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THE EFFECTS OF INCREASED ACCOUNTABILITY STANDARDS
ON GRADUATION RATES FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

by

Mitzi Lee Moore

Abstract of a Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School
of The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

May 2012
ABSTRACT
THE EFFECTS OF INCREASED ACCOUNTABILITY STANDARDS ON GRADUATION RATES FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES
by Mitzi Lee Moore
May 2012

This research sought to determine if unintended effects of increased accountability standards on graduation rates for students with disabilities existed. Data from one southeastern state were utilized in order to determine if graduation rates were impacted as a result of higher accountability standards. In addition, administrator attitudes on views of NCLB, high-stakes testing of students with disabilities, strategies initiated to exclude students with disabilities from high-stakes tests, and inclusion of all students with disabilities in the growth model. Archival data from 2001 and 2010 were used to compare pre and post graduation rates for significant differences. Survey results were collected from high school principals and directors of special education in order to answer research questions regarding attitudes of administrators. Open-ended questions revealed additional information on administrator attitudes regarding leadership practices, prioritization of special education, inclusion of all students with disabilities in the growth model, and instruction of students with disabilities.

The results indicated a decline in graduation rates for all students as well as the sub-group of students with disabilities. Additionally, statistical tests revealed an interaction between the groups and years. Historical data confirm that students with disabilities graduate at lower rates than their non-disabled peers. However, the results of this study indicate the gap between these two groups has widened. These findings are
alarming for several reasons including possible future social and economic impacts for these students as well as the United States. No statistical difference was found between attitudes of principals and directors of special education.
The University of Southern Mississippi

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by

Mitzi Lee Moore

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate School of The University of Southern Mississippi in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Students must meet federal, state, and local graduation requirements in order to obtain the sometimes elusive high school diploma. The road to completion of this process has many detours, shortcuts, and roadblocks. Students traveling this road need a map to guide them through each possible situation. For students with disabilities, the graduation process is the same for those without disabilities; however, the journey could be more hazardous because of the addition of a disability that effects their education. The *No Child Left Behind Act 2001 (NCLB)* raised the bar for obtaining a high school diploma by implementing testing requirements in reading, math, and science. These requirements are the same for all students even those students that are on an alternative graduation track (Katsiyannis, Zhang, Ryan, & Jones, 2007) In addition, according to *NCLB* this trip should take a maximum of four years (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004). The four directions on this roadmap are increasing accountability for student performance, focusing on what works, reducing bureaucracy and increasing flexibility, and empowering parents (*NCLB*, Executive Summary, 2002). Ultimately, the purpose of this study is to evaluate the effects these increased standards have had on students with disabilities in relation to graduation.

Alarmingly, one in eight students will not graduate from high school. This number is also equal to losing one student every nine seconds (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004). According to the National Educational Goals Panel 2002, the overall graduation rate has not changed much since 1990. Even worse, students with disabilities, including
those with learning and behavioral problems, are more likely to dropout in comparison to general education students.

The issue of dropout rates for students in general education and special education should be a major concern for educators as well as society. Many jobs once available for students without a high school diploma no longer exist (Mishel & Roy, 2006). In addition, societal costs for drop-outs are staggering. It is estimated that billions are spent annually on unemployment, welfare, and legal expenses (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004). Levin (2009) expands on the taxpayer’s returns for investing in adequate education in America. His studies indicated that the average monthly expense for an incarcerated inmate is $26,600. He states this estimate is conservative. High school graduation may have a ten to twenty percent impact on the decreased likelihood of incarceration. This cost does not encompass the expense to the taxpayer for criminal defense. Furthermore, Levin (2009) found the average lifetime welfare savings for each high school graduate to be $3,000. This figure includes food stamps, housing, and temporary assistance for needy families (TANF). Levin’s study also found that high school graduates’ longevity is six to nine years longer than their drop-out counterparts. This has a direct impact on public funds spent for health care. Ultimately, adequate education for all students is crucial to life opportunities. Therefore, the investment revenues far exceed the public costs of dropout prevention.

Background of the Problem

Since the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, improving education has been in the forefront of our nation’s goals. Not until the passage of the Improving America’s Schools Act (IASA) in 1994 did that improvement
goal shift toward standards based assessments (Quenemoen, Lehr, Thurlow, & Massanari, 2001). This Act spurred the beginning of the refinement process for graduation requirements, as well as the focus on content and standards’ based performance (Guy, Shin, Lee, & Thurlow, 2003). Most recently, the ESEA was revised to become No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) 2001. With the signing of NCLB Act, accountability standards have once again increased. These standards are applicable to all students, including those students with disabilities. Historically, students with disabilities have lower graduation rates than non-disabled students (Lehr, 2003). While some students with disabilities pursue a traditional diploma, others seek an alternative diploma. Regardless, testing requirements under NCLB mandate that these students be tested in the same areas as general education students. Concurrently, the definition of graduation for accountability purposes states that only a traditional diploma obtained in four years will be counted (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004). The issue here is that alternative options have been available for students with disabilities. Furthermore, teacher expectations have frequently driven these decisions. These options include the occupational diploma and certificates of attendance (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004). Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act 2004 tried to align specific provisions of NCLB in regard to accountability. States must include students with disabilities in all district and state testing programs using appropriate accommodations. When appropriate and stated in a student’s individualized educational plan, alternate assessments may be used. States must report results including participation rates and accommodations (Katsiyannis et al., 2007). Revisiting the definition of a graduate may be in order.
These accountability standards have been the catalyst driving a paradoxical shift in belief regarding service delivery options for students with disabilities. Too often students with disabilities had been “labeled” and removed from general education and, in essence, were being sent to a separate educational system with no accountability standards (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994). All the while the law has required access to the general curriculum. However, where and how students were allowed access began to change with the revision of IDEA 1997 and NCLB 2001. Students with disabilities were about to be placed in the general education classrooms without notice or preparation. The few students with disabilities that had remained on traditional diploma track had continued to be placed in general education with accommodations and modifications on an individual basis. However, students on track for occupational diploma and many certificate students were about to have their educational surroundings change drastically.

These non-traditional diploma students were sent back into general education settings for accountability purposes (Destafano, Shriner, & Lloyd, 2001). How would this affect their path to exiting high school? Furthermore, how would it change their post-school lives? Are students with disabilities now being left behind when it comes to preparation for life after high school (Orfield, Losen, Wald, & Swanson, 2004)? Furthermore, having the same expectations as general education students is causing some school leaders to use students with disabilities as scapegoats for not meeting accountability standards for this same group (Albritten, Mainzer, & Ziegler, 2004).

These rigorous requirements reduce the amount of time students with disabilities can spend working on improving weak academic areas or vocational skills (Guy et al., 2003). The IDEA 2004 revision put much emphasis on transition services for students
with disabilities. Occupational students do need access to general education. However, they also need to be able to work toward meeting individual educational goals for preparation beyond high school. Many students are now placed in general education classes that require extensive modification in order for them to achieve any success at all. In addition, if they have time for a special education class in their schedule, they have to work on trying to catch up. These students also have other needs that may be crowded out of their schedules. Ultimately, either directly or indirectly, the students end up bearing the consequences of regulations (Ysseldyke et al., 2004). The need to review the impact accountability has had on graduation rates of students with disabilities should also include a focus on preparation for post-school activities.

Not all students will attend college. However, all students currently face the same exit requirements for a traditional diploma. The quest for increased student performance is a worthy cause. President George W. Bush was driven by the perpetual existence of low expectations in the education of students with disabilities to sign NCLB into law (Johnston, 1999). The path to achieving proficiency for all is filled with roadblocks. Legislation has changed course many times. The one constant in the educational process for students with disabilities has been the Individual Educational Plan Team (IEP). This team usually consists of several members including the special education teacher, general education teacher, administrator, parent, student, and any other related service provider that may be needed. The decisions of this team are extremely important for students with disabilities regarding high stakes testing accommodations (Thurlow, 2004). This team is the decision making body for students with disabilities; however, state policies have
become more specific in relation to participation of students with disabilities (Thurlow, Lazarus, Thompson, & Morse, 2005). Again, this shift in practice is guided by federal regulations included in NCLB. Litigation has also molded the shape of accommodations for testing students with disabilities. Some groups have challenged the limited availability of allowable accommodations. Courts have in some cases required the expansion of such accommodations (Katsiyannis et al., 2007). Regardless, the true north for the current compass is accountability for all students.

Purpose of the Study

Graduation rates for students with disabilities trail far behind graduation rates for all students (Orfield et al., 2004). According to the Office of Special Education, students with disabilities have a graduation rate of 32% nationally. This varies from state to state. However, Georgia, Mississippi, Nevada, Alabama, and Louisiana have graduation rates under 25% for this same subgroup. This study will seek to reveal any additional significant decreases in graduation rates for students with disabilities. According to the Assessment and Accountability Reporting System for one southeastern state, there is a 75.9% graduation rate for all students. One of the largest school districts in this state has a graduation rate of 83.5 for all students and 57.8 for students with disabilities. Conversely, one of the smallest districts in the state has a graduation rate for all students of 65.8% and 39% for students with disabilities (Mississippi Department of Education, 2010). A report by the Children’s Defense Fund (2001) stated that one in eight children drops out of school, including one high school student every nine seconds (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004).
This research exposed the effect, whether positive, negative or non-existent, that higher accountability standards have had on students with disabilities in this southeastern state. This information is vital for the future of students with disabilities. The higher expectations of educational laws may prove beneficial for these students. On the other hand, the results of this study revealed if high-stakes testing requirements are adding additional restrictions on a group of students that already have educational limitations.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. Have the increased accountability standards through high-stakes testing requirements affected traditional graduation rates of students with disabilities?
2. What are attitudes of high school principals toward high-stakes testing of students with disabilities?
3. What are attitudes of directors of special education toward high-stakes testing of students with disabilities?
4. Do the attitudes of directors of special education and high school principals differ?

This study explored the relationship between principal practices regarding high-stakes testing on graduation rates for students with disabilities. A Repeated Measures ANOVA was used to see if a statistically significant relationship existed between accountability standards and graduation rates of students with disabilities. This comparison utilized data pre and post since the implementation of high stakes testing requirements. This data was accessed via the Mississippi Department of Education’s (MDE) Assessment and Accountability Reporting System website.
Federal reporting requirements ensure districts track graduation rates for students with disabilities. This information can be used to determine if accountability standards have had a statistically significant impact on graduation rates for students with disabilities. In addition, a survey to be completed by high school principals and directors of special education statewide was examined for relational impacts on graduation for students with disabilities.

Definition of Terms

*Accommodations*- Testing accommodations are commonly defined as a change in a way that a test is administered or responded to by the person tested and are intended to offset or “correct” for distortions in scores caused by a disability (McDonnell, McLaughlin, & Morrison, 1997).

*Adequate Yearly Progress*- According to the United States Department of Education each state must establish a definition of adequate yearly progress that is used to measure the achievement of schools and districts over time by determining if all students whether individual or part of a subgroup are making progress toward state academic standards (U. S. Department of Education, 2004a).

*Elementary Secondary Education Act 1965*- Congress enacted the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) (P.L. 89-10), which was the most expansive federal education bill ever passed to date, on April 9, 1965, as a part of President Lyndon B. Johnson's "War on Poverty." The law focuses on equal access to education and accountability. The law established federally funded programs enacted by states (Brown-Nagin, 2004).
Free Appropriate Public Education- FAPE is a required component of federal law that aims to improve the educational outcomes for children with disabilities. Children with disabilities are entitled to a free and appropriate public education. School districts must provide special education and related services to meet the needs of exceptional students (McLaughlin & Thurlow, 2003).

General Education- General Education is the curriculum designed for all students to meet state standards. The General Education program assessed by the state's annual testing program, required by No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (U. S. Department of Education, 2004a).

Graduation rate- According to the Education Commission of the States, Graduation rate definitions are to be approved by the U.S. Department of Education, each state's graduation rate definition and calculation method had to meet the following criteria: Calculate the percentage of students, measured from the beginning of the school year, who graduate from public high school with a regular diploma (not including a GED or any other diploma not fully aligned with the state’s academic standards) in the standard number of years (Education Commission of the States, 2002).

Growth- According to No Child Left Behind Act one year’s worth of growth for one year of instruction (NCLB, 2001).

Improving America’s Schools Act 1994- Improving America's Schools Act of 1994, Pub. L. 103-382, became law on October 20, 1994. It is a huge law that, among other things, appropriated funding for the Fund for the Improvement of Education and specified uses for those funds. This law included bilingual education requirements to help
students become proficient in English. It also defined the term children and youth to include all students ages 3-21 (U. S. Metric Association, 2002).

*Individuals with Disabilities Education Act 1997* - The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997 were signed into law on June 4, 1997. This Act strengthens academic expectations and accountability for the nation's 5.8 million children with disabilities and bridges the gap that has too often existed between what children with disabilities learn and what is required in the regular curriculum by identifying children with special needs before they enter school and providing services, educating these children with non-disabled peers, develop an individual education plan (IEP) to improve educational achievement in the general curriculum, setting higher expectations for these students, fostering parent involvement, and reducing unnecessary paperwork (IDEA, 1997).

*Individuals with Disabilities Education Act 2004* - The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is the federal law that secures special education services for children with disabilities from the time they are born until they graduate from high school. The law was reauthorized by Congress in 2004, prompting a series of changes in the way special education services are implemented in areas such as IEP transition services, IEP short-term objectives, and IEP attendance and participation. IDEA also addressed due process statute of limitations and stay put requirements in relation to discipline procedures (IDEA, 2004).
**Individual Educational Plan**- The Individual Education Program Plan (IEP) is a written plan developed by the parents and the school’s special education team that specifies the students academic goals and the method to obtain these goals (IDEA, 1997).

**Mississippi Assessment and Accountability Reporting System**- The Mississippi Assessment and Accountability Reporting System (MAARS) is an integrated web application as well as separate web sites that are used for accessing accountability results or the Mississippi NCLB Report Cards and for downloading assessment, accountability, and Report Card data files (Mississippi Department of Education, 2010).

**Mississippi Department of Education**- The State Department of Education (“Department”) shall be under the direction and supervision of the State Superintendent of Public Education. The State Department of Education shall be organized into functional divisions as established by the State Board of Education, including any divisions established by law and prescribing the duties of the directors of such divisions. Website: [http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/directory1/index.html](http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/directory1/index.html).

**No Child Left Behind Act 2001**- No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) is a federal legislation that enacts the theories of standards-based education reform. Pursuant to 20 USCS § 6301, NCLB ensures that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging state academic achievement standards and state academic assessments (NCLB Executive Summary 2002).

