana, 2015). Upon engaging in the actual data analysis process, I determined it was best to record the categories in my research journal to ensure consistency with my research question and ongoing reflections. I had originally planned to record categories and sort data in a spreadsheet. I discovered the process of categorizing data and identifying emerging themes was more efficient in MaxQDA (2020).

**Validity**

In the analysis process it was important that I, as the researcher, reflected on the data to ensure accurate interpretation and validity. The credibility of my research exhibited trustworthiness as evidenced through my ability to maintain a clear and transparent intent throughout the inquiry process. I recognized the multiple perspectives and acknowledged varying points of view without personal bias. Throughout the inquiry, it was important that I avoid generalizations and that I accurately presented the findings as verified through member checking (Noble & Smith, 2015). I continuously returned to the guiding questions, which aligned with the inquiry-based research question constructed to maintain focus, when reflecting during analysis phase and reflect in my research journal.

**Research Timeline**

My research timeline is reflected in Table 3. I organized my timeline into three levels of data collection, data analysis, and presentation of results and discussion to the committee. I recruited the parents using a privately accessed Facebook platform outlining the purpose of the research and eligibility requirements. Once I determined the parents met the criteria for participation in the inquiry, I provided each participant a copy of the interview protocol and
informed consent to be reviewed, signed, and stored in my home office locked cabinet accessible only by me. In Level one, I conducted individual semi-structured interviews with a minimum of six parent parents selected from the online recruitment process. In Level Two of data collection, I transcribed the recorded interviews and submitted to the parents for member checking. In Level Three of data collection, I hosted an online focus group session for one hour and five minutes. In the final stages of research engagement, I conducted a thorough data analysis and prepared my findings for a results and discussion session with the committee to occur in Spring 2020.

Table 3

*Research Timeline*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Timeline</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IRB Anticipated Approval Period</td>
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<tr>
<td>November 2019 – January 2020</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pilot Interview Questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Recruitment</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 2020</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level One Data Collection - Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 2020 – February 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level Two Data Collection – Transcription and Member Check</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 2020 – March 2020</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3 (Continued)

Research Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Timeline</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level Three Data Collection – Online Focus Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Results and Discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2020</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summary

In this chapter, I included my philosophical and theoretical foundations used for this inquiry. I provided the questions used for the pilot interview and individual semi-structured interviews. Further, I explained the inclusion criteria for parents to participate in this study and outline the research design for data collection. Also, included in Chapter Three was a brief discussion of the unique challenge with engaging in human research during a world-wide pandemic, which I explain further in Chapter Four.
Chapter Four: Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine how parents of children with multiple disabilities understood their child’s participation in the Florida State Alternate Assessment (FSAA) FSAA-Performance Task and FSAA-Datafolio. Throughout this study, the perspective of parents of children with multiple disabilities and their child’s participation in formal alternate assessment as part of the IEP were examined.

In this chapter, I present the findings of the study that resulted from analysis of the data through constant comparison coding in search of common themes across both the interviews and focus group. The findings are presented through nine themes identified based on the primary research question. These themes include; Parent Understanding of FSAA, Parent Perspectives on Assessment Equity, Parent Understanding of FSAA Format, Parent Involvement, IEP Decision FSAA Participation, Parent Role in Assessment Participation, Impact of FSAA Participation, Appropriateness of Assessment, and Parents Disagree with FSAA.

Cycle One – Identifying Themes

The findings of cycle one of the constant comparison coding process resulted in a total of twenty-four codes based on the categories derived from the interview questions and probes. In Figure 2, a display of the twenty-four codes is represented with the number of occurrences to the right of each code.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Occurrences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Parent Perspective – Equity</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>School Accountability</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Assessment Requirements</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2

Cycle One Codes
Figure 2 (Continued)

*Cycle One Codes*

As I considered the iterative process in the cycles of coding, I wondered if my coding would be inductive or deductive. Throughout the coding process, I came to recognize there was a blend of inductive and deductive reasoning in my approach. In the initial phase of coding, I began with an inductive approach, as I used my prior knowledge to seek patterns and regularities in experiences among the parent interviews and focus group. In a natural progression through
cycle two and three, I moved to a more deductive approach as I returned to the research question driving this inquiry. I found it vital to the integrity of this inquiry that I continuously reminded myself to be honest and transparent with my reflections. It was important that I recorded each phase of the coding process in my research journal to ensure my coding was reliable and valid. For example, after coding cycle one I reflected:

As I delve deeper into the coding process I’m feeling a bit confused and overwhelmed so I emailed my major professor to request support. We will have a zoom session tomorrow so for now I’m watching tutorials to guide me in the process of understanding coding.

One particular video describes the coding process in cycles, which resonates with me and aligns with my proposal. (Research Journal Entry on 4/27/2020)

It was at this point in the data collection, that I began to recognize the significance of maintaining a research journal. The reflective process was much like having a conversation with a colleague where you would share ideas and challenges and discuss solutions. This process encouraged the research process to continue flowing and offered a way to avoid hidden barriers.

**Cycle Two – Finding Patterns and Similarities**

The findings in cycle two resulted from patterns and similarities identified through the emerged themes in cycle one based on the interview questions and probes. Through MaxQDA (2020), I created a coding map of the overarching themes with the number of occurrences in parenthesis. The number of occurrences indicate how many times the theme was coded in the data collected from the interviews and focus group session. This was important to the coding process as the interview questions helped determine the identified themes. (See Figure 3)
Cycle Three – Findings from Emerged Themes

The findings of cycle three resulted from parent comments sorted by the emerged themes. In the next section, I discuss the findings from the themes as described through parent reflections from data collected through interviews and the focus group.

Parent Understanding of FSAA

The parents in this study revealed their understandings of the FSAA and the criteria required for determination of FSAA format for their child’s participation. In the following sections, the findings are described according to the emerged themes collected from parent interviews and an online focus group session. Parents of children with multiple disabilities talk about their impressions of assessment equity and the impact they believe participation in the FSAA has on their child. They talk about their involvement in their child’s participation in the Florida State Alternate Assessment through their lived experiences.
Parent Perspective of Assessment Equity

The parents in this study believe the curricular content on standardized formal assessments is not an equitable measurement of their children’s abilities. Parents Two and Three spoke to the need for children with multiple disabilities to be treated equally and perhaps their participation in formal assessments ensures both equal educational opportunities and accountability. For example, Parent Two indicated she believes her child’s participation in formal assessments ensures she is receiving an equal education and there is accountability relative to children with special needs participating in formal assessment. She shared, “I think every child deserves equal treatment” (Parent Two, Interviewed on March 21, 2020). Her understanding is all children must participate in the state formal assessments to receive a diploma. Parent Three had a similar perspective as she states, “I mean, not that they get a great job, but they can do other things, you know, and it shows that they actually graduated, and it makes them feel special. Makes them feel equal” (Parent Three, Interviewed on March 23, 2020). Parent One shared a different perspective as she talks about the format of the assessment. She shares, “They are not supposed to be just universal, especially to be told everybody does the same thing but they have many different disabilities and they can do different things, you know” (Parent One, Interviewed on March 20, 2020). Parent responses on equity were often paired with discussion of test appropriateness. It is possible the parents have a different perception of equity.

Parent Understanding FSAA Formats

Parents appear to understand that the FSAA serves to allow children with multiple disabilities to participate in an alternate assessment. One out of the six parents interviewed was aware of the two formats of FSAA; Performance Task and Datafolio. Parent Six shares how she opted to have her child participate in the Datafolio after a one-year exemption in the previous
year. Her position on formal assessments is one that the FSAA, in its current format, is inappropriate for her child’s ability and significantly low cognitive level. She states, “My child is 17 at toddler mentality” (Parent Six, Interviewed on April 20, 2020). Based on their responses, the remaining five parents had no knowledge or understanding of the two formats of the FSAA. Responses included: “I had no idea” (Parent Four, Interviewed on March 24, 2020), “Mine is Braille” (Parent Three, Interviewed on March 23, 2020) “Oh, I don't know much about it” (Parent One, Interviewed on March 20, 2020), “No, I didn't know it was two different kinds,” (Parent Two, Interviewed on March 21, 2020), and “I think he takes the one where she says she's helping him with the pictures and whatnot” (Parent Five, Interviewed on March 31, 2020).

Parent responses about FSAA formats affirmed my suspicions in this inquiry. Based upon my teaching experience, parents were not informed of the two formats of FSAA prior to or during the IEP meeting. I found this concerning as parent involvement in all decisions made for their child’s education and assessment participation must be part of the development of an IEP as parents are stakeholders of the IEP team.

**Parent Involvement**

The findings indicate parent involvement in decisions made for their child’s participation in the FSAA are limited. Parent One indicated her experience was limited due to a lack of understanding of the FSAA and IEP process. When asked about her involvement she responded, “I just don't understand what type, what is the test? Like what they do.” (Parent One, Interviewed on March 20, 2020). Parent Three indicated a trust in the teachers to be the expert and make decisions in her child’s best interest as she shares, “I would think that the teacher would know if the child was qualified or not because on how well they participate in class and how well they are knowledgeable. And I would think that it would be a teacher's understanding on where they were if they were eligible or not from based on what they do in class in their
work” (Parent Three, Interviewed on March 23, 2020). Parent Four shares, “I would say the involvement is limited to signing on her IEP that she's taking, acknowledging that she's taking it. Beyond that, there's not a whole lot of talk or information or, you know, outside of complaining” (Parent Four, Interviewed on March 24, 2020). How parents of children with multiple disabilities described their involvement in their child’s participation in the FSAA continued to affirm my understandings. I was not surprised that parents were unaware of the differences between the FSAA-Performance Task and FSAA–Datafolio formats. In my experience, the decision for assessment participation was often made by school staff prior to the IEP meeting.

The parents are responding in such a way that I am not surprised there is little knowledge of the IEP and decisions made. (Research Journal Entry, March 31, 2020)

Assessment Decisions Made in IEP Meetings

The topic of participation in the FSAA, as part of the IEP meeting, was not specifically framed as an interview question, as I was not examining the IEP process. My intent was to inquire to what extent parents were aware of the decision made for FSAA participation as part of the IEP meeting. The findings indicate, that five of the six parents interviewed possessed limited understanding of the decision for assessment participation made during the IEP meeting. Parent Two states, “It’s not really talked about that much. We usually talk more about her participation in the classroom. I know it's academic. They need their academics. But I don't really, I didn’t really have a role in that part of it” (Parent Two, Interviewed on March 21, 2020) Parent Five shared a similar experience, “You know, I don't think during an IEP that I have had, we have ever really had a discussion about this. I don't recall ever being asked if I want my child to participate one way or another” (Parent Five, Interviewed on March 31, 2020). Only one parent had knowledge of the portion of the IEP where it is decided which format of the FSAA a child
participates; FSAA-Performance Task or FSAA-Datafolio. For example, Parent Six states, “on the IEP, we did get to choose between the Datafolio or that other format, or maybe I was one of the only ones to ask because I was adamant about pushing for it” (Parent Six, Interviewed April 20, 2020). Five out of the six parents interviewed indicated they believed the determination of criteria for FSAA participation was the responsibility of the teacher, school, or government and their input was not recognized. In my sixteen years attending IEP meetings, I struggled to recall discussion of assessment decisions with parents. Often times parents were informed of the assessment decision made and asked to agree or disagree at the IEP meetings. Again, my suspicions were confirmed that parents had minimal experience in decisions made for FSAA participation.

**Parent Role in Preparing Their Child for Assessment Participation**

The findings reveal that parents understand their role in preparing their child for participation in the FSAA to be limited. For example, Parent Three shares, “I mean, I feel that I try my best. I'm winging it but I do feel like the vision teacher that does all of her tutoring with her really knows where her strengths are and what to focus on only because she does see her twice a week and knows the, like where she's at” (Parent Three, Interviewed on March 23, 2020). When asked about her role, Parent Two shares, “I wouldn’t say I feel good or bad about it, I’m somewhere in the middle. It is what it is. She had to take this test. And there's not much more I can do but talk to her. So, I don’t know” (Parent Two, Interviewed on March 21, 2020). Parent Four shares; “I have zero role I don't do anything to prepare her. I don't know what I could possibly do to prepare her for” (Parent Four, Interviewed on March 24, 2020).

At this point, it is clear most of the parents do not know about the FSAA formats and have little understanding of the role they should play. I wondered if the lack of
understanding of the FSAA resulted in parents indicating they had a minimal role in preparing their child for participation. (Research Journal Entry, March 26, 2020)

Impact of FSAA Participation

The findings indicate that some of the parents discussed the negative impact participation in the FSAA has on their children and the children remaining in the classroom during periods of testing. For example, Parent Five shared how the teacher reports students acted stressed after sitting for forty-five-minute test sessions to test. “Yeah, I would say it's more challenging to be him being stressed out during class for no reason” (Parent Five, Interviewed on March 31, 2020).

As described by the parents and through my own teaching experience, teachers typically take students to a quiet area, void of any distractions, to administer the FSAA. Parent Five shares concern for the students who remain in the classroom, under the supervision of aides, when the teacher and individual students leave for testing. For example, she says according to her understanding, “there's not a whole lot going on because teachers are stressed out because they're being brought from the classroom to one on one to test with these kids. So, what does everybody else do during that time? It's like free for all” (Parent Five, Interviewed on March 31, 2020).