**Special Education**- Specialized education of physically or mentally handicapped children whose needs cannot be met in the regular classroom (IDEA, 1997).
**Students with Disabilities** - As defined by IDEA, the term "child with a disability" means a child "with mental retardation, hearing impairments (including deafness), speech or language impairments, visual impairments (including blindness), serious emotional disturbance, orthopedic impairments, autism, traumatic brain injury, other health impairments, or specific learning disabilities; and who, by reason thereof, needs special education and related services” (IDEA, 2004, p. 3).

**Assumptions**

The study operated under the following assumptions:

1. The archival data utilized for this study was accurately reported.
2. The graduation rate percentages were based on accurate results reported by schools.
3. The test data that were utilized from state testing had scores that were obtained from standardized testing situations.
4. There was validity and reliability established in the process by which the test was distributed, administered, and returned to testing centers.
5. The participants surveyed responded openly and honestly.

**Delimitations**

This study is delimited to the following:

1. The data were collected from a single southeastern state in the United States.
2. The surveys were mailed to participants.
3. There were a limited number of participants.
Justification

Educational accountability is important. However, knowing if the system in place may be causing some students to leave school before accountability testing to avoid lowering performance ratings. This study seeks to determine if unintended negative impacts for students with disabilities exist as a result of accountability standards established by such laws as NCLB.

Without any other consideration, dropping out of high school negatively impacts a student’s quality of life. Dropouts earn less than high school graduates. Dropouts have shorter life expectancies than high school graduates. Dropouts rely on public assistance at higher rates than high school graduates. Dropouts are incarcerated more often than high school graduates. In sum, educational accountability is linked to quality of life for students (Levin, 2009). As a result of these economic impacts, accurate reporting of the high school dropout rate is linked to a continuing viable economy.

The increasing pressure that schools are under to show improved student achievement may have caused some administrators and teachers to discourage testing of students that may negatively impact the overall performance of a school. Students with disabilities have historically been low performers on standardized tests (Boston, 2002). Therefore, they may not be welcomed into classrooms that must participate in statewide testing until the last possible chance. This can add additional years to a high school career. Statistics have revealed that two years of retention increases the chances of dropping out of school (Bowman, 2005).

These same students, when they are enrolled in the subject area tested classes, are failing at alarmingly higher rates than their peers. According to an article published by
the associated press on February 22, 2011, one southeastern state has eleven percent of seniors that will not graduate because of failing one or more state tests. One third of these 3,000 students are students with disabilities. Therefore the percentage for this subgroup is higher than eleven percent.

Summary

Meeting the post high school needs of all students is difficult. Even in the general education population there are many avenues for students to choose; however, the options are still limited. If one adds the factor of a disability to the equation, students have even more individually specific needs. Laws mandate that schools offer a free and appropriate education for all children. Currently the measure of an appropriate education is showing adequate yearly growth on high stakes testing; this requirement is the same for all children. Determining if the measurement tool is appropriate for all groups of students is as important as determining appropriate education for all students. This study evaluated the effects of the current accountability system in one southeastern state for students with disabilities in obtaining a high school diploma in relation to principal practices or attitudes regarding testing students.

The socioeconomic concerns regarding dropout rates are alarming. According to Levin (2009), the failure to realize the depth of the dropout issue may impact the economic stability of the future. The effect of dropping out of high school lasts far beyond the teenage years. It is estimated that billions of taxpayer dollars are spent annually on crime prevention and prosecution, welfare programs, and unemployment wages (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004).
Since at least 1965, educational reform has been continuous. *ESEA* (1965) directed millions of dollars to educating the nation’s young. This trend continued with *IASA*. The *NCLB* act fine-tuned funding educational efforts directly in relation to student achievement. Finally, the inclusion of students with disabilities in the accountability model expanded reform to all students with revisions of such laws as *IDEA*.

Most consider accountability a positive factor for student learning especially students with disabilities. However, an unintended result may be an increased dropout rate for this same group. While end of course tests may provide proof that students have met benchmarks for subject areas, it could also impose negative results for school completion (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004). School administrators are under pressure to improve student achievement. Unfortunately, this has created a frenzy to find loopholes to avoid testing low-performing students such as English language learners and students with disabilities even if it means excluding them from school altogether (Darling-Hammond, 2008).

One question this study explored was, if the implementation of higher accountability laws such as those included in the *NCLB* act have had an impact, either positive or negative on the dropout rate for students with disabilities. Chapter I explains the problem, the background surrounding the problem, and the purpose of this study. Also included are the research questions. Terms are defined for clarification. Assumptions that the study is based on are also included. The delimitations are spelled out. Finally, the justification for this study is explained. Chapter II discusses the major literature surrounding accountability issues regarding students with disabilities. Chapter III explains the methodology, including research design, participants, instrumentation,
procedures, and data analysis. Chapter IV reports and analyzed the data that were obtained. Chapter V discusses results, implications, and ideas for future research.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

The following chapter includes the major research in the area of educational law and the shift of those laws to standards-based education. Out of this transition came laws that established high stakes testing, adequate yearly progress, and equal access for students with disabilities. The foundational law, *Elementary Secondary Education Act of 1965*, still has the largest effect in terms of funding for students today. *Improving America’s Schools Act of 1994* changed the focus of educational law to standards-based education. This refocusing continued with the *Individual’s Disability Education Act of 1997* and the reauthorization in 2004 expanded the accountability mandates to students with disabilities. These expectations were spelled out in the flagship law for accountability in *No Child Left Behind 2001*.

Theoretical Framework

The theories that establish the basis for this study have been written into law in the United States of America. The foundational right of students to receive a free and appropriate education (FAPE) has long been established in code. The cornerstone of this foundation is *The Elementary and Secondary Education Act 1965*. Additional laws followed that have fortified and expanded the right to FAPE to all students including students with disabilities. These same regulatory guidelines for America’s schools that have included all groups of students also established higher expectations for accountability for all groups including students with disabilities. The effects these
standards have on this group need to be examined for possible positive or negative impact.

While students with disabilities placed in general education is not a new concept (Sindelar, Shearer, Yendol-Hoppey, & Libert, 2006), to include all students in state-mandated testing is. Different graduation options have not consistently been part of the total graduation rate data until recently. *NCLB* required more reporting for the students with disabilities subgroup, which consists of different graduation options including occupational diploma and certificates of attendance. Reporting requirements previously had not included these subgroups of students. This increased requirement put the special education teacher in the same situation as other educators. (Destefano et al., 2001). Special educators have not been accustomed to the same public scrutiny that general educators have learned to accept. According to Thurlow and Johnson (2000), schools must make sure the students with disabilities have the opportunity to be exposed to the content of a regular education classroom. *NCLB* forced districts to stop hiding their lower performing students and held educators accountable for all students. According to Johnson (2003/2004), educational systems are now being asked to re-examine how students with disabilities are being prepared for adulthood. Standards-based performance is driving many schools to take a thorough look at meaningful education for students with disabilities. Students with disabilities have long been placed in settings where they became stagnant and where almost no growth occurred. If growth did occur, it was not known because these students were often left out of testing. Parents of all students have the right to know if their child is making progress toward a standard (Ysseldyke & Bielinski, 2002). Students with disabilities should be no different. Unfortunately, like
many other issues in the United States, it has taken laws to make many do what seems like the obvious: be accountable for the learning of every student regardless of race, ethnicity, or socioeconomics (Linn, Baker, & Betebenner 2002).

Along with the laws that form a foundational basis for the education of students with disabilities, there is Bronfenbrenner’s Theory on Ecological Development of Children. This theory provides a framework that supports this study. Bronfenbrenner believes that cognitive development, thus school performance, is effected by a myriad of factors. These factors impact the possibility that a child will be identified as a student with a disability. Bronfenbrenner looks at the development of a child through the various relationships that make up the environment (Paquette & Ryan, 2001).

Bronfenbrenner defines four systems that include factors that shape the development of a child. These systems are microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. The microsystem is the surrounding environment in which a person operates. Some examples of a microsystem are families or classrooms. The mesosystem is the interaction of two microsystems. For example, the relationship between home and school is a mesosystem. The exosystem is external to a child but still has an indirect impact. An example of an exosystem is the parent’s workplace. The macrosystem is the overall cultural context. Bronfenbrenner’s research is pivotal in understanding child development and the impact that development can have on the success or failure of that child (Paquette & Ryan, 2001). Most recently, the chronosystem has been added to Bronfenbrenner’s theory. In the past the chronological age of a human was the only consideration in relation to development. However, this focus has shifted to the historical
passage of time. This added the fifth level or system to the existing theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

Bronfenbrenner’s theory has major impacts on teaching. The educational system is held with the task of supplying deficiencies found in students’ homes (Paquette & Ryan, 2001). The erosion of modern families creates additional issues for teachers to address in schools (Paquette & Ryan, 2001). Schools are attempting to provide stability for children. However, this cannot take the place of primary family relationships that are lacking. Ideally, schools and families will work together to establish an environment that both welcomes and nurtures families for the success of the student (Paquette & Ryan, 2001).

History of Educational Law

*Elementary Secondary and Education Act of 1965*

The most comprehensive educational legislation ever passed by Congress was signed into law in April 1965 according to Jennings (1995). As a part of President Lyndon Johnson’s War on Poverty, the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965* (*ESEA*) has been aiding low income communities and schools since. This bill is responsible for approximately 11 billion dollars annually to school districts across America. As a former teacher, President Johnson believed that access to education was vital to leading a productive life.

Former Presidents including Kennedy had laid the foundational need to improve America’s educational system. Many global factors spurred the need for America’s children to be achieving standards at or above other nations. During President Truman’s term, the Cold War triggered the need for increased competitiveness in technology. The Soviet Union’s Sputnik accomplishment in 1957 propelled the fear that Americans were
inferior scientists. Furthermore, the Civil Rights movement had revealed the unequal education that was occurring in America (Brown-Nagin, 2002). Following President Kennedy’s assassination in 1963, President Johnson revised the former President’s plan and presented it to Congress. In only eighty-seven days, the un-amended ESEA was passed into law. This became the centerpiece for education in President Johnson’s legislative agenda known as the “Great Society,” more specifically the “War on Poverty” (Brown-Nagin, 2002).

Lange and Sletten (2002) said the shift of focusing education on excellence rather than on equality began with ESEA. However, there were vocal adversaries to this legislation. One staunch opponent to ESEA was the National Education Association. Their opposition stemmed from federal dollars being awarded to private schools (Jennings, 2001). In response to concerns about the national role in education, ESEA included provisions that stated the government had no part in the selection of instructional materials, administration, personnel, control over curriculum, or instructional programs (ESEA, 1965).

In 1965, an estimated one billion dollars was funneled to states for education of students. These funds were awarded based on data about child poverty. According to Jennings (2001), ESEA provided services based on need. However, in the 1970s about 94% of districts received funds. It was argued that funds could be accessed for students, even if their parents did not fit the category of economically disadvantaged, if they were not performing academically (Thomas & Brady, 2005).

Debates followed regarding the restriction of federal funds to poor children (Stein, 2004). Many argued that these funds should be used to support all children at risk of
failing regardless of poverty level. Misappropriations were outlined in a report published in 1969 entitled *Title I of ESEA: Is It Helping Poor Children?* According to McClure and Martin (1969), these funds were being used for purchasing books, paying operating expenses, equipping offices, and meeting payroll obligations for new teachers. As a result of such fiscal abuse, *ESEA* was amended four times over the first 15 years of its existence (McDonnell, 2005). Each revision was aimed at meeting the original intent of the legislation. These revisions led to more directed impact of these funds, evolving names of various components of the law and increased focus on higher academic standards (Thomas & Brady, 2005).

This Act had a major impact on expanding the government’s role in the educational system. Prior to the passage of *ESEA*, educational policies had almost solely been a state’s affair. Not only did this spark debate regarding over involvement of the federal government in the education of students, it also ignited the debate regarding actual improvements in student performance (Thomas & Brady, 2005).

*Improving America’s Schools Act of 1994*

The reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA)* in October 1994 led to the *Improve America’s Schools Act (IASA)*. The components of this revision focused on delivery, systemic reform, developing high standards for both instructional and professional development, expanding accountability and coordinating resources to obtain achievement for every student. Research by U.S. Metric Association (USMA) established four principles that are pivotal for sweeping school improvement. These standards are: high standards for every student; teacher
training for delivery of high standards; flexibility and responsibility for state and local educational agencies; and partnerships between family, community, and school.

*IASA* established high standards for all by defining what students must know and be able to do. This involves moving past drill and practice generated from worksheets and moving toward teaching complex skills such as teaching problem solving skills and creating experiences through the imaginative world of reading novels. Professional development is a vital piece of the puzzle that enables teachers to deliver instruction for higher achievement standards. Professional development should spotlight areas such as instructional strategies, team teaching, writing across the curriculum, and new technologies (*IASA, 1994*).

*IASA* established new guidelines for education that promoted coordination among programs and systemic reform; while *IASA* allowed greater decision-making power to local educational agencies and teachers, it required increased accountability for students. The spirit of this law encouraged partnerships and no longer held single agencies or groups solely responsible for student achievement. Agencies, programs, schools, nor governments alone could bear the complete responsibility for educating America’s children. All students must meet high standards. Educators must be responsible for student progress toward those standards. All factors working together provide the best chance for educational improvement (USMA, 2002).

*IASA of 1994* set aside funds for educational improvement. This law also specified areas that the funds should be directed toward. The basis of this revision was to increase educational quality, set challenging state standards, and increase performance standards. Districts were charged with identifying schools that failed to meet adequate yearly
progress (AYP) and implementing a plan for improvement (Thomas & Brady, 2005). The following paragraphs will define what IASA funds were set aside to support.

First and foremost funds from IASA should promote educational reform by developing rigorous standards at the state level. Concurrently states should establish performance standards for students that are challenging. Establishment of models that assess learning, promote training for teachers and administrators, and increase participation by parents and communities should be a primary focus. In addition to standards development, IASA called for abolishment of ability grouping, placement of all students in college preparatory paths, enrichment programs and in-service training for faculty and staff.

Additional reform practices encouraged increased parental involvement. Lawmakers believed if parents were directly involved in the education of their children it may promote increased expectations in the home (USMA, 2002).

According to IASA, encouraging site-based decision-making and school choice at the state and local levels should have national significance. IASA codified in law the need to improve transition both from preschool to school as well as school to work through integration of health and social services into the educational plan. More specifically, IASA promoted activities such as mentoring, health education, environmental education, economics and personal finance education, investing and entrepreneurial education, foreign language, and metric education.