The findings reveal that not all parents feel supported by the school. When parents were asked if they feel supported by the school within their role in determining their child’s participation in the FSAA, Parent Three responds, “I felt very supported by my teachers. The teachers were excellent. I didn't write the IEP. They wrote the IEP” (Parent Three, Focus Group on April 15, 2020). Parent Five shares, “I've always felt supported by the teachers” (Parent Five, Focus Group on April 15, 2020). Parent Two offered a different perspective on feeling supported by the school. Parent Two described an instance when her daughter was moved to a different classroom, which she believed to be based on testing requirements. She states, “she was
in a wonderful classroom and she was being taken care of and I felt comfortable having her there. And then this new principal came, and they pulled her out and put her in a high school classroom” (Parent Two, Focus Group on April 15, 2020). The parent explains how this end-of-year change caused both Parent Two and her daughter significant stress. During the focus group, the parents arrived at the consensus that their children were moved to an on grade-level classrooms, possibly to accommodate assessment needs. No additional input was offered on the topic of classroom movement.

The way parents talked about the impact of their child’s participation in the FSAA was most significant as parents revealed strong emotions in their understandings. While these parents appeared uninformed on the FSAA, they were certainly the experts on their children. How parents described the physical and emotional stress caused by assessment participation had the greatest impact on my understanding. As a teacher who administered the FSAA to four of the six children, I witnessed increased fatigue and seizure activity during testing sessions. I experienced guilt and concern for these children and parents. As I reflected on the interpretation of my findings, I recognized the true purpose of this study. I wondered if the findings would reach policy makers as they made decisions to include children with multiple disabilities in standardized assessments. Further, I wondered if educators could improve their communication with parents and become stronger advocates for individualized assessments for these children.

Parents Question Appropriateness of Assessment

The findings show parents find the appropriateness of formal assessments of their children with multiple disabilities to be questionable. When asked if they agree or disagree with the FSAA, parent responses indicate they believe the content of state assessments is structured well above the cognitive level of their children. For example, Parent Six states, “In math, it is
totally inappropriate to even ask a child that has a toddler mental age, to understand Algebra. I believe the IEP is a more accurate assessment of all aspects of learning at school” (Parent Six, Focus Group on April 15, 2020). A shared concern was the relevancy of their children being assessed on grade-level concepts when their children function at an average cognitive level of a toddler to grade two or three. Parent five talks about the grade-level content on the FSAA as she shares, “I think it's the most ridiculous thing ever and it is not a fair test for a child that has severe disabilities” (Parent Five, Focus Group on April 15, 2020). While I believe that all children with varying abilities need to participate in some type of formal assessment, I agree with the parents that individualized assessments are appropriate for children with multiple disabilities. In my experience with the FSAA-Datafolio, the collection of student performance over the entirety of a school year captured a more authentic picture of student progress.

Parents Disagree with FSAA

Parents talked about their understanding with their child’s participation in the FSAA from a position of minimal support. When asked during the focus group if they agreed or disagreed with the way students are considered eligible for the FSAA, parents stated, “I think I disagree,” (Parent One, Interviewed on March 20, 2020) or “I disagree with them even testing our children. It doesn't test for anything” (Parent Six, Focus Group on April 15, 2020). Parent Six talks about the need for FSAA to be a matter of accountability for teachers as she states, “so the test is supposed to see to make sure that teachers are teaching from the children or absorbing it” (Parent Six, Interviewed on April 20, 2020). Parents in this study again surprised me with their responses. In my experience with four of the six parents, I always felt supported to educate and administer the FSAA to their children, but I never realized the parents did not agree with the assessment.
Summary

The findings of this study reflect the perspectives and experiences of six parents of children with multiple disabilities in the participation of the FSAA. The findings indicate parents of children with multiple disabilities participating in the FSAA have a vague understanding of the assessment format, participation criteria, and their role in the IEP process as it pertains to FSAA eligibility. Parents most frequently referred to the assessment as an inappropriate assessment for their children who function far below the grade level for which they were being assessed. Parent views of the FSAA revealed a significant lack of understanding of the two formats, the criteria for participation, and their role in the decisions made during the IEP meeting. Parents in this study were completely against the FSAA due to its irrelevant nature of assessing children with multiple disabilities. In other cases, parents indicated that as long as the assessment did not cause harm to their child, they accepted testing. When asked to talk about their involvement in their child’s participation in the FSAA, the parent responses were concerning. In response to questions about the different types of FSAA, parents had no knowledge of the various assessment formats, or how decisions were made for assessment participation. Examining this relationship between the data collected from parent responses to the successes and challenges parents have seen emerge from their child’s identification for the FSAA suggests increased parental involvement in the IEP meeting is needed.
Chapter Five: Discussion

In this chapter, the findings and limitations of the study are discussed and connected to existing research regarding parents’ perspectives of their understanding of their child’s participation in standardized formal assessments.

Six parents of children with multiple disabilities participated in this study. Parent perspectives on their child’s participation in the Florida State Alternate Assessment (FSAA) were collected through individual interviews and a focus group discussion. Throughout the data collection process, a research journal was used to support my reflection and interpretation of parent perspectives of the FSAA as they described their understanding of their child’s participation in the FSAA.

Themes Discussed

The parent responses collected from the semi-structured interviews and an online focus group session are summarized in each of the themes that emerged:

- Parent Understanding of FSAA – Parents reveal their understanding of the FSAA participation criteria and formats as limited.
- Parent Perspective of Assessment Equity – Parents report feeling the FSAA to lack equity in curricular content that matches their child’s ability to learn.
- Parent Understanding FSAA Formats – Parents understand the state requires their children to participate in formal assessments, but indicated they were unaware of the FSAA formats (FSAA-Performance and FSAA-Datafolio).
• Parent Involvement – Parents indicated their involvement during the IEP meeting to be limited to listening to goals and determinations made by the school prior to the meeting.

• Assessment Decisions Made in IEP Meetings – Parents revealed minimal involvement in the decisions made during the IEP meeting for their child’s participation in the FSAA.

• Parent Role in Preparing Their Child for Assessment Participation – Parents reported they had no role and that they relied on the teachers to prepare their children for assessment participation.

• Impact of FSAA Participation – Parents revealed the impact of FSAA participation on their children through concerns of an increase in fatigue, frustration, and seizure activity during testing periods.

• Parents Question Appropriateness of Assessment – Parents reported feeling the curricular content on the FSAA to be inappropriate for their children as it is on grade-level and their children are not.

• Parents Disagree with FSAA – Parents reported they disagree with use of the current format of the FSAA as it does not accurately measure their children’s knowledge.

**Parent Understanding of FSAA**

This inquiry was inspired by my own perspective on formally assessing students with significant cognitive disabilities and physical challenges. In this study, I sought to understand parent perspectives of children with multiple disabilities in their child’s participation in standardized formal assessments with a specific focus on the FSAA. I was adamant to affirm my
suspicions that parents were not thoroughly informed of the multiple formats of the FSAA or of their rights to make decisions on their child’s IEP. After 17 years teaching in special education, I wondered what parents understood about their child’s education, particularly what role formal assessments played in their child’s education. In this inquiry, I learned that the parents in this study desired their children with multiple disabilities to improve their communication skills and to learn independent functioning skills. In their view, the parents did not consider standardized formal assessments to be an appropriate measure of their child’s ability to learn. In their understanding, the parents believed that children with multiple disabilities would benefit more from individualized assessments that measure progress towards meeting individual goals.

**Parent Perspectives on Assessment Equity**

I interpreted parents’ perspective of assessment equity as a matter of fairness in testing. I wondered if parents were trying to say the FSAA was not a fair assessment of their children’s abilities. Davis (2010) made an excellent point when he talked about the need for equity for all students to be assessed using standardized methods to ensure reasonably comparable results. The requirement by the United States federal government (IDEA, 2004, Sec. 300.160 (a)) for all students to participate in standardized formal assessments has been addressed, thus addressing the matter of equity. Baker et al. asserts that “equity is a relationship, of some kind or other, between two or more people or groups of people, regarding some aspect of those people’s lives” (Baker et al., p. 20, 2016)

The parents in this study believe the standardized format of the FSAA is a “one-size fits all approach” (Parent Six, Focus Group on April 15, 2020) to assessment, thus not addressing the individual needs of children with multiple disabilities. Parents reported they would like to see the FSAA measure their child’s progress in a more individualized manner. Ayres, et al (2012) asserts parents would like to see education for children with severe disabilities to focus more on
independent functioning skills in place of “higher level academic skills” (p.11). I always found it interesting that children with disabilities have an IEP to ensure their individual education needs are met and then are assessed by a standard measurement tool such as a state-developed alternate assessment.

As I considered the parent perspectives through the lens of a special education teacher, I realized a more thorough examination of literature was needed to address the findings. I found that perhaps the issue is not with standardized assessments but rather a lack of understanding on the part of teachers in carrying out the goals of an IEP. Larson et al. (2020) assert that “several recent studies suggest that educators are sometimes confused…” and “…absent the structure and regulation of IEP teams, they do not know how to select, implement, and evaluate accessibility features and accommodations for particular students” (p. 249). While the findings in this study represents the voice of parents, research that includes both the parents and teachers working collaboratively on understanding an IEP could offer a blended perspective on assessing students with multiple disabilities.

Parent Understanding of FSAA Format

In the individual interviews and focus group discussion, the topic of FSAA formats confused the parents. For example, parents understood their children were required by the state to participate in the FSAA, but they were unaware that the FSAA-Performance Task and FSAA-Datafolio were two different formats. The decision for participation in the FSAA-Performance Task and FSAA-Datafolio is determined by each school’s IEP Team to be the most appropriate method for assessing academic growth (Measured Progress, FSAA-Datafolio, 2019). Based on their responses, it was apparent the parents in this study were excluded from the discussion on the FSAA formats as part of the IEP meeting. As noted in the research literature, there is ongoing concern about the lack of parent involvement in the development of IEPs. “Despite the
inconclusive evidence about the power of parent involvement to boost student achievement there is broad public appeal [for] parent involvement” (Underwood, 2010, p. 20). As stakeholders and members of the IEP team, it is important to acknowledge parent perspectives and involve them in all decisions made for their child.

**Parent Involvement**

Parent responses in this study revealed their minimal understanding of the FSAA formats and determination for their child’s participation in the FSAA had a significant influence over their involvement. Diliberto & Brewer (2012) assert that parent involvement as stakeholders in developing appropriate formal assessments for children with multiple disabilities is critical to their success. Parents reported feeling excluded from decisions made on their child’s IEP. I found the parents’ lack of understanding of FSAA formats and criteria for participation during IEP discussions during the IEP meeting to be disappointing. Successful parent involvement in the development of an IEP and decisions made for formal assessment participation only occurs when parents are included in the discussion. I draw on Underwood’s (2010) discussion of the effects parent involvement has on a child’s educational success. Underwood asserts that “The research on parent involvement indicates that parents who are engaged in true collaborative activities and in the learning experience of their children have the greater impact on student outcomes” (Underwood, K. p. 21, 2010). The parents in this study indicated they had minimal involvement in their child’s IEP may account for their lack of understandings of the FSAA formats and IEP decisions for assessment participation.

Parent views of their child’s participation in formal assessments and involvement in decisions made during the IEP meeting is relevant to the requirements for state assessments (IDEA, 2004, Section 300.160). Cho & Kingston (2015) assert that the determination for appropriately identifying participation in alternate assessment for children with disabilities has
involved the teachers and other school staff but excluded parent input. This is disappointing as the development of quality IEPs occurs through collaborative efforts between school staff and parents. Research suggests that parent involvement significantly impacts student achievement (Wilder, 2014).

**Assessment Decisions Made in IEP Meetings**

According to IDEA, “the parents of a child with a disability are expected to be equal participants along with school personnel, in developing, reviewing, and revising the IEP for their child” (1997). The involvement of parents as part of the IEP team can have dramatic impacts. “One of the goals of involving parents in development of IEPs and as part of the decision-making team for children with disabilities is to achieve inclusion” (Underwood, 2010). In my experience as a special education teacher, only general concerns of the parents have been considered in the development of a student’s IEP. Most parents in this study revealed they had minimal involvement in decisions made for their child’s IEP. Parents found IEP meetings to be intimidating and overwhelming, and often filled with information they did not understand.

Parents explained their experience in the IEP meeting to include signing in agreement with goals and assessment participation already determined by the school. These findings are concerning as parents are stakeholders in the development of the IEP. The findings in this study align with the analysis of IEPs for 88 students with significant disabilities by Kurth et al. (2019) as they indicated “parents are naturally outnumbered on IEP teams for students with significant support needs, which are made up of numerous school professionals” (p.494).

According to the Florida Department of Education Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services an IEP must include: “the strengths of the student; the academic, developmental and functional needs of the student; the results of the initial evaluation or most recent evaluation; and the results of the student’s performance on any statewide standardized and districtwide
Parents in this study reported feeling as though the decisions made about their child’s academic strengths and functional needs contained limited parental input. The “input” came in the form of asking about their general concerns. As a rule, the “concerns of the parent”, are included in one section of the IEP with no reference to goals, accommodations, or assessment preference. The parents agreed they have not been included in making decisions about academic or social emotional goals on their child’s IEP.