The revisions of this Act were far reaching. It attempted to equalize education among the genders. Strategies were employed to end biases in both materials and
instructional practices. Furthermore, preventative processes were established to analyze
practices and materials already being utilized.

Recognizing schools that were making strides in meeting the rigorous requirements
established by IASA was also highlighted in this law. The establishment of the Blue
Ribbon Program was to recognize exemplary schools in meeting the high standards
expectation for all students in high poverty areas.

Reduction in highly mobile students was also a concern addressed in IASA. The
method employed to accomplish this task was information sharing regarding the
educational impact that mobility has on a child. In addition, encouraging active parental
participation in a child’s education was promoted. Matters such as child abuse prevention
could be covered with participating parents. IASA also encouraged public-private
partnerships that would expand learning outside the classroom walls. Through the use of
technology, learning could be maximized. The school of thought was that these
experiences would expand and enrich learning. This Act expanded the rights for bilingual
students to participate in regular education. IASA addressed inappropriate placement in
separate segregated or special education programs because of language barriers.

While all components of this law are relevant, it is the area of increased
expectations, thus standards for every student that has the greatest impact. Past
regulations had allowed some students to be excluded from accountability and
assessment. This practice resulted in low or no expectations for excluded students, such
as students with disabilities. IASA of 1994 was the beginning of standards-based
education for all students (USMA, 2002).
IASA started the standards based movement in educational reform. This movement has been fortified by the revision of Acts like Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) 1997. This Act pinpointed students with disabilities as a group to be included in the standards groups. Each law to this point had strengthened links between experiences, curriculum, assessment, and performance.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1997

IDEA 1997 was more aligned with recent laws such as IASA and Goals 2000 that set higher achievement standards for all students. This law specifically prescribed least restrictive environment considerations for students with disabilities. Furthermore, IDEA required documentation of access to general education for these students and their inclusion in state assessments. While this and other reform regulations create concerns, IDEA 1997 highlighted some specific issues. Those issues are: the burden of high stakes testing on students with disabilities; the effects of high stakes testing on graduation rates; the degree to which special education programs will be accountable for test results; and the relevance of test results for programming choices for students with disabilities.

Exposure to the general curriculum was a necessity that IDEA addressed. Teachers must make the connection between accountability expectations and classroom needs (Destefano et al., 2001).

Signed by President Clinton in June to address low expectations, IDEA 1997 strengthened the following areas of the original law: the role of the parent; access to general education; reducing paperwork; funding; inappropriate identification protections; safe schools; and non adversarial negotiations. The original law had nine parts, IDEA 97 reduced that to four parts with subchapters referred to as Parts A, B, C and D. Part A is
definitions and general provisions. Part B gives grant details for ensuring a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) and procedural safeguards. Part C expands coverage of Part B to infants and toddlers. This section encourages states to provide services for these children. Part D addresses improvement grants for students with disabilities education in areas such as research, parent training, and technology. Prior to the reauthorization of IDEA, the least restrictive environment (LRE) focused mainly on the location of a student. IDEA 97 refocused LRE on content of student education rather than location of education (Yell & Shriner, 1997).

Congruently, according to Yell and Shriner (1997) if access to general curriculum was a major part of the new law, so was student progress. This revision specifically addressed participation in state assessments. IDEA 97 also went one step further by requiring development of alternate assessments for students that would not participate in statewide assessments. This varies widely from state to state. As with regular state assessments, alternate assessments were to measure progress toward high expectations that states adopted. According to Leone, McLaughlin, and Meisel (1992, p. 12), “What gets measured gets taught.” IDEA 97 focused on giving results of student performance on state assessments for students with disabilities the same weight as their non-disabled peers. Yell and Shriner (1996, p. 104) changed the former statement to “Who gets measured gets taught”. The reporting requirements specifically stated that results for students with disabilities were to be reported as often and in the same detail as their non-disabled peers. Also to be included in the reporting results were the numbers of students with disabilities participating, the number of students with disabilities participating in
alternate assessments, and the performance of students with disabilities on general assessments and alternate assessments (Yell & Shriner, 1997).

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001

ESEA has been in existence for more than forty years. This Act remains the foundational federal financial support for America’s under-privileged children. Over the years this Act has expanded to address the unique needs of particular groups like Title 9 for females, the Education for All Handicap Children Act in 1975 for students with disabilities, and more recently laws impacting English language learners. Over the years not only has the Act been extended to include these groups in the service end of education, but expectations for proficiency and growth have also been established. This revision known as NCLB was in response to various and significant needs in diverse groups of students.

ESEA started a major reformation in American education. Beginning with Thomas Jefferson and the foundation of a free system of public education in Virginia and continued by Horace Mann, the first state school superintendent, the historical background of education for all can be traced (Meier, Kohn, Darling-Hammond, Sizer & Wood, 2004). The reformation fires have once again sparked. The standards-based education movement has been the current catalyst in educational advancement. The effects span from the twentieth century into the twenty-first century. A Nation at Risk is credited for igniting this fire. This report created by National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) under the Reagan administration discussed the status quo attitude regarding the mediocrity of education in America. Many Americans equated the demise of the education system in America with the overall security of the country. These
educational woes moved President George H. W. Bush to convene the nation’s governors. Out of this meeting, national standards were compiled. This was the first concerted effort at creating national standards. As a result, forty-nine states developed and aligned state standards by 2004 (Marzano, 2004).

The quest for increased student performance is a worthy cause. President George W. Bush was driven by the perpetual existence of low expectations in the education of students with disabilities to sign NCLB into law (Johnston, 1999). No Child Left Behind (NCLB) of 2001 again strengthened IDEA 97 and earlier reform efforts to establish rigorous achievement standards. NCLB went a step further and required participation of students with disabilities in not only testing but also in accountability models (Johnson, 2003/2004). This law established responsibility for the students with disabilities access to general curriculum, higher expectations, and improvement. The NCLB mandate that schools meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) increased the need for access to general curriculum for students with disabilities. AYP measures school’s academic performance as well as graduation rates. Schools that do not meet these requirements will be identified as “needs improvement.” Additionally, if one of the subgroups, for example, students with disabilities, does not meet requirements, the school will be classified as “needs improvement.”

According to the No Child Left Behind Executive Summary, NCLB established the change from aggregated data to disaggregated data. In other words, how are schools educating girls, Hispanics, and students with disabilities? Many students’ scores are included in more than one of these subgroups. Therefore, making it even more imperative that every student be successful in meeting state adopted rigorous academic standards.
In addition, *NCLB* has at the heart the goal of measuring effectiveness of programs and holding schools accountable for results. The way this legislation attempted to accomplish these goals was to establish national criteria for student performance in reading, math, and science. The law also established that students must show growth annually in order to meet these goals. However, *NCLB* has components other than these criteria that school districts must focus on. The four major components of *NCLB* are increasing student performance, focusing on what works, reducing bureaucracy and increase flexibility, and empower parents (NCLB Executive Summary, 2002).

The seemingly unending revision of education laws appeared to only take the old systems and attach new program requirements without accountability or funding. The revision of *ESEA* in 2001 added the accountability piece to the blueprint for restructuring education. The belief behind this movement was that placing the responsibility on those closest to the most important function of schools would produce the most results (NCLB Executive Summary, 2002). Therefore, by placing responsibility squarely on the shoulders of classroom teachers, the students would benefit. However, some adversaries of *NCLB* would argue that the bi-partisan support that enacted this seemingly punitive law was done with the demise of public education in mind. The sanctions that are enacted, when appropriate growth for all groups of students, including students with disabilities, does not occur, may result in school choice or school closure (Meier et al, 2004). This unfunded mandate that all students will meet proficiency levels by 2014 has resulted in narrowing the curriculum, low-level skills reflected on high-stakes testing, inappropriate assessment of English language learners and students with disabilities, and exclusion of low-performing students from school (Darling-Hammond, 2008). Specific
attention was given to reducing inequities in education racially and socioeconomically beginning with the initial passage of *ESEA*. Studies reveal little progress in shrinking the gaps in achievement (Thomas & Brady, 2005). Billions have been spent in meeting the federal educational standards resulting in failure to meet the requirements. Increased accountability as well as sanctions were specified in *NCLB 2001* specifically in Title I school districts (Thomas & Brady, 2005).

In January 2008 when President George W. Bush signed the reauthorization of *ESEA*, known as *NCLB 2001*, it reflected strong commitment across political parties. Even though *NCLB* mirrors *ESEA*, it added increasing standards, accountability, and sanctions for students failing to meet the growth requirement (Thomas & Brady, 2005). One difference between the accountability measures of *ESEA* and *NCLB* is the mandate that progress must be demonstrated for sub-groups. These sub-groups include students with limited English proficiency, minority students, and disabled students. The ninety-five percent participation rule also went a step further by applying the same rate to all sub-groups. If districts failed to test ninety-five percent of all subgroups, they could meet AYP (Thomas & Brady, 2005).

*NCLB* was groundbreaking in establishing sanctions for failure to meet AYP. Resources are available to school districts not meeting AYP. After failure to meet AYP for two consecutive years schools are entitled “in need of improvement.” A plan of improvement then must be developed. Students must also be given the opportunity of moving to a better performing school. After the third year, school choice is still in place. In addition, the district must offer supplemental instructional services. Continued failure to meet the requirements of *NCLB* may result in reorganization of schools, a takeover by
the state, staffs being replaced, or reduced funding for administration of schools (Thomas & Brady, 2005). According to Thomas and Brady (2005), NCLB has caused many to question the inclusion of all students with disabilities in AYP calculations. Since students with significant disabilities are enrolled in schools and in some cases a lack of understanding still exists, is it appropriate to measure their performance in relation to grade level standards (Torgeson, Wagner, Roshotte, Rose, Lindamood, Conway, & Garvin, 2001)? If this trend continues it will leave a lot of schools in the failing category (Thomas & Brady, 2005).

These arguments were heard. The Secretary of Education during the Bush administration, Rod Paige, implemented changes in the ninety-five percent testing rule for students with significant cognitive disabilities and alternative assessments for some students with disabilities (U. S. Department of Education, 2004b). These alternate assessments allowed students with disabilities to demonstrate academic progress in a more individualized way. In addition, schools are allowed to average participation rates over a three-year timeframe. This accounted for students unable to participate in statewide assessments because of valid reasons. Furthermore, USDE has made improvements in its financial support to states in regards to students with disabilities (U. S. Department of Education, 2005).

NCLB’s focus regarding test scores is a major flaw. Likewise this could be creating a larger graduation crisis (Orfield et al., 2004). Research shows an accountability system that is fueled by test scores bringing about unwanted negative results (Orfield et al., 2004). While intentions may be to encourage schools to improve instruction for all students, pressure to perform may encourage low achieving students to drop out of school.
so their scores do not negatively affect a school’s performance level (Orfield et al., 2004). According to Orfield et al. (2004) multiple achievement measures should be weighted in order to give a more equitable picture of accountability. These researchers say a single test-propelled model of accountability may not give an overall representation of student performance. A model based on more than a single test score could lessen the pressure on schools and, therefore, reduce the desire to get low-achieving students like students with disabilities out of the cohort. Likewise, the current “test and punish” model is more impactful for poor schools because of lack of resources and well-prepared teachers (Meier et al, 2004).

While NCLB does include a grant for decreasing dropout rates, Congress has not funded it since the passage of NCLB. Graduation rates expose a huge loss of minority students before high school graduation. These numbers show strong efforts to get low achieving students to leave school before grade twelve or in some cases before participating in state testing (Orfield et al., 2004).

According to Orfield et al. (2004), Harvard University’s Civil Rights Project of 2004 found that graduation rates are lower than actually reported. For example in 2001 only approximately fifty percent of American Indians, Latinos, and African American students received a diploma after four years of high school. Furthermore, Texas data also show that after initial high stakes testing in the 1980s, graduation rates for Blacks and Latinos dropped significantly. This trend did not change over the next twenty years (Orfield et al.2004).

Even more confounding is the active encouragement to place low-achieving students into GED programs (Orfield et al., 2004). Many of these transferred students do
not obtain a GED certificate. Additionally, statistics reveal that students with a GED are still more likely to receive public assistance and have higher rates of unemployment (Levin, 2009). The USDE’s weak reporting requirements in regard to graduation have not addressed this problem.

*Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004*

While *NCLB 2001* and *IDEA 2004* were intended for different groups they have overlapping effects. This was not accidental. *IDEA 2004* was revised with the intent of aligning with *NCLB 2001*. Both legislative actions are assessment issues for all students. Both laws are providing paths for increased student achievement for students with disabilities. However, *IDEA 2004* implements change through the Individual Educational Plan (IEP) (Bowen & Rude, 2006).

*Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975* provided opportunities for children with disabilities to go to their “home” school; however, there was no factor that addressed the quality of education for these children. The focus was on the physical location of the students. *IDEA 1997* moved the focus from physical location to access of challenging academic standards. *NCLB* took this a step further by including students with disabilities in accountability reports. In other words, whatever obstacles had been in place to prevent students with disabilities from full participation in general education, *NCLB* removed. Even if state assessments are not appropriate for some student with disabilities, a state approved alternate assessment must be given to ensure IEP goals are rigorous and being met (Bowen & Rude, 2006). For those students that cannot participate in state assessments, even with accommodations, an alternate assessment is given. These alternatives are only for students with the most severe cognitive disabilities.
Approximately two to three percent of the students with cognitive delays are severe enough to participate in the alternate assessments. However, only one percent of these students’ scores that are proficient or advanced can count in the accountability model for NCLB reporting purposes (Bowen & Rude, 2006).

Reporting of adequate yearly progress (AYP) is complicated. The definition of AYP is based on expected growth that is continual and substantial. Every child should demonstrate growth (USDE, 2004b). Federal reporting requirements include specific subgroups like limited English proficiency, students with disabilities, minorities, and economically disadvantaged students. However, there may not be a large enough number to form a subgroup especially in rural schools. Additionally, reporting the AYP results for alternate assessments as well as the test results for students that received testing accommodations varies from state to state. This is a decision that has been left to individual states to make. Nonetheless, NCLB and the revision of IDEA sometimes referred to as Individual’s with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) can both be viewed as avenues for access to general curriculum for students with disabilities to travel (Bowen & Rude, 2006).