**Parent Role in Preparing Their Child for Assessment Participation**

The findings in this study revealed that parents often relied on school staff to inform them of their child’s educational needs. Parents reported their role in preparing their child for participation in the FSAA to be limited to relying on the teachers for test preparation. Parents responded to the questions about their role and involvement as limited to communication with the teachers on daily reports of social emotional goals. I draw on the discussion with Rispoli et al (2019) that some parents desire their role to be more significant in their child’s education. In their study, Rispoli et al (2019) reported parents preferred their role be considered as part of a partnership with the school and they would like their involvement to be more than “surface level” (p. 465). Ruppar & Gaffney (2011) assert that informed parents play a larger role in their child’s education.

**Impact of FSAA Participation**

Here too, most parents reported grave concerns regarding the negative impacts of FSAA on their children. In many cases, parents felt their children are expected to learn and perform assessments on curricular content above their cognitive level. Parent responses indicated concerns over the impact of participation in the FSAA on their children. For example, parents described a higher demand placed on their children as teachers feel pressured to have children
score well on assessments. One parent shared an increase in her child’s seizure activity during testing periods. Another parent expressed concern over the teacher leaving the classroom to assess a child on a one-on-one basis, leaving the remaining students without instruction or supervision. Parents responses indicated the time spent sitting for lengthy assessments created frustration and fatigue. In their study of children with multiple disabilities, Horn & Kang (2012) assert, “Many of these young children struggle to communicate their wants and needs, to freely move their body to access and engage their world, and to learn abstract concepts and ideas” (p. 241). For example, Parent Five indicated her child “gets stressed out, especially when it's a time thing and if things are too difficult for him he acts out and he'll start hitting himself in the head or biting his fingers” (Parent Five, Focus Group on April 15, 2020).

Parents Question Appropriateness of Assessment

When asked how they feel about their children participating in the FSAA, the parents revealed significant concerns with the curricular content as inappropriate for their children with significant cognitive delays. The FSAA content is based on Florida Standards Access Points (FS-AP) to meet the expectations “written specifically for students with significant cognitive disabilities” (Measured Progress FSAA, 2019, p. 2). Children are administered the FSAA in accordance to their grade level.

While most parents in this study understood the requirement for assessment participation, they viewed the primary purpose for assessment requirements focused on teacher accountability rather than student achievement. Parent Six shared, “I know that it is state mandated by the Florida Department of Education and also under the umbrella of the whole U.S. Department of Education to make accountability that while my child goes to attend school, she's getting something out of it” (Parent Six, Interviewed on April 20, 2020).
Five of the six parents do not support the way their child is formally assessed. For example, parents grappled with the concept of teaching high school level content to children functioning at a kindergarten level. In discussion of the FSAA, Parent Five shared “it's not really going to measure anything for him. He works at about a four-year old level” (Parent Five, Focus Group on 4/15/2020). The majority of parents in this study indicated they would prefer their children learn functional skills that support their ability to communicate and be more independent in their daily lives. Weston and Ware (2018) assert that using tools to improve their communication skills and to learn independent functioning skills such as the Welsh-English developed Routes for Learning (RfL) designed to measure students on a developmental level to be a more accurate assessment of these children. In my experience as a special education teacher, adapting curriculum and assessments to the individual needs of a child with multiple disabilities provides a more accurate picture of their abilities and growth. A Skills Checklist as described by Goldstein and Behuniak (2012) may be another example of an appropriate assessment for children with multiple disabilities as it measures student progress based on individual communication abilities and cognitive levels.

**Parents Disagree with FSAA**

While not all parents in this study disagreed with the current curricular content on the FSAA, each of the parents agreed formal assessment was a matter of necessity in the form of school and instructional accountability. From their perspective, some parents believe the purpose of formally assessing their children is to hold teachers and their schools accountable to the state for their quality of instruction. Parent Three shares, “I think it's a good way to make sure that teachers are held accountable on teaching the kids and holding the children responsible” (Parent Three, Interviewed on March 23, 2020). Each of the parents in this study, on some level, shared the sentiment that their children were considered equal and included if they participate in formal
assessments. The findings in this study indicated parents of children with multiple disabilities have an opinion about formal assessment participation and content. Research suggests the decisions made for participation criteria and content for formal assessments does not include parent perspectives (Streagle & Scott, 2015). Based upon the current study, parent understandings of formal assessments and decisions made as part of the IEP meeting remain limited.

**Reflexivity**

It was important that I reflected on parent responses and recorded the experience in my research journal. I sometimes felt conflicted when I asked questions as I expected certain responses based on my familiarity with some of the children and their parents. I was not surprised that many of the parents had no prior knowledge of the two formats of FSAA and were unclear of the assessment participation as part of the IEP meeting. I have participated many times, as an IEP team member, where there was no discussion of the FSAA format with parents. In my instructional experience, parents are rarely included in decisions made for their child’s participation in the FSAA as part of the IEP meeting. It was important that I reflected the affirmation of parent perspectives on the FSAA formats and IEP process as it aligned with the purpose of my inquiry.

**Limitations**

When interpreting the results of this study, multiple limitations are considered. One limitation is the small sample size collected through purposeful sampling. Although purposeful sampling is often used in phenomenological qualitative research, Palinkas et al. (2015) assert the use of combined sampling strategies to be more efficient. Participation in this study required
parents to be a current Florida resident at the time of data collection. It was necessary to include parents who were current Florida residents to meet the face-to-face interview requirements.

Another limitation of this study is the possibility of parents self-identifying as the parent of at least one child with multiple disabilities. It is possible that parents responding to the screening survey could have considered their child to be identified as having multiple disabilities outside the IDEA definition (2006).

Additionally, the unique circumstances of the occurrence of the COVID-19 World-Wide Pandemic is considered a limitation of this study. As people self-quarantined to their homes as per recommendations of the Emergency Management - COVID-19 Public Health Emergency executive order by Governor Ron DeSantis on March 1, 2020, conducting face-to-face interviews presented a challenge.

Data collected via face-to-face interviews were held outside. The CDC recommendation of a six-feet minimum distance observed between each participant, the wearing of protective masks, and inability to meet in public venues may have impacted the interviews. Although the social distancing rules required during the pandemic made collecting human subject data challenging, data was successfully obtained. None of the parent participants in this study directly indicated concern for their privacy or health as a result of data collection.

My knowledge of the policies and processes of administering standardized assessments and participating as a member of the IEP team contributed to my desire to conduct a study investigating parent perspectives of children with multiple disabilities participating in the FSAA. There is a possibility that my professional understanding of the FSAA and IEP processes may have influenced my interpretation of parent responses. Karagiozis’s (2018) asserts that, “the reality of interviews is more complex and ambiguous than the transcribed, written
text of research data. There is both verbal and non-verbal communication and interaction taking place” (p.23). It was important to the data collection and analysis process, that I consistently looked beyond the transcribed interviews and reflected on the parents’ emotional responses, non-verbal communication, and social stories that spoke to their life experiences as the parent of a child with multiple disabilities. After each phase of data collection and communication to my committee, I recorded reflections in my journal through the lens of a teacher of children with multiple disabilities who had administered the FSAA and developed several IEPs.

**Implications for Future Research**

The findings of this study revealed that parents of children with multiple disabilities who participated in the FSAA are not included in decisions made during the IEP meeting for their child’s participation in formal assessment formats. Further, the parents in this study do not feel they are informed about the formats of FSAA or included in discussions about the curricular content on the FSAA.

This study focused on the perspectives of parents of children with multiple disabilities participating in the FSAA confirmed my experiences that sometimes parents are not fully included in the development of IEPs and are not informed about the options for FSAA formats. Although parents and teachers have historically disagreed on goals and accommodations for children with disabilities (Underwood, 2010), it is imperative the policy be adhered to and parents be included in IEP development. This study demonstrates the need for continued examination of parent perspectives and research focused on improving the collaboration between schools and parents relative to formal assessment participation and IEP development.

Another consideration for future research might include parent involvement in the development of standardized formal assessments. Parents in this study reported feeling the
current FSAA does not appropriately measure their child’s knowledge or skills. Some parents in this study felt the FSAA should be completely discarded and a new assessment should be developed with individual needs of the child considered. Many parents in this study accepted the requirement for formal assessments but reported their desire to have ongoing individualized assessments for their children throughout the school year in place of one formal assessment. A potential research question to pose may include examination of parent perspectives in formal assessment content.

Finally, future research should include larger samples of parents who represent children with multiple disabilities. Although the current study affirms prior research findings, the limited participant base minimalized the perspectives represented to a single geographical area. A more global consideration of parent perspectives needs to be explored.

Future research needs to include wide-scale research to examine the impact on children with multiple disabilities participating in standardized formal assessments. Perhaps it is time to consider a different approach to teaching and measuring the progress of children with severe disabilities. Further, the consideration of including parent input in the development of formal assessment content must be examined.

**Implications for Practice**

The reauthorization and examination of IDEA (2004) affirms IEP requirements need to be considered when educators work collaboratively with parents to ensure assessments are relevant and include measurable annual goals appropriate to students’ individual needs and abilities. Professional development needs to include teacher education on the requirements defined under the IDEA for parent involvement in the development of IEPs and criteria for
formal assessment participation (IDEA, 2005). School administrators need to be cognizant of teacher knowledge of the IEP process and criteria for formal assessment participation.

Implications for Teacher Education

Teacher education needs to include an emphasis on the development of IEPs through parent-teacher collaboration. Further, teacher preparation programs would benefit from extended practicum experience working with children with multiple disabilities. Finally, opportunities for future educators need to include experience in participating in IEP meetings and test administration for children with special needs.

Conclusion

In this study, parent perspectives were gathered through interviews designed to learn how parents of children with multiple disabilities understand their child’s participation in the Florida State Alternate Assessment (FSAA). Parents experienced an opportunity to describe successes and challenges that emerged from their child’s participation in the FSAA. Parents were also encouraged to share how they would like their involvement to be in their child’s participation in the FSAA in the future.

Capturing, interpreting, and understanding the experiences of the parents of children with multiple disabilities navigating their child’s participation in the FSAA was a challenging and reaffirming process. Reflecting on my instructional experience in teaching children with severe cognitive delays and physical impairments requires an understanding that formal education looks ‘different’ for these parents and families. Children with multiple disabilities have limited communication skills, are often nonverbal, and may experience significant health conditions, such as seizures. In my interpretation of the views of the parents who participated in this study, parents of children with multiple disabilities would prefer a more individualized assessment to
provide an accurate measurement of their child’s abilities. It was my intent to carefully and respectfully reveal this by providing an opportunity for the parents in this study to share their perspectives.

In this inquiry I sought authentic parent perspectives of children with multiple disabilities in their child’s participation in the Florida State Alternate Assessment (FSAA). The parents in this study shared their understandings of the FSAA and how they made sense of the criteria for assessment participation. Parents either agreed and disagreed with the way students are considered eligible for the FSAA and talked about their limited role in their child’s participation in the FSAA. Feelings of support by the school and involvement in their child’s participation in the FSAA were also shared.

The purpose of this study was to extend my knowledge, as a teacher, to include parent perspectives of children with multiple disabilities in their participation in the FSAA. I learned that parents want to talk about their experiences with their child’s participation in formal assessment and share their feelings about the IEP process. It is through the lens of a researcher that I was able to consider multiple perspectives on standardized formal assessments and parent involvement in the development of an IEP. Throughout this inquiry, I experienced moments of affirmation that parents do not feel informed nor included in decisions made for their children with multiple disabilities. Kurth et al. (2019) reminds us that the role of parents is critical to the development of an IEP. The focus of this inquiry included the search for parent perspectives of formal assessments. The development of an IEP includes decisions made for formal assessment participation. My findings indicate the issue in need of further examination is finding a way to improve the involvement of parents in the IEP process.
References


Florida Statutes Title XLVIII. K-20 Education Code § 1008.22.


Weigert, S. C. (2012). Aligning and inventing practices to achieve inclusive assessment policies:


Appendices
## Appendix A Search Phrases and Identified Issues

### Table A4 Search Phrases and Identified Issues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Search Phrases</th>
<th>Results (2010-2019)</th>
<th>Issues Identified</th>
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<tr>
<td>IEPs and Statewide Assessment</td>
<td>La Salle, T. P., Roach, A. T., &amp; McGrath, D. (2013). The relationship of IEP quality to curricular access and academic achievement for students with disabilities. <em>International journal of special education</em>, 28(1), 135-144.</td>
<td>Minimal research regarding the effect of IEP quality on student access to the general curriculum and student performance on standardized assessments is available.</td>
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<td>Search Phrases</td>
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<td>----------------</td>
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<td>Questions Parents Should Ask About Alternate Assessments</td>
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<table>
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<th>Results (2010-2019)</th>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issues Identified</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inadequacy and invalidity of state assessment results. impossible to interpret and rarely presents a true picture of students’ academic proficiency.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We do not yet know the potential students have to learn more complex academic content.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriateness of the test.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusion without assessment of the appropriate instruction of students.</td>
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Table A4 Search Phrases and Identified Issues (Continued)