Regardless of the mandates of least restrictive environment and high stakes testing that IDEA 2004 brought about, the need for longevity in school reform practices still exists. There is little research regarding the effects over time of educating students with disabilities in general education classrooms. However, three key components have been identified in successful implementation of such school reform models. They are district and state policy, leadership, and teaching factors. Furthermore, research suggests where districts are not committed to reform models they have increased chance of failure.
Also if districts depend on increased student performance on high stakes testing to validate reform models, sustainability decreases (Sindelar et al., 2006).

Seemingly in contrast to the research, federal laws continue to attempt implementation of student achievement expectations and school improvement models by means of high-stakes testing. Historically, certain subgroups have been low-performing on such tests (Katsiyannis et al., 2007). NCLB has been the most aggressive federal legislation in this pursuit, implementing the ninety-five percent testing rule and AYP for all subgroups in reading, math, and eventually science as well as graduation attainment and attendance. Failure to meet these standards may result in school choice for parents or school reorganization by state educational agencies.

IDEA 2004 aligned with NCLB and went a step further by implementing the same reporting requirements on student performance for students with disabilities as those non-disabled peers. Some states have blamed school failure on having to test students with disabilities. One state, for example, said because of cognitive deficits and inappropriate curriculum, twenty-seven of its thirty-three schools failed to meet NCLB requirements. The debate of whether no exposure to rigorous curriculum or high expectations have further handicapped students with disabilities or that indeed the curriculum is inappropriate could be never-ending. However, according to the Center on Educational Policy (2004), there have been incremental gains in performance levels of students with disabilities on high stakes tests.

Conversely, some negative results are that students with disabilities’ low performance on high-stakes testing may cause schools to under perform. Graduation rates may drop because of increased accountability expectation and student pressure to
perform yet failing to meet standards (Johnson, Stout, & Thurlow, 2009). These issues may lead to more schools being labeled as “needs improvement;” thus, resulting in states abandoning testing. All these things combined with the pressure to increase student performance may lead to more students giving up and exiting before receiving a diploma (Katsiayannis et al., 2007).

Graduation Options

Erickson and Morningstar (2009) state that up to ten percent of American high school students receive something other than a standard high school diploma. The laws discussed previously in this paper all addressed effectiveness of education in America. Included in these efforts of school reform in America is the graduation dilemma. These policies effect graduation rates for all students. Many feel that increased graduation requirements may result in increased dropout rates. In addition, for students with disabilities, the requirements may affect post school activities for this population. It has long been established that adults without a high school diploma earn less money than their counterparts that do graduate. These same students that drop out are not eligible to serve in military or receive any post-high school education. These increased requirements for graduation have also limited the amount of time that all students can spend in vocational courses (Katsiyannis et al., 2007).

In response to these rigorous expectations for all students in America’s schools, states have turned to diploma options as an alternative to dropping out. While the traditional high school diploma is defined as the minimum requirements established by SEAs based on courses, credits, and possibly exit exams, other diploma options include honors diplomas and certificates of completion (Thurlow, 2009).
General Education Students

Criticism has accompanied discussions regarding the skills of America’s high school graduates in relation to societal contributions. Laws and policies have forced reform upon states. The response to this cynicism has led to the creation of high stakes testing and graduation exams in certain subject areas. This movement to standards based education for all students can be linked back to the release of studies like *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) and The Forgotten Half (Grant Foundation, 1988). Such reports established that there were foundational problems in public education, which without systemic change would not improve (Johnson et al., 2009)

The term high stakes is significant because of the effects on a student’s post high school life (Johnson et al., 2009). Over the past decade the trend has been for states to implement the use of exit exams as a requirement for receiving a high school diploma. In 2006, twenty-four states required such exams (Johnson et al., 2009). A significant consideration when implementing such exams is determining how students with disabilities should be included in the process (Center on Education Policy, 2004).

In research conducted by Johnson et al. (2009), it was established that all fifty states and the District of Columbia offered a standard high school diploma for all students. Of these, nine states offered only a standard diploma. In order to obtain this standard diploma, states’ requirements differ. However, these options were grouped into three categories: certain number of course credits, pass some type of graduation/exit exam, meet both requirements of credits and exit exams. Twenty-seven states require
only course credits. Nineteen states require course credits and some type of exam. Only one state required only an exit exam.

Course credits have different meaning and value depending on the state in which a student resides. These varied across the states ranging in number from 14.5 to 24. They also included different arrays of requisite subjects. Even more convoluting, some states mandated hours instead of credits (Guy et al., 2003).

Of the states that had graduation exams established, determining passing levels was left up to the individual state. Likewise, these vary in degree of difficulty as well as passing percentages. In some states students may be exempt from such test and still receive a standard diploma. Most states also allowed multiple attempts to pass exams. Further complicating the definition of a high school diploma, one state, Minnesota, required only an exam. A few states went beyond the standard diploma for all students and also offered a GED diploma. In addition, an Honor’s Diploma was an option in some states.

Students with Disabilities

The debate regarding lowering the standards for some students in earning a high school diploma is raging. Employers have begun to weigh in on the abilities of high school graduates (Johnson et al., 2009). According to Johnson et al. (2009) the implementation of what a high school diploma equates is almost unrecognizable when compared to thirty years ago. Even though recent decades have seen an increase in the number of students exiting high school with a diploma this has not translated in to better abilities (Johnson et al., 2009). This conversation is significantly important when
considering what a student should look like when exiting with something other than a standard diploma (Johnson et al., 2009).

Harvard’s Civil Rights Projects (2001) studied the impact these increased high stakes testing requirements have had on various populations including students with disabilities. In this study it was stated that these students could not pass high stakes testing if they were not exposed to the curriculum. New research says that the requirements of IDEA 1997, NCLB 2001, and IDEIA 2004 are having a profound impact on students with disabilities and their teachers (Giacobbe, Livers, Thayer-Smith, & Walther-Thomas, 2001). In addition, Heubert (2001) indicated students with disabilities may benefit to a larger degree than other sub-groups because they are entitled to high expectations and instruction.

In the states that had multiple diploma options for general education students the same diploma options were available to students with disabilities. However, in some cases alternate scores were allowable for students with disabilities. In addition to the standard diploma, twenty-four states offered an IEP diploma. Thirty-one states included some type of certificate in their diploma choices for students with disabilities. In most cases, this certificate was based on attendance. Course credit requirements for students with disabilities were established by the state educational agencies or local educational agencies (Guy et al., 2003).

Exit exams were optional for students with disabilities in some states. In addition alternate passing rates were in place for this sub-group of students. A few states had developed alternate assessments for students with disabilities. These alternatives gave students the opportunity to demonstrate mastery of the subject matter in some form other
than a single exit exam (Krentz, Thurlow, Shyyan, & Scott, 2005). According to Krentz et al. (2005) states had also developed multiple forms of their graduation exams to be used by students with disabilities. If a student failed one form, they could take another form of the test in attempt to obtain a standard diploma. These multiple attempts to pass add to the debate of lowering standards; thus resulting in sub-par knowledge and skills as evidenced by students exiting America’s high schools.

In some states up to 10% of students exit high school with something other than a standard diploma (Erickson & Morningstar, 2009). According to McDonnell, McLaughlin, and Morison (1997), to understand this more clearly, accessibility for obtaining a standard diploma must be reviewed. Accessibility was established in 1975 with the passage of public law 94-142. While this law did allow for students with disabilities to be educated at the same school with their non-disabled peers, it did not guarantee quality education (Bowen & Rude, 2006). It was not until the enactment of IDEA 1997 that schools were forced to allow students with disabilities access to general education classrooms and curricula. This access moved beyond the physical location of where the student was educated to active participation in the same curriculum as their general education peers (Bowen & Rude, 2006).

As reported by Erickson and Morningstar 2009, some unintentional negative results have occurred when students have been placed in the general curriculum and given the same expectations as non-disabled students. As states have implemented high stakes testing requirements linked to NCLB, some examples of such impacts are alternative diplomas, increased grade retentions, more dropouts, and higher failure rates on state assessments. These policies impact students, schools, and communities. These
outcomes should be considered in the implementation of graduation requirements and optional diplomas.

In 2006, exit exams were required by twenty-four states. Twenty-one of these states held the same passing requirements for students with disabilities and students without disabilities. The remaining three states required students without disabilities to pass these tests in order to be awarded a high school diploma (Johnson et al., 2009).

One consistent issue with implementation of the high stakes testing requirements of IDEA 1997, NCLB 2001, and IDEA 2004 is how to include students with disabilities according to Lehr, Clapper, & Thurlow (2005). The commonality of these policies on participation, performance, and reporting for all students has states looking for alternative diploma options for students. In addition to offering multiple types of diplomas, ensuring that these diplomas mean something in regards to skills and knowledge that students should be able to demonstrate has been a concern (Erickson & Morningstar, 2009).

According to Erickson and Morningstar (2009), the high school diploma has lost value when compared to a high school diploma from the 1960’s. While the graduation rates have increased over the decades this has not carried over to increased skill levels. Some argue that decreased academic expectations as well as social promotions have lowered the value. Likewise, according to Erickson and Morningstar (2009), employer’s complaints that the diploma has little holds little value for preparedness has powered the debate. In 1960, 41% of 24-year-olds had graduated from high school. In 2009, 85% of adults graduated from high school. In addition, 28% have four years of college compared to 8% in 1960. This has caused national debate on educational standards and rigor of curricula at the state level (Erickson & Morningstar, 2009).
With the efforts of increasing graduation rates and expanding graduation options, not all diplomas are created equal (Erickson & Morningstar, 2009). Johnson et al. (2009) indicted great variability in diploma options across states. Options included honor’s diplomas, certificates of attendance, and occupational diplomas to name a few. Of these options not all were available to every student. Nationally, diploma options ranged from a single choice to some states offering more than five.

Debates have been made favoring both single options and multiple options for high school diplomas. Supporters of a single option argue that this promotes high-level expectations for all groups (Thompson & Thurlow, 2003). However, others suggest that when students are unable to pass required exit exams offering options helps prevent drop-outs (Erickson & Morningstar, 2009). Thompson and Thurlow (2003) believe that no matter the number of options, they must all be made available to all students. One problem with alternative diploma options is that there is little or no research for future implications of obtaining something other than a standard diploma (McLaughlin & Thurlow, 2003). However, foundational research in this area states that while Institutes of Higher Learning are willing to accept alternative diplomas, they will not offer financial aid without obtaining a GED (Gaumer, 2003).

Along the same lines, Vernon, Baytops, McMahon, Padden and Walther-Thomas (2003) asked the questions: “Will students have the basic skills and pre-requisites needed to seek post-high school goals? Will alternate diploma options limit post-high school opportunities? Will LEAs encourage students and parents to seek these alternative diplomas to lessen high stakes pressures?” (p. 5). The results of their study solidify the
need for alternative diploma options that are viable. All students need meaningful educational opportunities to prepare them for the future.

In communities with high percentages of parents that were dropouts, there is instability in families or social situations. The increasing global competition requires, at a minimum, a high school diploma. The lack of obtaining this minimal educational level results in detrimental effects for individuals, communities and nations (Orfield et al., 2004). In a follow-up study of their earlier findings conducted by Bishop and Mane (2001), students that did not obtain a high school diploma earned 8.5% less per hour, had 20% lowered employment and 40% lowered earnings.

Graduation Rates

Much debate has occurred on reporting accurate graduation rates. Different methods have been studied and compared in order to obtain the clearest picture of the percentage of students meeting this important individual accomplishment that affects factors such as income level, health, and general societal contributions. In addition, measuring the success of the nation’s schools in producing graduates is imperative for continued educational reform (Warren & Halpern-Manners, 2009).

Reporting Requirements

NCLB did not define graduation rates. Subgroup accountability also does not require reporting of graduation rates. However, NCLB did mandate that all students including students with disabilities, low income students, English Language Learners, and minorities meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) requirements. Even more specifically, if 95% of these groups are not tested the school does not meet AYP. While both political parties in Congress supported progress for all students, NCLB actually
notes the historical fact that these groups perform disproportionately lower than their peers (Sunderman, Kim, & Orfield, 2005).

More recently research out of the University of Minnesota (Thurlow, Cormier, & Vang, 2009) evaluated the alternative routes offered by states for both students with and without disabilities. Obtaining a traditional diploma has major impacts personally for the student and society. Schools have become focused on the percentage of students that earn a standard diploma and what that diploma means. In addition, earning this diploma in four years is critical because of NCLB reporting requirements. This bar has been set as the maximum number of years students have to complete high school requirements and exit in order to be counted as a graduate. Furthermore, if students receive an alternate diploma, they are not counted in the national measures. As a result, states are trying to increase graduation rates. Again, not only is this considered for the overall group of seniors but for each sub-group. So, English Language Learners, Students with Disabilities, and Hispanics, just to name a few, must meet the national graduation requirements (Thurlow et al., 2009).

In addition to the rigorous requirements of high stakes testing, graduation rates of sub-groups are negatively impacting schools. This issue has become a litigated one. This has resulted in states offering alternative options for students with disabilities to demonstrate subject area proficiency (Thurlow et al., 2009). Such legal cases linked to the current high stakes testing requirements are frequently based on violation of the First and Fourteenth Amendments, Title VI and IX in the Civil Rights Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, or IDEA (Katsiyannis et al., 2007). The outcomes of such challenges often favor school districts since States are authorized to develop and
implement graduation requirements. However, the results of some of these legal challenges have broadened the availability of allowable accommodations on state tests as well as alternative assessments for some students with disabilities (Katsiyannis et al., 2007).

While students with disabilities placed in general education is not a new concept (Sindelar et al., 2006), counting all students in testing is. Different graduation options have not consistently been part of the total graduation rate data until recently. NCLB required more reporting for the students with disabilities subgroup, which consists of different graduation options including occupational diploma and certificates of attendance. Reporting requirements previously had not included these subgroups of students. This increased requirement put the special education teacher in the same vulnerable position as the general education teacher when it comes to accountability (Destefano et al., 2001). Special educators have not been used to the same public scrutiny that general educators have learned to accept. According to Johnson and Thurlow (2003), schools must make sure that students with disabilities have the opportunity to be exposed to the content of a regular education classroom. NCLB forced districts to stop hiding their lower performing students and charged educators with being held accountable for all students. According to Johnson (2003/2004), educational systems are now being asked to re-examine how students with disabilities are being prepared for adulthood. Standards-based performance is driving many schools to take a hard look at meaningful education for students with disabilities. Students with disabilities have long been placed in settings where they became stagnant and almost no growth occurred. If growth did occur, it was not known because these students were often left out of testing. Parents of all students
have the right to know if their child is making progress toward a standard (Ysseldyke & Bielinski, 2002). Students with disabilities should be no different. Unfortunately, like many other issues in our country, it has taken laws to make many do what seems like the obvious, be accountable for the learning of every student regardless of race, ethnicity, or socioeconomics (Linn et al., 2002). Some research indicates the dropout rate in America is 33% for all students and 50% for minority groups (Bracey, 2009). This may be indicative of a failing educational system which resulted in America lagging behind other countries like China and India (Bracey, 2009).

A seemingly simple task of using the number of entering ninth freshmen, or ninth graders, as a denominator and the number of exiting seniors four years later as the numerator should result in graduation percentage. However, according to Paul Barton at Educational Testing Services (ETS), as cited in Bracey 2009, it is not so simple. Barton purports that ninth grade numbers should not be used in this manner. Data reveals that enrollment in ninth grade has consistently been higher than eighth grade enrollment. As a matter of fact ninth grade enrollment was 12% higher than eighth grade enrollment in 2005. One possible explanation for this is the return of private school students to public school. Because of the use for reporting purposes, Barton believes graduation rates are underestimated. Likewise, Barton suggests using data on how many additional students enter ninth grade would produce more accurate numbers. However, states do not report such data (Bracey, 2009). Furthermore according to Bracey (2009), some studies have used eighth grade figures to produce graduation rates. Conversely, such figures produce over estimation of high school graduates because of students that may return to public school to complete high school. However, according to the National Center for
Educational Statistics (NCES), the most accurate rates could be obtained using average enrollment for all students in grades 8, 9, and 10. Various national graduation rates have been published (Heckman & Lafontaine, 2007) using an array of methods. These rates differ from 66% to 88% while minority rates range from 50% to 85%. Barton (2009) used the eighth grade numbers, ninth grade numbers, and the average of eighth, ninth, and tenth grades to figure graduation rate. The national graduation numbers are as follows: using eighth grade numbers-78.3%; using ninth grade numbers-70.6%; using the average of eighth, ninth, and tenth grade numbers-74.7%.

Many things complicate the process of figuring graduation rates. One complication is the single phrase “on time.” Reporting requirements limit the students being counted as graduates to those completing the process in four years (Bracey, 2009). In addition, the word “diploma” creates complexity. The requirement for obtaining a high school diploma varies greatly. However, future plans are to adopt national standards [Editorial, The New York Times, 2010]. Many countries in Asia and Europe already have national standards in place (Bishop & Mane, 2001).

In an editorial published in the New York Times on March 13, 2010, the countries that are surpassing the United States in education in the areas of math and science shared sameness in educational standards. The curriculum was in place from every border of the country. Unfortunately, in the United States the level of education available to a child depends on the zip code. The National Governor’s Association (2010) and school superintendents from across the nation hope to change this. This group has developed an internationally based framework for the twenty-first century American students.
Even though the rigorous goals of *NCLB* established a foundation for accountability, most states reported increased performance on state assessments while student performance on national tests worsened. This coalesced effort among America’s states is the springboard for America’s future global competitiveness [Editorial, New York Times, 2010].

The correlation between high school graduation and future success is significant (Greene, 2001). Students who leave high school without a diploma or GED are at increased risk of earning less money annually, becoming single parents, having children at an earlier age, being incarcerated, and/or relying on public assistance.

In summary, achieving the goal of obtaining a high school diploma is a significant indicator of future success. Graduation rates are also an indicator of public high school success. Seemingly, the more success schools have preparing students for high school completion the better the school. Based on the aforementioned research regarding the correlation between high school graduation rates and economic prosperity graduation rates should be given the same importance as test scores. Historically, however, they have not been awarded the same amount of importance as test scores (Greene, 2001).

The lack of importance assigned to graduation rates could be attributed to the lack of clarity across states for reporting rates (Greene, 2001). While the government spends more than forty million dollars on high stakes testing approximately one million is spent on dropout rates by the federal government. Equalizing the importance of graduating all students, especially low-achieving students, could decrease the negative view of these groups (Sunderman et al., 2005).
State Educational Agencies (SEAs) must report on progress or lack of progress for every student. States are now starting to analyze this data. However according to Ysseldyke and Bielinski (2002) many of these SEAs are misinterpreting such data. Compounding this problem is that this data is then guiding policy decisions. Not only must SEAs report on general education students, IDEA 1997 established the specifications that students with disabilities be included in assessments as well as included in performance reports (Ysseldyke & Bielinski, 2002).

According to National Center on Educational Outcomes (2002), seventeen states included performance for students with disabilities in the reporting process. These same reports showed significantly lower percentages of students with disabilities met the goals set by SEAs as proficient (Ysseldyke & Bielenski, 2002). The obvious significance for reporting on student performance is to confirm that the educational system is producing academic growth (Ysseldyke & Bielenski, 2002). However, clean data is needed consistently over time to reveal accurate trends. According Ysseldyke and Bielenski (2002), this process is convoluted for students with disabilities because of the increased likelihood they will drop out. One possible explanation for lower student performance over time for this group is that higher performing special education students tend to drop out. This leaves the lower achieving special education students to be negatively impacted some groups reported (Thurlow, House, Scott, & Ysseldyke, 2000).

Some fear that ignoring graduation rates while focusing on increasing test scores could further overlook students with disabilities. For example, Ohio has an overall graduation rate above the national average. Simultaneously, their graduation rates for minority groups are the lowest in the nation (Sunderman et al., 2005). Therefore, schools
that successfully graduate low achievers may actually be penalized under NCLB’s test
driven accountability system. Improved graduation rates must be figured into the
equation of accountability. This attempt at equalization could prevent pushing out low
achievers (Sunderman et al., 2005).

*General Education Graduation Rates*

One in eight students will not complete their high school career or receive a high
school diploma (National Educational Goals Panel, 2002). Even more alarming, when
stated like this, every nine seconds a student drops out of high school (Children’s
Defense Fund, 2001). These statistics prove the seriousness of this problem in America.
Furthermore this establishes the fact that most states are not close meeting the rigorous
standard of 90% graduation rate established by the National Educational Goals Panel
only 68% of all students that enter ninth grade exit with a diploma four years later. In this
same report, minority groups earned diplomas at a rate of 50% for Blacks, 53% for
Latinos, and 51% for American Indians. If males in the minority groups were singled out,
the rates are even dimmer, less than 33% in some states (Mishel & Roy, 2006).

According to Warren and Halpern-Manners (2007), the national high school
graduation rate was 76 %. However, rates were variable across states and ethnicities. As a
matter of fact, the national consensus was that America’s progress toward all students
obtaining a high school diploma had been significant. With the exception of a few
minority groups the concerns about the United States dropout rate was non-existent. This
was partially due to reliance on data from the Current Population Survey (CPS). This
report had been the foundation for figuring dropout rates for decades. The figures
generated by using the data gathered in this decennial task had been reported by such organizations as National Center for Education Statistics’ (2010) annual report. However, these numbers are not the most widely accepted trends in education (Warren & Halpern-Manners, 2009).

More widely used and contrasting data has been generated by the Common Core of Data (CCD). These measures have been much bleaker than those reported by the CPS. In 2000, the rate was estimated to be 65 to 75 in comparison to the 90% reported by the CPS. Many feel the CCD figures are more in line with reality. Warren & Edwards (2005) reported a graduation rate of 78% in 1978. That had fallen to 72% in 2002 (Warren & Halpern-Manners, 2009).

The high school dropout rate is a significant social indicator. The lack of consistency in data collection and reporting may result in profound effects on the level of employability of future workforce, equality of social opportunities, and education beyond high school (Warren & Harpen-Manners, 2009). Mishel and Roy (2006) feel the data generated by use of the CCD data does not align with economic indicators and that the CPS rates are more indicative of the actual dropout data.

In a report completed by Warren and Halpern-Manners (2009), the state that ranked first in graduation rate was Nebraska. New Jersey followed in second place. This study was based on rates reported for the class of 2004. Coming in last was Nevada, South Carolina, Georgia and Mississippi finished respectively at the bottom of the rankings. This same study revealed a national high school graduation rate of 76%. The researchers, based on their previous work, Warren and Edwards (2005) and Warren and Halpern-
Manners (2007), the CCD data is better for determining accurate graduation rates at both national as well as state levels.

In addition to graduation rates for all students, Warren and Halpern-Manners (2009) reported on rates for minority groups. Since conversations regarding dropout rates in the United States had virtually ceased with the exception of concerns about some minority groups, these percentages became relevant. In the African American racial/ethnic group a rate of 62% was indicated. Whites were 81%. 71% of Hispanics completed high school. 66% of American Indians and 96% of Asians/Pacific Islanders graduated from high school in the United States.

*Students with Disabilities Graduation Rates*

While graduation rates for general education students is a significant problem for the United States, even more problematic are the rates of high school completion for at risk groups like students with disabilities (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004). More specifically, students with emotional and behavioral disabilities drop out of school at a rate of 50% (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). Targeting students that are at increased risk of dropping is important. However, implementing preventive measures have been complicated by the requirements of NCLB (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004).

According to the Office of Special Education (OSEP) as cited in Orfield, et al. 2004, students with disabilities graduate at only a 32% rate. In addition, another 11% of students once identified as special education are also classified as drop-outs. Even worse, several states including Mississippi, Georgia, Alabama, and Louisiana, graduate 25% or less of students with disabilities (Orfield, et al., 2004). More specifically, according to the Mississippi Assessment and Accountability Reporting System (MAARS), the state has a
75.9% graduation rate for all students. One of the largest school districts in Mississippi has a graduation rate of 83.5 for all students and 57.8 for students with disabilities. Conversely, one of the smallest districts in the state has a graduation rate for all students of 65.8% and 39% for students with disabilities (Mississippi Department of Education, 2010).

One dropout preventative measure that states have tried to implement is expanding diploma options. However, in a study conducted by Christenson and Thurlow (2004), there are other measures that could be implemented that could provide a solution to the dropout issue in America. Rather than calling these drop-out prevention techniques, these strategies have been termed high school completion measures (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004). This term gives a more positive emphasis.

Promoting school completion requires a conceptualization shift. This would involve focusing on a student’s positives rather than negatives in relation to school competencies. These programs focus on factors than can be altered. Unlike socioeconomic levels that cannot be changed, these alterable factors can be addressed and have a positive impact on school completion. Therefore, for issues like lack of engagement, behaviors, attitude toward school, and family practices, changes can be made that may positively impact school completion (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004).

Dropout prevention has focused more on predictive measures that preventative measures. More is known about who may drop out than what can be done to prevent students from dropping out (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004). While most programs have focused on improving drop-out factors such as poor attendance and low academic
performance, new information implies that personalizing education over time results in positive outcomes for students (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004).

The rigorous expectations of NCLB have created many concerns for educators. However, it has also created opportunities for partnerships between schools and parents. Building partnerships for not only students with disabilities but other at-risk groups will provide education both socially and academically. This can promote active participation in learning while keeping students on the right track to graduate and building other skills academically and behaviorally (Chirstenson & Thurlow, 2004).

Summary and Conclusion

While there is much debate and research in the area of graduation rates, there is little data regarding the academic and financial impact of receiving something other than a high school diploma (Erickson & Morningstar, 2009). One direct impact of high stakes testing has been accountability standards for all students, including those that once were pushed aside in to a separate educational system (Fuchs, & Fuchs, 1994). Congress has taken foundational laws like ESEA 1965 and Educational for Handicapped Children Act 1975 and fine-tuned them through revisions and amendments so that all students now have access to high quality instruction by highly qualified teachers. Progress for every student must be reported and educational agencies are held responsible for lack of progress for any sub-group.

The impact of studies in the area of graduation rates for student with disabilities is far-reaching. Social and economic futures depend on producing students that possess skills to survive in the future workforce. While equal education is a moral issue, if only weighing the economic impact, the necessity of investing in fair education for all is
obvious (Levin, 2009). This investment in education of at-risk groups like students with disabilities needs to be determined by empirical data produced by research. Such benefits are decreased criminal behavior and fewer public assistance recipients. Therefore, according to Levin (2009), both the private and public sectors receive a return on investments in public education.

Other Studies

One study conducted by the University of North Florida on high stakes testing and graduation rates in Duval County Florida reported the afore founded fact that minority students from highly mobile and less educated families are less likely to obtain graduation requirements than their white, wealthier, more educated classmates (Borg, Plumlee, & Stranahan, 2007). One interesting note from this study did indicate that school characteristics did impact the likelihood of success for these groups of students. Schools that employ more educated teachers had higher scores on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT).

Furthermore, this study did indicate a negative consequence of high stakes testing on graduation rates for minority and poor students. According to the findings by Borg et al. (2007), increasing numbers of poor and African American students will fail to meet the requirements imposed by these tests. In addition, evidence found that the current accountability model may widen the gap between Black and Hispanic students and White students. While it is clear that NCLB’s focus on improving achievement levels for all students is admirable, it is unclear that high stakes testing will bring about the desired improvements.
Additionally, Cummings (2009) compared graduation rates in Ohio and West Virginia. Results of this longitudinal study indicated that based on previous studies, a decrease in graduation rates should be evidenced after implementation of high stakes testing requirements. Ohio initiated required passage of state exams in 2004. Likewise, West Virginia began state testing in 2004. However, West Virginia did not require passage of the state test in order to obtain a high school diploma. Only slight decreases were noted in both states in the first year of testing. No significant decrease was noted in comparison to other years. In comparison, West Virginia has lower graduation rates than Ohio. Therefore, high stakes testing did not impact graduation rates.

A study conducted by Elizabeth Drame (2010) measured academic growth of disabled students in Charter Schools. This study stated that even though students may make progress annually, they start out behind. Furthermore, students are not proficient unless scoring in the proficient range. According to Drame, this is unrealistic. However, when utilizing an individual growth model, three different patterns emerged. These outcomes varied according to what was measured. If comparing static scores to levels of proficiency, paired individual scores, or growth score differences results differed. The researcher suggested analyzing different subgroups on individual growth over time might be more reflective of actual progress. At the same time, there are limitations to using such a model. However, this study reveals data that could guide the reauthorization of accountability laws.
CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The following chapter provides information regarding the methodology that was utilized to answer the research questions. First, how do higher accountability standards affect graduation rates for students with disabilities? This question is quantitative in nature. Additionally, three other research questions are qualitative. Included in this section will be research design, participants, instrumentation, procedures, and data analysis.

Research Design/Methodology

Research design established the parameters of higher accountability impact on graduation percentages for students with disabilities by examining pre and post accountability implementation and administrators’ attitudes in relation to these standards. Archived data regarding graduation rates in percentages were gathered from the Department of Education database. The questionnaire responses were answered on a Likert-type Scale with quantitative responses. In addition, gender, years of experience in education, and experience in administration were answered with categorical responses. Lastly, three open-ended questions were included as a qualitative piece to this study.

Archival Data

A discussion with the Director of Research and Statistics for the State Department of Education clarified the type of archival data available to complete this study (Appendix A). Data were available beginning in 2001 on graduation rates prior to the states’ implementation of a growth model that complies with federal laws. The data were
compared to current graduation rates in order to determine if a statistically significant impact existed. Therefore, the data obtained were annually for 2001 and 2010. This allowed a comparison check for pre- and post-growth models for this southeastern state. This data was used to answer Research Question 1.

**Survey Instrument**

A survey instrument (Appendix B) was adapted from Wright and Choi (2005). The original survey was written for teachers of English Language Learners (ELL) regarding attitudes of high-stakes testing for ELL students. This instrument solicits demographic data regarding gender, administrative position, years of experience in education, and years of experience in administration. The instrument was modified in the following ways to address the specific research questions in this study. The revised sections included views of NCLB; views of high-stakes testing for SWD; strategies to eliminate swd from high-stakes testing; NCLB impact on graduation rates. Permission was obtained from Dr. Wayne Wright (Appendix C), the original author of *Voices from the Classroom: A Statewide Survey of Experienced Third-Grade English Language Learner Teachers on the Impact of Language and High-Stakes Testing Policies in Arizona*. Questions 1-31 were utilized to answer Research Questions 2 and 3 regarding attitudes of administrators on high-stakes testing of students with disabilities. Finally, four open-ended questions were included to answer Research Question 4 regarding impacts of administrator attitudes toward high-stakes testing of SWD.
Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. Have the increased accountability standards through high-stakes testing requirements affected traditional graduation rates of students with disabilities?

2. What are attitudes of high school principals toward high-stakes testing of students with disabilities?

3. What are attitudes of directors of special education toward high-stakes testing of students with disabilities?

4. Do the attitudes of directors of special education and high school principals differ?

Participants

Archival Data

There were two types of participants in this research project. The first group of participants was the high schools from all 152 districts in the state. The graduation percentages for each public high school in the state are reported annually. This information is made public in the District Report Card required by the Children’s First Act. More specifically, these data are disaggregated and reported for multiple sub-groups. A comparison was run on graduation percentages for all students versus students with disabilities prior to implementation of higher accountability standards and following implementation. Data for schools from across the state were included in this study. This state is located in the southeastern part of the United States. The state is composed of 82 counties. Located in these counties are 152 school districts. The racial makeup of the schools is 50% black, 46% white, and 4% other. In 2009/2010 there were 2,577
secondary special education students, 2,837 elementary students with disabilities, and 1,016 GED students that participated in high-stakes testing at the high school level. (MDE, 2010).

As a result of NCLB school district data are compiled to report overall performance and graduation rates annually. Additionally, all subgroups are required to participate in state’s high stakes testing in grades 3 through 8. Subject area tests for high school students are required in English II, Algebra I, Biology, and United States History. These rates included all subgroups. However, data are also disaggregated for students with disabilities. This information is compiled in the state Report Card in order to comply with the Children’s First Act requirements. This state began compilation of this information prior to implementation of a growth model, which was required by law in 2002. However, this annual report was modified to reflect the requirements of the new accountability law after 2002. Therefore, 2001 data compiled before and in 2010 several years after NCLB were utilized for this study.

Survey Instrument

In addition to the archival data for schools, high school administrators and directors of special education from across the southeastern state were contacted for participation in this research project (Appendix D). As a result, 45 administrators completed the survey. Of the participants, 31 were male (68.9%), 13 were female (28.9%), while one was not identified (2.2%). Principals comprised the largest number of respondents at 37 (82.2%). Directors of special education made up a total of seven respondents (15.6%). Once again, one was not identified (2.2%). The majority of the respondents had more than 6-10 years
of administrative experience. The information relating to administrative experience is included in Table 1 below.

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Research indicates the importance of leadership on student achievement (Reeves, 2007). According to Reeves (2007), there are many areas of education subject to much debate. However, he says one of the areas is evidence-based assessment. Furthermore, evidence has revealed that the single most important factor in closing gaps in student achievement is leadership (Reeves, 2007). For this reason, school leaders, principals and directors will be given a survey so that the attitudes from both the principal’s position and the directors of special education position can be evaluated in reference to the dropout rate for students with disabilities in this study. Furthermore, a comparison of the attitudes of the two administrative positions was conducted.
Accountability standards and high stakes testing is no longer something that affects only general education students and teachers. IDEA expanded the idea of accessibility to students with disabilities. NCLB went a step further by requiring proficiency. According to Gregg (2007) special education teachers will need to be specialized in both instructional and assessment strategies. Knowing that students with disabilities must meet the same standards regarding high stakes testing for graduation, teachers of these students will need to use assessment to measure student progress. This will allow timely instructional decisions to be made for students with disabilities (Gregg, 2007). Simply using end-of-year assessments will not work for students with disabilities. In order to close the gaps and meet the needs of this group of students day to day instructional decisions must be based on such things as work samples, portfolios, task analyses, observations, and writing samples. These things must be measured periodically. Incremental monitoring may be the only way to show any gains in closing the achievements gaps that exist for some students (Gregg, 2007).

Instrumentation

Archival Data

Archival data on graduation rates for students with disabilities was obtained from the state department of education. A conversation with the Director of Research and Statistics confirmed availability of this information. This data was obtained for 2001 and 2010. 2001 data represent pre-accountability growth model and 2010 data represent post-accountability growth model. The data were obtained per high school in the state. However, no single high school was identified in the study and not all high schools had
graduation information available for both of the selected years. Therefore, the data reflects 90 of the 152 districts.

**Survey Instrument**

A questionnaire was given to principals and directors of special education in order to gather information regarding their attitudes regarding high-stakes testing of students with disabilities. The questionnaire was given to administrators from across a southeastern state. The purpose of this was to obtain information regarding practices in relation to high-stakes testing for students with disabilities in light of accountability requirements following the implementation of NCLB. The questionnaire was mailed to approximately 200 high school administrators. This questionnaire was adapted from one developed and distributed by Wright and Choi (2005). Permission was obtained from Dr. Wayne Wright in May 2011. The original questionnaire was written for teachers of English language learners regarding high-stakes testing. The sections of the questionnaire were amended to address high-stakes testing of SWD.

The reliability of the survey instrument was verified with Cronbach’s alpha. The survey consisted of four sections: views of NCLB (.754); views of high-stakes testing of SWD (.835); strategies to eliminate SWD from high-stakes testing (.806); to what degree does NCLB impact graduation rates for SWD (.502). Each section displayed strong reliability with the exception of the final part of the survey. The section labeled “To what degree does NCLB impact the graduation rate for SWD” showed weak reliability (.502). This could be due to the fact that there were only three questions in this section. Any conclusions drawn from this section of the survey will be referenced with the fact that reliability was low.
Research Procedures

Procedures are spelled out sequentially in this section. The exact method of data collection is explained. Information regarding the geographical location of the state and demographics of the students is also included. The SPSS tests that will be conducted are included and described in this section.

The main focus of this research was the guiding question regarding the effects of increased accountability standards on traditional graduation rates of students with disabilities. The dependent variable will be graduation rates post high stakes testing implementation. The 152 districts in the state each report graduation rates for all subgroups combined as well as students with disabilities separately. Therefore, the data can be grouped and tests conducted to compare the differences within groups and between groups for significance.

Archival Data

Once permission was obtained from Institutional Review Board (Appendix E) this was sent to the State Department of Education for release of the archival data. The archival data needed for this study was graduation rates for the sub-group, students with disabilities, per district in the southeastern state as well as overall graduation rates for each of the 152 districts in the state. Once the request for access to records (Appendix F) was submitted and data for specified years was obtained, tests were used to check for a statistically significant impact of accountability standards on graduation rates for students with disabilities pre and post accountability standards. All information housed on the state department’s website is submitted via the state reporting system. Districts enter an agreement stating the information is valid and reliable. District reporting processes are
secure and limited to significant district personnel. District information is verified by the
department of education and made available for public viewing. No single district was
identified in the study.

Survey Instrument

In addition, a questionnaire was given to principals and directors of special
education in order to obtain personal information regarding the direct impact on testing
students with disabilities will be categorized. This added a qualitative piece to the study.
Responses were indicated using a four point Likert scale. The questionnaire was then
mailed to participants to ensure anonymity. A self-addressed, stamped envelope was
included for quick return. Once results were returned, they were analyzed. The analysis
also involved thematic coding of open-ended responses for both groups of high school
principals and directors of special education.

Data Analysis

Data analysis includes the data from the ANOVA. Analysis determined if no
impact on graduation rates for students with disabilities existed as a result of high stakes
testing. Statistical tests reported if significant differences exist between graduation rates
for students with disabilities and high stakes testing based on one southeastern state’s
implementation of a growth model. In addition, a t-test was conducted to determine if
differences existed between principals and directors of special education.

Archival Data

The particular parametrical test used to compare differences in data was a Repeated
Measures Analysis of Variance or RM ANOVA. This test was used to find the differences
between means. When only one quantitative independent variable exists along with a
quantitative dependent variable, a Repeated Measures ANOVA is used to find differences.

Survey Instrument

The results of the questionnaire were thematically coded and grouped by responses. These responses were reported with descriptive statistics. The frequency, mean, and standard deviations were reported for one group, high school principals, as well as the second group, directors of special education. The importance of this questionnaire is for future research to determine if attitudes of school leaders impact graduation rates for this sub-group of students.

A t-test was conducted to compare the attitudes of principals and directors of special education on high-stakes testing for students with disabilities supplied in the questionnaire. The purpose of running a simple t-test was to determine if the attitudes of high school principals and directors of special education differ.

Summary

Chapter III describes the participants in the study. The reason each was chosen is also explained. Step-by-step procedures for collection of the archival data as well as the survey instrument for administrators are included. In addition, the SPSS data entry and test selection is spelled out. The instrument, or questionnaire, is also described. The parametrical tests that were run on the data are defined. Also, the type of statistical data that will result from each test is detailed. The significance of each step in the methodology section of the study is clear. The need for clean data, honest reporting and precise analysis will lead to accurate reporting regarding the research questions which are regarding the effects of accountability standards on graduation rates for students with disabilities. Comparison of the archival data before the implementation of a growth
model in this southeastern state to the data following the implementation of the growth model will provide information regarding effects. In addition, the answers to the questionnaire by high school principals and directors of special education shed light on the attitudes of administrators on high-stakes testing of this same sub-group.
CHAPTER IV
RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the study. The purpose of this research was to reveal the impact of high-stakes testing on graduation rates of students with disabilities. In addition, the study sought to reveal the impact of administrators’ attitudes on graduation rates of this sub-group. These answers were found through identifying four research questions. Results were presented for each of the four questions. For Research Question 1 regarding the effects of high-stakes testing on graduation rates for students with disabilities, archival data on graduation information for 152 school districts in this southeastern state were included. Graduation rates for all students, as well as the students with disabilities subcategory, were included. In addition, for the qualitative piece of the study, or questions 2-4, a survey was utilized to reveal administrator attitudes on high-stakes testing of students with disabilities, a total of 45 administrators participated. This total comprised of 37 principals, seven directors of special education, and one unidentified. An alpha level of .05 was applied for each statistical test.

In order to answer Research Question 1, archival data housed by the state’s department of education was obtained. Graduation rates are stored on the state’s website for public viewing. For this study, graduation rates were needed prior to the higher accountability standards established by NCLB as well as rates following the implementation of increased standards. For this study, data from 2001 and 2010 were requested from the department of education. A public records request form was submitted requesting a copy of this data in January 2012.
A survey was distributed for the qualitative section of the study, the survey captured data about the attitudes of administrators on the impact of high-stakes testing of students with disabilities using a four-point Likert-type scale. Furthermore, the survey questions asked about administrators’ perceptions to determine if these attitudes impact graduation rates on these same sub-groups of students. This survey is divided into the following sections: demographic data; views of NCLB; views of high-stakes testing of SWD; strategies to eliminate SWD from high-stakes testing; NCLB impact on graduation rates for SWD; and open-ended questions regarding impact of NCLB on leadership style, prioritization of special education, SWD in growth model, and SWD instruction. This survey was adapted from Wright and Choi’s (2005) survey for a study on high-stakes testing of English Language Learners. Permission was obtained to make changes for high-stakes testing of students with disabilities. The sections and questions of the study were adapted to read students with disabilities. The open-ended questions were added in order to seek specific information regarding the impact of accountability standards on principal leadership styles, prioritization of special education, instructional improvements for students with disabilities, and inclusion of students with disabilities in the growth model.

Data Analysis

Research Question 1: Have increased accountability standards through high-stakes testing requirements affected traditional graduation rates of students with disabilities?

This question was answered utilizing archival data for the 152 school districts. However, not all 152 districts had graduation data for either or both groups in the years selected.
Therefore only 90 districts were calculated. Once this data was obtained it was imported to SPSS version 20 software. Data for total graduation rates of all students were obtained as well as data for SWD subgroup. Tests looked at changes in both groups and changes between groups. The following descriptive statistics were reported.

Table 2

*Graduation Rates by Year (N=90)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Graduation Rate 2001</td>
<td>81.84</td>
<td>8.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWD Graduation Rates 2001</td>
<td>36.92</td>
<td>22.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Graduation Rates 2010</td>
<td>72.52</td>
<td>8.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWD Graduation Rates 2010</td>
<td>22.50</td>
<td>14.96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As indicated in Table 2, graduation rates for all students were much higher than those for SWD. Graduation rates for all students in 2001 (M=81.84, SD=8.17) declined as compared to data in 2010 (M=72.52, SD=8.78). Likewise, graduation rates for SWD in 2001 (M=36.92, SD=22.02) decreased in comparison to 2010 (M=22.50, SD=14.96). Theses declines are shown below in Figure 1.
According to the analysis of graduation rates pre NCLB compared to graduation rates post NCLB, both rates showed decline. Figure 1 indicates the widening of the gap between graduation rates for all students as compared to graduation rates for SWD.

Multivariate tests checked for interaction between year of graduation rates, type of graduation rates, and year and type of graduation rates. The following effect was identified in year (2001 vs. 2010), $F(1,89)=82.93, p<.001$. This was indicative of a significant difference between years. Due to historical information, the effect in type of graduation rate was expected. The effect in type of graduation rate (total graduation rate vs. SWD graduation rate) was $F(1,89)=1157.68, p<.001$. Finally, the interaction between year and type of graduation rate indicated something significantly more impacting than the expected difference in type of graduation rate. The effect between

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*Figure 1. Mean Graduation Rates by Year (SPSS Version 20)*

---
year and type was $F(1,89)=4.03$, $p<.048$. The data indicated a widening of the gap between the two groups as illustrated in Figure 1.

Research question 2: What are attitudes of high school principals toward high-stakes testing of students with disabilities?

Administrator responses to survey questions 1 through 31 were tallied and entered into statistical software. Once this was complete, a t-test was conducted. Principals that responded to the survey using a four-point Likert-type scale indicated the following descriptive information in relation to views on NCLB, views on high-stakes testing of SWD, strategies initiated to eliminate SWD from high-stakes testing, and NCLB impact on graduation rates for SWD.

Table 3

*Principal Survey on NCLB Effect on Students with Disabilities (N=37)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NCLB Views</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Testing SWD</td>
<td>2.34</td>
<td>.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies</td>
<td>2.23</td>
<td>.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact on Grad</td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td>.64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Likert Scale: 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=agree, 4=strongly agree

As indicated in Table 3, principal means for each of the four sections on the survey ranged in between a 2, which is disagree, and a 3, which is agree. Principal responses on views of NCLB were closer to agree (M=2.90). Both views of high-stakes testing of SWD (M=2.34) and strategies initiated to eliminate SWD from high-stakes testing (M=2.23)
were closer to disagree. The last section of the survey on the impact on graduation rates for SWD (M=2.99) were indicative of agreement from the principal perspective.

Research Question 3: What are attitudes of directors of special education toward high-stakes testing of students with disabilities?

Once again, the responses to the survey were recorded using a Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=agree, 4=strongly agree). These responses were then typed into the SPSS software version 18. The following descriptive information was identified from a simple t-test based on directors of special education responses.

Table 4

Directors of Special Education Survey on NCLB Effect on Students with Disabilities
(N=7)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NCLB Views</td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td>.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Testing SWD</td>
<td>2.23</td>
<td>.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies</td>
<td>2.52</td>
<td>.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact on Grad</td>
<td>2.79</td>
<td>.64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Likert Scale: 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=agree, 4=strongly agree

Directors of special education indicated agreement on views of NCLB (M=2.99). While views of high-stakes testing of SWD were closer to disagreement (M= 2.23). Both strategies initiated to eliminate SWD from high-stakes testing and NCLB impact on graduation rates for SWD fell somewhere between agreement and disagreement. The limited number of responses from special education directors did not seem to impact the
results of the survey due to the fact that the means for both groups of administrators did not vary significantly.

Research Question 4: Do the attitudes of directors of special education and high school principals differ?

Two separate methods of reporting were used to check for differences that may have existed between principals and directors of special education attitudes. First of all a t-test was conducted to check for significant differences among responses to the survey questions. As indicated in Table 5, no apparent difference existed between the two groups on the four parts of the survey.

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>NCLB Views Principal</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sped Dir</td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Testing SWD</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>2.34</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sped Dir</td>
<td>2.23</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>2.23</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sped Dir</td>
<td>2.52</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact on Grad</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sped Dir</td>
<td>2.79</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Likert Scale: 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=agree, 4=strongly agree
Furthermore, a t-test for equality of means indicated no significant differences in means on each of the four sections of the survey per respondent group. The following values were reported: views of *NCLB* \( t(42) = -0.470, p = 0.641 \); views of high-stakes testing of SWD \( t(42) = 0.501, p = 0.619 \); strategies initiated to eliminate SWD from high-stakes testing \( t(42) = -1.48, p = 0.146 \); to what degree does *NCLB* impact graduation rates for SWD \( t(41) = 0.761, p = 0.451 \). As evidenced by the findings the means between principals and directors of special education do not differ significantly on any part of the survey.

The open-ended responses provided by administrators were used to answer Research Question 4. The results of the survey were thematically coded and are listed below. The responses from many administrators were uninhibited. Many even wrote extensive paragraphs on feelings regarding high-stakes testing of students with disabilities. The responses were reported in order of most frequently reported to least frequently. The responses to the open-ended questions are also sorted in categories of principal and directors of special education to four questions. The questions asked for honest responses to the following:

- Name three changes created by accountability standards such as those in *NCLB* that had the greatest impact on leadership style.
- How did these accountability standards impact the prioritization of special education?
- What is your opinion on inclusion of all special education students in the growth model?
- How has *NCLB* impacted the instruction of SWD?

All responses are reported in the following tables.
Table 6

_Name three changes created by accountability standards such as those in NCLB that had the greatest impact on leadership style._

Principal Responses:

- Increased supervision
- Higher expectations for all
- Teacher collaboration
- Increased awareness of needs
- More difficult retention/selection of staff
- Increased focus on graduation rates
- Harder to discipline some students
- More passive style
- Decreased time for teacher improvement
- Focus on curriculum more than teaching strategies
- Increased focus on test scores/test preparation
- Tracking/reviewing data
- Increased resources for inclusion teachers
- Created remediation classes
- Created path to subject area classes for SWD
- Leadership has not/will not change
- Eliminated grade level testing
Table 6 (continued).

Principal Responses:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decreased individualization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Decreased supplemental programs/clubs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant evaluation of number of SWD in subject area classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of pacing guides</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased knowledge of laws</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased pressure on administrator/paranoid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exclude students from enrolling in school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allowed placement of SWD in subject area classes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thematic coding of the responses to the question regarding impact on leadership style revealed increased supervision of teachers as the most frequent answer given by principals with a total of seven. High expectations for all students, increased collaboration between teachers, and increased awareness of needs were each recorded a total of three times. All other responses were reported twice or less.

Table 7 reveals the responses regarding *NCLB* impact on leadership. Only one response was recorded multiple times. Increased tracking of data was the most frequently given answer from directors of special education. Each of the other responses recorded in the table below were each counted only once.
Table 7

Name three changes created by accountability standards such as those in NCLB that had the greatest impact on leadership style.

Directors of Special Education Responses:

Tracking data
Focus on highly qualified teachers
Mandatory testing for all
Focus on showing adequate yearly progress
Changed teaching style
Increased differentiation
Higher expectations for special education students
Increased collaboration

Leaders responded to a question regarding the prioritization of special education since the implementation of higher accountability standards. Table 8 indicates principal responses to this question. Two responses, closer alignment to state curriculum and focus on greater achievement for SWD were noted three times each. Improved/Increased instructional strategies, setting higher goals for SWD, focusing on impact of test scores on school accountability levels, and increased scrutiny of scheduling SWD in subject area classes (number tested) were each listed twice. All other responses were noted once.
Table 8

How did these accountability standards impact the prioritization of special education?

Principal Responses:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Closer alignment to state curriculum for SWD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on greater achievement for SWD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved/Increased instructional strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set higher goals for SWD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on impact of test scores on school accountability levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased scrutiny of scheduling SWD in subject area classes (number tested)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased frustration for SWD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Push some SWD toward Occupational Diploma or GED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased attention to IEP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased instructional time in subject area classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Established pre-requisites for subject area classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look for loopholes in testing requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decrease in growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on accountability for all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reducing special education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on “bubble students” (students scoring basic but almost proficient)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased paperwork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased expectations for special education teachers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Likewise, directors of special education programs in this state reported the following responses to the NCLB impact on the prioritization of special education.

Table 9

*How did these accountability standards impact the prioritization of special education?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Directors of Special Education Responses:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increased expectations of special education students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special education became important to all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District data more important than students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased evaluations of special education teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New sense of belonging in general education for SWD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased frustration for SWD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The next question to elicit principal responses was in regard to the inclusion of all SWD in the state’s growth model. Overwhelmingly, sixteen principals stated a simple no when asked if all disabled students should be included. Most principals included additional information in their narratives as to why some SWD should not be included. All recorded responses are listed below in Table 10.
Table 10

*What is your opinion on inclusion of all special education students in the growth model?*

Principal Responses:

---

No

IEP should drive testing/accountability for SWD

Stronger instruction for SWD

Unfair to SWD

Important for all to be included

Yes

Social benefits

Unfair to schools

Increased stress on teachers

Increased stress on students

NCLB missed kids in middle

---

Directors of special education reported the responses shown in Table 11. None of their responses to this question regarding the inclusion of all SWD in the growth model was noted more than once.
Table 11

*What is your opinion on inclusion of all special education students in the growth model?*

Directors of Special Education Responses:

- Severe/Profound students should not be included
- Unfair to districts
- Growth for all is important
- High-stakes testing is not best way to show growth
- Most SWD experience success in general education
- Free and appropriate education can be provided for SWD in general education setting

Once again, principals identified one response more frequently than the others. Improved instruction for SWD was listed as the most noted impact on instruction for this group of students occurring nine times. The other top recorded answers from principals were focusing on test preparation and placement in classes for which they were ill prepared. See responses in table below.

Table 12

*How has NCLB impacted the instruction of students with disabilities?*

Principal Responses:

- Improved instruction
- SWD forced into classes with no preparation
- Focus on test preparation
Principal Responses:

Limited modifications in subject area classes
Tracking test instead of skills needed
Increased rigor
More accommodations needed
Holds all people accountable
Increased mainstreamed placement
SWD left behind
SWD forced to take test they cannot pass
Increased achievement
Increased awareness
Numbers game
Reduced focus on career preparation
Increased opportunities to take some classes
Negative impact

Like principals, special education directors indicated that \textit{NCLB} improved instruction for SWD. This response, along with increased expectations, was the most frequent response from this group of administrators. All others reported in Table 13 were listed once.
Table 13

*How has NCLB impacted the instruction of students with disabilities?*

Directors of Special Education Responses:

- Improved instruction
- Improved accountability
- Higher expectations
- Less time to focus on career preparation
- Increased opportunities to take some classes
- Increased need for accommodations and modifications

The open-ended responses ranged widely in theme. This caused for lengthy reporting of this information. However, as indicated by the responses listed above, the similarities existed between principals and directors of special education. For example, in regards to the open-ended item, name three changes created by accountability standards such as those in *NCLB* that had the greatest impact on leadership style, both principals and directors of special education indicated that higher expectation had been established for SWD. In addition, increased collaboration was also noted by both groups of respondents. In response to the survey question regarding inclusion of all SWD in the growth model, both groups stated it was good for all students to be included. While themes were broad, both groups did show many similarities.
Summary

One high school student drops out every nine seconds (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004). Based on the results of the data regarding graduation rates for all students as well as SWD, this problem is not improving. As a matter of fact, results of the tests showed a decline in graduation rates for both groups. However, a significant difference does exist between the years of 2001 (pre NCLB) and 2010 (post NCLB) between the groups. While the gap existed in 2001, it was wider in 2010 (see Figure 1).

In addition to graduation rates, this study revealed no significant differences in attitudes between principals and directors of special education regarding views of NCLB, high-stakes testing of SWD, strategies initiated to eliminate SWD from high-stakes testing, or the impact on graduation rates for SWD as indicated by survey responses. Principal responses to the survey ranged between agree and disagree with views of NCLB (M=2.99) and impact on graduation rates (M=2.90) being closest to agree. Likewise, directors of special education responses varied between agree and disagree with views of NCLB (M=2.99) and impact on graduation rates for SWD (M=2.79) being closest to agree.

Finally, the survey identified some similarities in attitudes regarding impact of NCLB on leadership, prioritization of special education, inclusion of SWD in growth model, and impact on instruction for SWD as evidenced in open-ended responses by both groups of administrators. The themes provided from responses varied widely. However, both groups usually shared some common responses to each of the four questions.
CHAPTER V

FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

This study started as a passionate search for answers to a question that has major impacts on the lives of students. Trying to find a vehicle in which to reveal if unintended effects on students existed as a result of higher accountability standards was not an easy chore. Finally, it was determined that an anonymous survey with specific questions regarding attitudes was the most certain way to encourage administrator participation and candor. The survey responses were not disappointing. Because the topic of high-stakes testing for students with disabilities is a relevant one, the survey elicited responses from many administrators. Many of the respondents wrote extensive answers even writing outside the margins provided for answers. This survey along with graduation rates both pre- (2001) and post- (2010) NCLB were utilized to determine if any significant impact was obvious.

In accordance with research from Levin (2009), the social impact of this issue should be a major concern for the United States. According to Levin, the cost of incarceration was conservatively more than $26,600 in 2009. Simple economics implies that expense is climbing. Levin’s research (2009) stated dropping out of high school significantly increases the likelihood of incarceration. Based on the results of this study, our country should have the dropout crisis much higher on the priority list. In order to produce citizens that contribute to society, educators must ensure every opportunity to surpass the possible roadblocks set by increased accountability standards. These checkpoints for all high school students could be viewed as creating both positive and
negatives impacts for students. While the graduation data indicated some negative impacts, the survey indicated some overall positive attitudes regarding instruction and expectations for SWD.

Findings and Conclusions

In regard to Research Question 1, which was related to the effect of higher accountability standards on graduation rates for SWD, there was a significant impact between all students and SWD. The initial difference between the two was not surprising. According to the National Educational Goals Panel 2002, SWD have historically graduated at significantly lower rates than their non-disabled peers. Furthermore, studies reveal little progress in shrinking the gaps in achievement (Thomas & Brady, 2005). Frankly, the data from the study revealed a larger gap between all students and SWD in 2010 than what existed in 2001. This increased gap indicated a negative impact on graduation rates for SWD since the implementation of high-stakes testing. Therefore, it can be assumed that high-stakes testing has caused a decline in graduation rates for SWD.

While SWD make up 12% of the students in this state, it is alarming that only 22% of those reach the level of high school graduation (MDE, 2010).

Research Question 2 revealed principal attitudes toward high-stakes testing of SWD. The data indicated means falling somewhere between agree and disagree in each section. The four areas of the survey instrument sought feedback on overall views of increased accountability standards for SWD. Principals indicated agreement on the first section relating to views of NCLB. Questions in this section asked about such things as the idea of high expectations of all students, the creation of equity in education, and improved instruction for SWD. Section two of the survey elicited responses to views of
high-stakes testing of SWD; principals indicated a mean closer to disagree. This section asked specifically about reporting of test scores being fair, impact of SWD tests scores on school rating levels, and accurate measurement of achievement for SWD through high-stakes testing. The third part of the survey asked questions regarding strategies initiated to eliminate SWD from testing. Respondents were asked about the 95% testing rule created by NCLB, IEP guidance on testing for SWD, and optional diplomas for SWD to name a few. Overall principal answers were closer to disagree. The last section of the survey sought responses about NCLB impact on graduation rates. It should be noted that, the reliability of this section was low possibly because of the limited number of questions included. Therefore, while the responses revealed agreement in this area, the results should be viewed in light of weak reliability.

Research Question 3 was the same as two with only the respondents changing. Directors of special education answered in relation to their attitudes of higher accountability for SWD. While the number of respondents was small, this did not appear to impact the results based on the fact that means did not vary significantly in relation to principal responses. Directors of special education also indicated agreement to views of NCLB. The section regarding high-stakes testing of SWD indicated responses closer to disagree by this group of respondents as did the principals. The mean for the section relating to strategies initiated to eliminate SWD from testing fell exactly between agree and disagree. Once again on the questions applying to the impact of NCLB on graduation rates for SWD, reliability should be considered. Directors of special education indicated agreement.
Research Question 4 was regarding differences between principals and directors of special education attitudes. Both quantitative data and qualitative data were gathered. This was done utilizing a Likert-type scale as well as open-ended questions. The purpose of asking both groups of administrators was to see if differences existed in attitudes that may impact graduation rates for SWD. According to Reeves (2007), leadership has a major impact on achievement levels of students. The results of the survey responses did not indicate a significant difference in attitudes between the two groups of school leaders. However, the open-ended questions provided some interesting insight as to principal practices in relation to high stakes testing of students with disabilities. Some notable responses in this section of the survey were: establishing subject area class prerequisites for SWD, prevention of enrollment, looking for loopholes in testing requirements, limiting number of special education students in subject area classes, and decreased time for career preparation.

Limitations

Limitations identified for this study included the small number of directors of special education that responded to the survey. Even though special education administrator responses were fewer than principal responses, the means between the two groups of administrators were similar. Therefore, this did not seem to impact the outcome. However, a larger number of participants from the special education field could add additional insights. In addition, the low reliability (.502) on the section of the survey that asked about attitudes regarding the impact of NCLB on graduation rates for SWD could be a limitation. This section of the survey only contained three questions. In addition, the questions did not seem related. The fact that there were changes in
graduation rate calculations should also be considered a likely limitation. The passage of new regulations regarding graduation or the revision of existing regulations results in amending current policies. Graduation rates have evolved over the years. Therefore, what may have been considered a high school graduate in 2001 may be different today. These changes could impact the data gathered in this study. However, when considering the gap that exists between the two groups, all students and SWD, data from different years was not compared.

Implications

This study could be the springboard for future research regarding the impacts of high-stakes testing for not only students with disabilities but all students. The fact that both rates declined indicates possible negative impacts on graduation rates. The revelation of principal attitudes toward testing practices with this subgroup of students, and other low-performing students, may indicate a need for further investigation into the impact on graduation rates for this group of students. Furthermore, responses regarding principal practices regarding low achieving students’ placement in high-stakes testing classes may warrant further research. According to Albritten, et al (2004), SWD had often been the scapegoats for failing to meet the adequate yearly progress goal, thus, impacting school rating levels. Likewise, according to the data, there has been a decline in graduation rates for all students. All the while, the distance between the two groups, all students and SWD, has widened. The need for further investigation on the impact of NCLB on graduation rates for SWD may be needed. This section of the survey showed weak reliability. The need for an improved tool to find additional information on this particular area is demonstrated by the open-ended responses. Principals indicated they
purposefully tried to prevent students from enrolling or required pre-requisites for SWD before enrolling in subject area classes. Both practices could impact the opportunity to reach graduation.

As stated in earlier research, Gregg (2007) says that a one-time test may not be the best way to indicate academic growth for SWD. Furthermore, like Fuchs and Fuchs (1994), it seems unfair to hold SWD to the same standards when, for too many years, they have been prevented from receiving the same standard of education until recently. With the adoption of the Common Core State Standards, the nation is beginning to refocus the type of accountability students must meet. While it is yet unclear on the exact format of the tests, it is apparent that multiple tests will be given in order to get a snapshot over time of a student’s performance. This may be more aligned with what needs to occur in order for students to demonstrate growth. Once again, Gregg (2007) says multiple tests over time may be the most effective way of measuring student achievement. Once fully implemented, a comparison of SWD performance on one-time testing and multiple tests measures could be conducted to determine if one is more indicative of achievement for SWD. Looking at this issue on a more wide-scale level could also provide useful information. Identifying states that are handling high-stakes testing of SWD without decreasing graduation rates for this same sub-group could provide applicable practices for states lagging behind. This too may be easier since more than 40 states have now adopted the same standards.

Summary

In conclusion, the purpose of this research was to determine if any unintended impacts existed as a result of higher accountability standards such as those implemented
by NCLB. Likewise, it was the desire of the researcher to reveal if any residual effect might be attributed to administrator attitudes regarding these standards in relation to SWD. The purpose behind this work was centered on life decisions that are sometimes made in the hands of administrators that must comply with ever-increasing pressure established by education laws that are well-intentioned. Based on the responses to the open-ended questions of the survey instrument, there are various practices in existence that could impact graduation for SWD.

Furthermore, future studies should consider several factors when conducting studies regarding graduation rates. For example, changes in leadership at the federal level impacts the revision of laws. Regulations drive educational policies and practices. Additionally, this study looked at graduation rates for one-year pre-NCLB and one-year post-NCLB. Future studies should consider looking at this data over time. Along these same lines, this study compared district means for graduation rates. This data could be compared at the school level. This information could help to reveal if particular schools have problems with administrators in relation to graduation rates for SWD. Future research should also consider administrator practices in relation to high-stakes testing of SWD.

Trying to regulate accountability is a difficult task. Teachers doing the right things for the right reasons seem to diminish when pressure to perform is applied. There is no one-size-fits-all vehicle for delivering student achievement growth or results. Multiple measures over time may be the best hope many students have.
APPENDIX A

MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION MEMO

Mississippi Department of Education
Dr. Tom Burnham, Ed.D, State Superintendent of Education

Lynn J. House, Ph.D. *Deputy State Superintendent

Ken Thompson *Director

To: Mitzi Moore

From: Ken Thompson

Date: July 25, 2011

RE: Data for dissertation

Ms. Moore – please consider this formal notification that the Office of Research and Statistics will be happy to work with you in obtaining necessary data for use in your dissertation. To provide you with the data, I’ll need confirmation from the IRB at your institution that you are working on your dissertation, and you’ll need to complete the necessary security documents before receiving any data.

Please let me know if you need anything further.
APPENDIX B

SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Administrator Survey on “No Child Left Behind” Effect on Students with Disabilities

Instructions: Please answer each question by choosing only one answer per question. Responses are anonymous. Thank you for participating.

Please choose only one answer for the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender of Administrator</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Administrative Position</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>SPED Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of Experience In Education</td>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>3-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of Experience As Administrator</td>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>3-5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rating Scale: (1 = Strongly Disagree) (2 = Disagree) (3 = Agree) (4 = Strongly Agree)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respond based on your views of the No Child Left Behind Act:</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The general idea of high expectations of all students, including students with disabilities, is good.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. NCLB has created equity in education, especially for students with disabilities.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. NCLB has improved instruction for students with disabilities.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Schools should be held accountable for academic achievement for students with disabilities.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. NCLB is a fair way to judge my school’s instructional effectiveness for students with disabilities.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Adequate yearly progress (AYP) should be measured for every sub-group including students with disabilities.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. School rating categories can be impacted by one subgroup’s scores on high stakes testing.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Standards and accountability for districts, schools, and teachers are important</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Schools that test 100% of all sub-groups, including students with disabilities, should be rewarded.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. NCLB unfairly rewards some schools.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respond to the following based on your views of high-stakes testing of students with disabilities:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11. Test scores of students with disabilities have caused my school’s rating to decrease.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. NCLB subgroup reporting of test scores is fair.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>---</td>
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<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Students with disabilities should be eliminated from high-stakes tests.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. High-stakes tests have helped schools focus on the needs of students with disabilities.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. With appropriate test accommodations, students with disabilities can be fairly tested.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Test accommodations should be expanded beyond the current restrictions.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. High-stakes tests provide accurate measures of students with disabilities academic achievement.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. The focus of high-stakes tests is driving instruction for students with disabilities, which is inappropriate.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. The amount of time that special education teachers are expected to spend on test preparation is too much.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Scores from high-stakes tests are useful for planning instruction for students with disabilities.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respond to the following statements based on strategies initiated to eliminate students with disabilities from high-stakes testing:

<p>| | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21. The 95% requirement is used for eliminating some students with disabilities from high-stakes testing.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Students with disabilities are encouraged to avoid taking subject area courses until the junior or senior year.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Students with disabilities are encouraged to enter GED programs to avoid taking subject area tests.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Students with disabilities are directed toward optional diploma tracks to avoid subject area testing.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. Students with disabilities are required to repeat classes to better prepare them for subject area tests.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. Some students are being classified as SCD (Severely Cognitive Disability) to avoid subject area testing.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. Limitations are being placed on the number of students with disabilities enrolled in subject area classes.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. Individual Education Plans (IEP) should dictate testing participation regardless of the 95% requirement.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To what degree does No Child Left Behind impact the graduation rate of students with disabilities:

<p>| | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>29. More students with disabilities are graduating with traditional diplomas since implementation of NCLB.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. More students with disabilities are choosing optional diploma routes to avoid high-stakes testing.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31. Failure to pass SAT is causing an increase of dropouts among students with disabilities.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
33. Failure to pass SATP is causing an increase of dropouts among students with disabilities.

34. More students with disabilities are choosing optional diploma routes to avoid high-stakes testing requirements.

35. Students with disabilities are choosing to drop out of school to avoid embarrassment of being placed in classes they are unprepared for.

36. Students with disabilities have been unfairly affected by No Child Left Behind in regard to graduation.

Give your opinion about the impact of No Child Left Behind Act on students with disabilities.

Name three changes created by accountability standards such as those in NCLB that had the greatest impact on your leadership style? Why?

How did these accountability standards impact the prioritization of special education? Why?

What is your opinion on inclusion of all special education students in the growth model? Why?

How has NCLB impacted the instruction of students with disabilities? Why?

THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING.

Survey Instrument Adapted from Wright & Choi (2005)
APPENDIX C

PERMISSION TO ADAPT SURVEY

From: Wayne Wright [mailto:wayne.wright@utsa.edu]
Sent: Tuesday, May 17, 2011 11:54 AM
To: Mitzi Moore
Cc: Wayne Wright
Subject: Re: Survey Permission

HI Mitzi,
Thanks for your phone call and e-mail. Permission is granted to adapt the survey instrument as published in Wright & Choi (2005). Please include a note in any your unpublished and published work in which it appears along the lines of “Survey instrument adapted from Wright and Choi (2005)” and provide the full citation to the original publication. Good luck with your research on this very important topic!

Wayne E. Wright, PhD
Associate Professor
Chair, MA-TESL Program Committee
University of Texas at San Antonio College of Education and Human Development Dept. of Bicultural-Bilingual Studies
http://education.utsa.edu/faculty/profile/wwright
APPENDIX D

LETTER TO ADMINISTRATORS

Mitzi Moore
208 Woodlake Circle
Pontotoc, MS 38863
January 3, 2012

Dear High School Principal/Director of Special Education:

This correspondence is regarding a study I am conducting for completion of the doctoral program at the University of Southern Mississippi. However, most importantly, this study is seeking to reveal the issues faced with the No Child Left Behind Act testing requirements of special education students on both schools and students with disabilities. Realizing the public scrutiny of school rating levels assigned to schools and knowing these levels are based on student performance of high stakes testing, this study is important.

Your participation is vital to the outcome and impact of this study. This survey is completely anonymous. No school or individual will be identified. Your open and honest responses are sincerely sought.

Thank you in advance for your participation in this research project.

Respectfully,

Mitzi Moore
Principal
Pontotoc City School District

Doctoral Student, USM
APPENDIX E

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
118 College Drive #5147 | Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001
Phone: 601.266.4380 | Fax: 601.266.4377 | www.usm.edu/irb

TO: Mitzi Moore
159 South Main Street
Pontotoc, MS 38863

FROM: Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board Chair

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 11052301
PROJECT TITLE: The Effects of Increased Accountability Standards
on Graduation Rates of Students with Disabilities

Enclosed is The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board
Notice of Committee Action taken on the above referenced project proposal. If I
can be of further assistance, contact me at (601) 266-4279, FAX at (601) 266-
4275, or you can e-mail me at Lawrence.Hosman@usm.edu. Good luck with
your research.
NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following criteria:

- The risks to subjects are minimized.
- The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported to the IRB Office via the "Adverse Effect Report Form".
- If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months.
- Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 11052301
PROJECT TITLE: The Effects of Increased Accountability Standards on Graduation Rates of Students with Disabilities
PROJECT TYPE: Dissertation
RESEARCHER/S: Mitzi Moore
COLLEGE/DIVISION: College of Education and Psychology
DEPARTMENT: Educational Leadership
FUNDING AGENCY: N/A
IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: Exempt Approval
PERIOD OF PROJECT APPROVAL: 08/10/2011 to 08/17/2012

Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board Chair
9-30-2011 Date
APPENDIX F

MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION REQUEST FORM

MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE OF REPORTING - 307
P O BOX 771
JACKSON, MS 39205-0771

Request for Access to Records

Date of Request: ____________________________

Name of Person Making Request: ______________________________________________________

Company/Organization: ________________________________________________________________

Address: __________________________________________________________________________

Phone Number: ____________________________

Email: ____________________________

I hereby request the following information maintained by the MS Department of Education: (Requests shall be specific enough to allow Department employees to identify and retrieve records requested)

__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

My request is to:

____ 1. Review the records listed above.

____ 2. Receive copy(s) of records listed above.

____ 3. Mail copy(s) of records to address shown above.

I understand that appropriate charges for searching, copying and/or mailing shall be paid in full prior to granting this request.

Signature of person making request: ____________________________________________

Title ____________________________ Date ____________________________

====================================================================For MDE Use Only====================================================================

FootPrint Number ____________

Office of Reporting: [ ] Approved [ ] Denied Initial: __________ Date: __________

Legal: [ ] Approved [ ] Denied Initial: __________ Date: __________

Cost: $___________

Payment Received: [ ] Date Received: __________ Date Completed: __________
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http://www.urban.org/url.cfm?ID=410936&renderforprint=1