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<tr>
<td>Testing Students With Multiple And Severe Disabilities</td>
<td>Kleinert, H., Towles-Reeves, E., Quenemoen, R., Thurlow, M., Fluegge, L., Weseman, L., &amp; Kerbel, A. (2015). Where students with the most significant cognitive disabilities are taught: Implications for general curriculum access. Exceptional Children, 81(3), 312-328.</td>
<td>“Researchers and practitioners do not have a clear national picture of the extent to which students with the most significant cognitive disabilities have access to the general curriculum.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Search Phrases</td>
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<td>Issues Identified</td>
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<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formally Assessing Students With Developmental Disabilities, or Severe and Profound Needs, or Students With Multiple Disabilities</td>
<td></td>
<td>Search query on these phrases returns literature on assessing students’ communication, physiological needs, and formal diagnosis for the purposes of clinical categorizing. Inappropriate for the purposes of this study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation Guidelines for Alternate Assessment</td>
<td>Kettler, R. J., Rodriguez, M. C., Bolt, D. M., Elliott, S. N., Beddow, P. A., &amp; Kurz, A. (2011). Modified multiple-choice items for alternate assessments: Reliability, difficulty, and differential boost. <em>Applied Measurement in Education, 24</em>(3), 210-234.</td>
<td>Students who meet these criteria may take the AA-MAS, but no more than 2% of tested students within a district or state may be counted toward proficiency reports for Adequate Yearly Progress calculations. Test items are modified to meet the needs of students with significant cognitive delays. Collectively, our analyses indicate that items can be successfully modified to improve access to tests for eligible students.</td>
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<td>Search Phrases</td>
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<td>Issues Identified</td>
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</table>
2. How satisfied are parents with their involvement in decision making in those meetings?  
3. What roles do students play in their transition planning meetings?  
4. What factors are associated with variations in levels of attendance of parents and students in IEP and transition planning meetings, in parents’ satisfaction with their involvement in those meetings, and with students’ roles in transition planning meetings? |
Appendix B Figure 1 Research Design

Research Design

Figure 1

Research Design
Appendix C Cycle Coding Figure 2

Cycle One Coding

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<td>Universality of Test</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Equity For Students</td>
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<td>Understanding FSAA Format</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Supported by School</td>
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<td>Parent Involvement</td>
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<td>Participation Criteria</td>
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<td>24</td>
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</table>

Figure 2

Cycle One Coding
Appendix D Coding Map of Overarching Themes

Figure 3

Figure 3

Coding Map of Overarching Themes
Appendix E Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol
Script:

I would like to thank you willingly participating in the interview portion of my study. As previously explained, the purpose of this study is to further understand how parents of children with multiple disabilities understand their child’s participation in the Florida State Alternate Assessment (FSAA) and the decisions made for participation criteria during the Individual Education Plan (IEP) process.

{Review Consent Form}

Script:

Do I have your permission to audio record our conversation? ___Yes ___No

Before we begin the interview, do you have any questions? ___ Yes ___ No

{Please feel free to ask questions throughout the interview.}

Research Question: How do parents of children with multiple disabilities talk about their involvement in their child’s participation in the Florida State Alternate Assessment?

Interview Questions:

● Describe to me your involvement in your child’s participation in the FSAA?
● Talk about which type of FSAA format your child participates in.
● Talk about the differences between the FSAA-Performance Task and FSAA – Datafolio.

Follow-up Prompts:

○ How would you like your involvement to be in your child’s participation in the FASS in the future?
○ What successes or challenges have you seen emerge from your child’s identification for the FSAA?

Script: Thank you for your time and willingness to participate in the interview process of my study.

{Discuss Member Checking of Transcripts and Set up for Focus Group Session}
Appendix F FSAA Figures

1. Which expression is equivalent to $4(6x + 11)$?

   A. 68  
   B. $68x$  
   C. $24x + 11$  
   D. $24x + 44$

Figure 4a

*Florida State Assessment Mathematics Test Item*

$$b + 5 = 25$$

*Solve for $b$:

Figure 4b

*Florida State Alternate Assessment Mathematics Task Item*
Figure 5a

Three-Tiered FSAA-Performance Task Flowchart

Figure 6a

FSAA-Performance Student Response Booklet - Task 1 (FSAA Guide, 2018)
Figure 6b

*FSAA-Performance Student Response Booklet - Task 2* (FSAA Guide, 2018)
Figure 6c:

*FSAA- Performance Student Response Booklet - Task 3 (FSAA Guide, 2018)*

*FSAA-Datafolio*
Figure 7a

**FSAA-Datafolio Running Record Template** (FSAA Guide, 2018)
Focus Group Protocol

Script:

I would like to thank you willingly participating in the focus group portion of my study. As previously explained during the interview process, the purpose of this study is to further understand how parents of children with multiple disabilities understand their child’s participation in the Florida State Alternate Assessment (FSAA) and the decisions made for participation criteria during the Individual Education Plan (IEP) process.

{Review Consent Form and Remind Parents They are Being Recorded and they agreed to ensure privacy during the focus group session}

Script:

Do I have your permission to video record our focus group session? ___Yes ___No

Do you agree to maintain privacy during our focus group session? ___ Yes ___ No

Before we begin the focus group session, do you have any questions? ___ Yes ___ No

{Please feel free to ask questions throughout the focus group session}

Research Question: How do parents of children with multiple disabilities talk about their involvement in their child’s participation in the Florida State Alternate Assessment?

Focus Group Questions:

● Talk more about your involvement in your child’s participation in the FSAA?

● Talk more about which type of FSAA format your child participates in.

● Talk more about the differences between the FSAA-Performance Task and FSAA – Datafolio.
Appendix H Semi-Structured Interview Probes

Semi-Structured Interview Probes

Tell me about your understanding of the Florida State Alternate Assessment.

What is your understanding of how it is determined for a student to participate in the FSAA?

Can you tell me what criteria would you consider for making the determination of a participation in the FSAA?

Do you agree or disagree with the way students are considered eligible for the FSAA? Can you explain why you agree or disagree?

What role do you play in your child’s participation in the FSAA?

How do you feel about your role in preparing your child for participation in the FSAA?

Can you share how your role contributes the decision of your child’s participation in the FSAA?

Can you describe in what ways to you contribute?

How do you feel about your child participating in the FSAA?

Do you feel supported by the school with your role in determining your child’s participation in the FSAA?
Appendix I Informed Consent

Informed Consent

Informed Consent to Participate in Research Involving Minimal Risk

Information to Consider Before Taking Part in this Research Study

Title: The Participation of Children with Multiple Disabilities in The Florida State Alternate Assessment: Parent Perspectives

Study # _000276______________

Overview: You are being asked to take part in a research study. The information in this document should help you to decide if you would like to participate. The sections in this Overview provide the basic information about the study. More detailed information is provided in the remainder of the document.

Study Staff: This study is being led by Lori Reese who is a principal investigator at/in the University of South Florida. This person is called the Principal Investigator. Lori Reese is being guided in this research by Dr. Phyllis Jones. Other approved research staff may act on behalf of the Principal Investigator.

Study Details: This study is being conducted at in a private location agreed upon by Lori Reese and each participant and is supported/sponsored by the University of South Florida. The purpose of the study is to explore how parents of children with multiple disabilities understand their child’s participation in the Florida State Alternate Assessment (FSAA) and the decisions made for participation criteria during the Individual Education Plan (IEP) process. Participants will be asked to participate in a single face-to-face interview for a maximum time of 90 minutes and a single online focus group session for a maximum of two hours.

Subjects: You are being asked to take part because based on self-identification as the parent of at least one child with multiple disabilities who has participated in the Florida State Alternate Assessment in the past five years. Participants must have previous experience in the IEP process for their child who has participated in the FSAA in the past five years.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation is voluntary. You do not have to participate and may stop your participation at any time. There will be no penalties or loss of benefits or opportunities if you do not participate or decide to stop once you start.

Benefits, Compensation, and Risk: We do not know if you will receive any benefit from your participation. There is no cost to participate. You will not be compensated for your participation. This research is considered minimal risk. Minimal risk means that study risks are the same as the risks you face in daily life.
Confidentiality: Even if we publish the findings from this study, we will keep your study information private and confidential. Anyone with the authority to look at your records must keep them confidential.

Why are you being asked to take part?

The purpose of this study is to examine how parents of children with multiple disabilities understand their child’s participation in the Florida State Alternate Assessment (FSAA) and their role in Individual Education Plan (IEP) process.

To examine parent perspectives of students with multiple disabilities participation in the FSAA, it is important to inquire how parents understand the FSAA formats and process. In the inquiry process, I will seek to determine how parents view their role in the decision-making process for their child’s participation in the formal assessment as part of the IEP process. I would like to know what parents understand about the administration formats of FSAA. I would like to understand how parents describe the process of determining participation for FSAA Performance Task versus Datafolio during the IEP process. I would like to understand how parents perceive the impact that participation in the FSAA has on their child.

Study Procedures:

I will conduct a sixty-minute semi-structured interview with each participant. The interviews are recorded with at least two audio devices to ensure quality, then transcribed and shared with the parents for member checking followed by analysis to identify emerging trends through constant comparison of the data. Participants will receive a transcribed copy for member checking.

During the individual- face-to-face interview, you will be asked to:

• Respond honestly to the following interview questions created to answer my overarching research question:

Research Question Interview Questions

How do parents of children with multiple disabilities talk about their involvement in their child’s participation in the Florida State Alternate Assessment?  

• Describe to me your involvement in your child’s participation in the FSAA?

• Talk about which type of FSAA format your child participates in.

• Talk about the differences between the FSAA-Performance Task and FSAA – Datafolio.

Follow-Up Prompts:
• How would you like your involvement to be in your child’s participation in the FASS in the future?

• What successes or challenges have you seen emerge from your child’s identification for the FSAA?

• Respond honestly to the following focus group questions created to answer my overarching research question:

Research Question  Focus Group Questions

How do parents of children with multiple disabilities talk about their involvement in their child’s participation in the Florida State Alternate Assessment?

• Talk more about your involvement in your child’s participation in the FSAA?

• Talk more about which type of FSAA format your child participates in.

• Talk more about the differences between the FSAA-Performance Task and FSAA – Datafolio?

Total Number of Subjects

About six (6) individuals will take part in this study at USF.

Alternatives / Voluntary Participation / Withdrawal

You do not have to participate in this research study.

You should only take part in this study if you want to volunteer. You should not feel that there is any pressure to take part in the study. You are free to participate in this research or withdraw at any time. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits you are entitled to receive if you stop taking part in this study. Your participation will not impact the assessment or educational program of your child.

Benefits

You will receive no benefit(s) by participating in this research study.

Risks or Discomfort

This research is considered to be minimal risk. That means that the risks associated with this study are the same as what you face every day. There are no known additional risks to those who take part in this study.

Compensation
You will receive no payment or other compensation for taking part in this study.

Costs

It will not cost you to take part in the study.

Conflict of Interest Statement

There is no conflict of interest for this study.

Privacy and Confidentiality

We will do our best to keep your records private and confidential. We cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality. Your personal information may be disclosed if required by law. Certain people may need to see your study records. These individuals include:

- The research team, including the Principal Investigator, study coordinator, and all other research staff.
- Certain government and university people who need to know more about the study. For example, individuals who provide oversight on this study may need to look at your records. This is done to make sure that we are doing the study in the right way. They also need to make sure that we are protecting your rights and your safety.
- Any agency of the federal, state, or local government that regulates this research.
- The USF Institutional Review Board (IRB) and its related staff who have oversight responsibilities for this study, and staff in USF Research Integrity and Compliance.

We may publish what we learn from this study. If we do, we will not include your name. We will not publish anything that would let people know who you are.

If completing an online survey, it is possible, although unlikely, that unauthorized individuals could gain access to your responses. Confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology used. No guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data sent via the Internet. However, your participation in this online survey involves risks similar to a person’s everyday use of the Internet. If you complete and submit an anonymous survey and later request your data be withdrawn, this may or may not be possible as the researcher may be unable to extract anonymous data from the database.

Please be advised that although the researchers will take every precaution to maintain confidentiality of the data, the nature of focus groups prevents the researchers from guaranteeing confidentiality. The researchers would like to remind you to respect the privacy of your fellow subjects and not repeat what is said in the focus group to others.

You can get the answers to your questions, concerns, or complaints.
If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this study, call Lori Reese at (941) 374-1491. If you have questions about your rights, complaints, or issues as a person taking part in this study, call the USF IRB at (813) 974-5638 or contact by email at RSCH-IRB@usf.edu.

Consent to Take Part in Research

I freely give my consent to take part in this study. I understand that by signing this form I am agreeing to take part in research. I have received a copy of this form to take with me.

__________________________________________________________
Signature of Person Taking Part in Study

                            Date

__________________________________________________________
Printed Name of Person Taking Part in Study

Statement of Person Obtaining Informed Consent and Research Authorization

I have carefully explained to the person taking part in the study what he or she can expect from their participation. I confirm that this research subject speaks the language that was used to explain this research and is receiving an informed consent form in their primary language. This research subject has provided legally effective informed consent.

__________________________________________________________
Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

                            Date

__________________________________________________________
Printed Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent