FACTORS AFFECTING THE RATE OF PROGRESS FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIFIC LEARNING DISABILITIES

Margie Ward Crowe

University of Southern Mississippi

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FACTORS AFFECTING THE RATE OF PROGRESS FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIFIC LEARNING DISABILITIES

by

Margie Ward Crowe

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

Approved:

August 2007
The University of Southern Mississippi

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ABSTRACT

FACTORS AFFECTING THE RATE OF PROGRESS FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIFIC LEARNING DISABILITIES

by Margie Ward Crowe
August 2007

This study examines the affect of time spent in special education on the rate of progress for students in Mississippi with special education rulings of Specific Learning Disabilities. Socioeconomic status, race, and the school’s percentage of disproportionate eligibility for special education services of minority students were examined for predictive effect. The results indicate that students with special education rulings served in special education classrooms for less than 21% of the day and students served in a special education classroom for more than 21% but less than 69% showed a greater rate of progress than students with special education rulings receiving no instruction in a special education classroom. The rate of progress was based on a comparison of scores collected from three administrations of the Mississippi Curriculum Practice test. However, even with a higher rate of progress the students with special education rulings were not performing at the same rate as the students in general education. The school’s percentage of disproportional identification of minority students for special education services and socioeconomic status were identified as predictors of a greater rate of progress. The findings supported the need for consistent, appropriate inclusion practices, strategic staff development, and more established reliability for the testing instruments.
DEDICATION

From the very beginning days of this endeavor, my husband, Tim, has provided support. Having completed a doctoral program himself, his anticipation of my needs, and his provision for every element has been absolutely unmatched. His daily prayer support was strategic and consistent. His support of long hours and separation was unbelievable. I am “blessed among women”.

As with every element of my life, my Mother was staunchly behind me. She supported me emotionally and prayerfully for the years involved even as she fought a graceful and gallant fight with cancer. Many of the blessings of my life are as a result of her prayers. Her price is “far above rubies”.

My daughter, Amy, who is my gift from God, is amazing in her own right and never wavered in her support. I will always regret time lost with her. By extension, Jason, my son-in-law, was a support on each level. Thank you.

God’s fingerprints were all over this endeavor evidenced, in part, by the place created for me on a daily basis by Dr. Hollie Filce and Dr. Elgen Hillman. Their willingness to provide a high quality of instruction in the academic and the culture of higher learning was unsurpassed. Further, I was blessed with a “Dream Team” for a Committee. Never did I encounter a problem that members of my “Team”, Dr. Hollie Filce, Dr. Elgen Hillman, Dr. Anne Sylvest, Dr. David Daves, and Dr. Linda McDowell, did not offer immediate help problem solving. I always had a pervasive understanding that it would all be accomplished because they were on my side. Dr. J. T. Johnson provided statistical help that made the difference between ABD and Ph.D. Who could ask for more?
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Special education is multifaceted in its ideology, etiology, definition, and practicalities. The overruling necessity in any discussion of special education services is, however, ultimately assuring student outcomes are appropriate for these students to lead productive lives to the best of their potential. Special education was for many years seen as a hybrid form of educational service delivery (Mamlin, 1999). Kavale (2000) writes that students who, for whatever reason, were not meeting classroom standards, very often in areas of behavior, were placed in special education away from the main flow of the school. According to Mamlin, academic achievement was most often measured strictly by Individual Education Program (IEP) objectives with little connection to the outside world realities. These students remained in these separate classrooms, writes Fuchs (1996), with little hope of returning to the general education classroom.

Determining placement and services is complicated by the fact that some of the disability definitions were, and to some degree remain, unclear. With each reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (1990, 1992, 1997) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) (2004) came the hope for clarity. This was especially true for the category of learning disabilities. Researchers began the attempt to put observable and definitive strength to the description of learning disabilities. These definitions ranged from developmental perspectives (Gallagher, 1996) to brain damage (Eisenmajer, Ross, & Pratt, 2005).

Directly related to the definition of learning disabilities was the eligibility criteria for receiving special education services. The IDEA (1990, 1992, 1997) offered little
stabilizing help. States, and to some degrees school districts, were left to define and
determine eligibility based on fuzzy and judgmental (Kaufman & Hallahan, 2005) criteria
with accompanying confusion in determining recommended placement and services.

With the implementation of The *No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)* (2001) came a
new focus on the definition and provision of services for students with learning
disabilities or, as it has been renamed, “specific learning disabilities” (SLD). Students
receiving special education services are no longer easily exempted from state testing
administration. Further, *NCLB* requires a more structured and public approach to
individual student progress by reporting data not only from the general education school
population but also in such areas as special education, socioeconomic status (SES), race,
and language.

In Mississippi further emphasis was placed on special education student outcomes
with the consent decree resulting from the *Mattie T. v. Johnson* case. The original
consent decree was issued in 1975. In 2003, when the State of Mississippi requested to
be released from the decree, the courts determined that the desired outcomes had not been
met and issued a revised decree. The requirements of the *Mattie T. Revised Consent
Decree* (2003) specifically target specific areas also mandated by *IDEIA* and *NCLB*
(2001). More specifically, the *Mattie T. Revised Consent Decree* requires close
monitoring and remediation to avoid the overrepresentation of African American males
in the Special Education categories of SLD and mild mental retardation (MMR) and also
in the decrease of placement in self contained classroom settings. There is a significant
need in Mississippi not only to assure that all student outcomes on the statewide testing
or Mississippi Curriculum Test (MCT) are aligned with *NCLB* requirements but also that
schools are reporting acceptable Annual Yearly Progress (AYP). Further, the *Mattie T. Revised Consent Decree* (2003) requires that Mississippi reconsider and, if necessary, reconstruct special education service delivery.

To meet the goals outlined in *IDEIA* (2004), *NCLB* (2001), and *Mattie T. Revised Consent Decree* (2003), Mississippi has adopted the Three Tiered Intervention Model (MDE, 2005a). The Three Tiered Intervention Model is a manifestation of the Response to Intervention model that implements progress monitoring. Progress monitoring and tiered interventions require remedial and support attempts be made earlier in the general education setting. School personnel consistently search and problem solve (Gerston & Bringellman, 1996) to intervene sooner and in ways that are much more individualized. Special education personnel and Teacher Support Teams (MDE, 2006) are charged with consistent data collection and the provision of services to teachers and students. To make interventions more effective for all students, it is important to understand what the critical variables are. The most effective interventions are determined by understanding the possible impact of 1) behavioral concerns as they are reflected by cultural differences, (Artiles & Trent, 1994), 2) early experiences as a result of early intervention or experiences (Skiba, Poloni-Staudinger, Simmons, Feggins-Azziz, & Chung, 2005; Hutchins, 2001), or 3) socio-economic status (MacMillan & Siperstien, 2002).

**Theoretical Framework**

Vygotsky (Wertsch, 1985) provides a theoretical context for understanding some of the variables that influence student outcomes. Vygotsky maintains that all instruction and performance requirements should be matched to the developmental levels of students. This developmental level is defined as the point in development that students
can work independently on a task. Related to this is determining the level of potential development. It is the level that is accomplishable with a teacher's assistance and, receiving this assistance, can become the point of actual development. The difference between the level of tasks performed with adult guidance and the level of independent tasks is Vygotsky's "zone of proximal development" (Wertsch, 1985). This "zone of proximal development" is the epicenter of instruction. Vygotsky asserts that it is consistently being in the "zone" in which educators can make the difference in student outcomes.

Continually being in the dynamic "zone" between independence and potential requires progress monitoring. Learning is accomplished, Vygotski contends (Wertsch, 1985) with "scaffolding" or as concepts are systematically built with each concept providing the foundation for the next concept. Fuchs & Fuchs (1999) suggest that one of the downfalls of current intervention practice is concentrating on the mastery of one skill at a time and often out of context or without a "scaffold." When considering this process of systematic development, questions arise concerning the decisions made for students in special education. How can placement decisions be made that best assure students are in the "zone" and not too closely controlled by an inflexible plan?

Vygotski (Wertsch, 1985) also proposed that learning is a social process and occurs in the presence of others and through the interaction with others. Placement decisions determine settings and thus the characteristics of the interaction group. Social processes are often determined by culture and race (Walther-Thomas, Korninek, & McLaughlin, 2000). So it is within the framework of the social processes of race and culture that learning is facilitated. Berninger (2002) defines SLD as a perceptual
dysfunction and contends that students with SLD receiving the appropriate intervention or instruction should be able to achieve on grade level.

Statement of the Problem

The confluence of the legal requirements of IDEIA (2004) and NCLB (2001) with the Vygotskian (Wertsch, 1985) concepts of the "zone of proximal development" and social processes of learning creates a quandary. How can placement decisions be made for students receiving special education services that keep the students in the "zone of proximal development," include opportunities for learning in appropriate social contexts, and meet the student outcome requirements of state testing?

Is that not, in essence, the foundation of IEP development? Is that not facilitated by progress monitoring? Regardless of the dissention concerning the definition of SLD, is it not the placement decision and response to intervention that governs learning? If Vygotski is to be taken seriously then the questions become those of variables that secure a place in the "zone" and in social development. Appropriate accommodations are necessary in order to provide instruction in the "zone" for students with SLD.

Research Questions

Two research questions will be explored in this study:

1. Does the amount of time in special education make a difference in the rate of academic progress for a student with SLD?
2. Does race, SES, or the district’s percentage of disproportionate representation predict the rate of progress for a student with SLD?
Definition of Terms

1. Race is defined by the categories required by Mississippi Department of Education in the course of reporting demographic data. They are Black, White, Hispanic, Asian, and Native American.

2. Rate of progress is defined as the individual amount of progress made by students in grades three through five in a school from one MCT Practice Test to the next.

3. District percentage of disproportionality is defined as the proportion calculated by the state reflective of the number of students receiving special education services as divided by race. Acceptable percentages are defined by Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) for each school in light of the Mattie T. Revised Consent Decree (2003). According to the MDE State Performance Plan (2005) students identified as SLD who are Black can make up no more than 1.85% of the school population.

4. Socioeconomic status is defined as the number of family members and the family income used to determine eligibility for free or reduced lunch at school. The guidelines for determining free lunch, as indicated in Table 1, range from an annual income of $12,441 per year for one person in the household to $42,107 per year for a family of eight members (MDE, 2005c).

5. Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD) is defined as those students deemed eligible for special education services using the criteria set forth in IDEA and by MDE. MDE (2003) defines a SLD as a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest
itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, 
read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations, 
including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, 
brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and 
developmental aphasia. The term does not include learning 
problems that are primarily the result of visual, 
hearing, or motor disabilities, of mental 
retardation, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, 
cultural, or economic disadvantage (p. A-16).

6. Time in special education is defined by the guidelines set forth by the MDE in terms of 
percentage of time that a student receives instruction in a special education setting. The 
category of “Regular Classroom” is defined as students with special education rulings 
who receive the majority of instruction in the regular classroom and receive special 
education and related services outside the general education classroom for less than 21 
percent of the day. The category of “Resource Room” is used as a category for students 
with special education rulings who receive special education and related services outside 
the general education classroom for more than 21 percent of the day but no more than 
60 percent of the day. This may include students placed in resource rooms (pull-out) 
with part time instruction in the general education classroom (MDE, 2003).

Delimitations

This study is delimited by selecting only students with SLD rulings.

This study is delimited to students within the state of Mississippi.
This study is delimited by students from schools participating in the U.S. Department of Education State Personnel Development Grant.

Assumptions

It is assumed that schools have correctly reported and identified students with SLD rulings based correctly on IDEIA requirements. It is further assumed that when provided with the correct interventions and supports students with SLD can receive on-grade level instruction that facilitates a successful rate of progress (Berninger, 2002).

Justification

This study finds its imperative in the necessity to understand what factors precipitate positive student outcomes. There are many materials and curriculum systems available and each professes to have the answer or method (Crockett & Kaufman, 1999). The review of literature produced results that indicate that it is only in understanding the individual student and relative variables for student outcomes are really affected. It is the purpose of this study to produce data indicating the importance or lack of importance of the variables of time in special education, race, SES, and a school's percentage of disproportionate representation of minority student receiving special education services. With dwindling federal support and an era of poor publicity for schools, information on how to eliminate or include variables for consideration can streamline educational decisions and outcomes. Time and personnel are valuable resources. Improved student outcomes are priceless resources. The data from this study can be used for instructional planning that uses resources to influence positive student outcomes.

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CHAPTER I
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

An exhaustive review of the literature was conducted in order to further examine the effect of time in special education, race, socioeconomic status (SES), and the individual school's percentage of disproportionality of representation in special education on the rate of progress for students with specific learning disabilities (SLD). This review resulted in several topical areas. Beginning with the historical and legal implications of placement decisions for students with SLD; it continues through the debate within the body of existing knowledge concerning the definition of SLD and methods of determining eligibility. Models of assessment and intervention are investigated including Mississippi's Three Tier Response to Intervention Plan. Mississippi's current status in determining eligibility and making placement decisions is examined. The review of literature culminates with a discussion of progress monitoring, Curriculum Based Monitoring (CBM), and the Mississippi model of Three Tiered Response to Intervention Model.

Historical and Legal Implications of Educational Decisions for Students with Specific Learning Disabilities

A review of legislation and litigation both at the federal and state levels reveals several factors relevant to examining the effects of time in special education, race, SES, and a school's rate of disproportionality on the rate of progress for students with SLD. Federal legislation including the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (1990, 1997, 2004) and the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) all have significant impact on services and supports for students with disabilities. Additionally, the Mattie T. v. Johnson (1979,
2003) case has placed further emphasis on issues of identification, placement, and monitoring of all students in the state of Mississippi. While not comprehensive, discussions of each piece of legislation and litigation including relevant provisions of each will be discussed in the context of examining the variables of time in special education, race, SES, and a school’s rate of disproportionality as related to the rate of progress for students with SLD.

**Federal Legislation**

*Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (1990, 1992, 1997) and the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act* (2004). The *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (1990, 1992, and 1997) and subsequent reauthorization, The *Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act* (*IDEIA*) (2004), serve as the primary regulatory basis for special education services. Concepts highly aligned in providing services are Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE), Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), and individualized planning. The requirements of FAPE, LRE, and individual planning take on a different dimension within the template of *NCLB* (2001). The statutory and regulatory requirements have created a renewed emphasis in special education services. Fuchs & Fuchs (2002) suggest that public awareness has been increased in recent years because the high cost of providing special education services is almost double that of providing general education services.

*No Child Left Behind Act* (2001). The *No Child Left Behind Act* (*NCLB*) (2001), with its emphasis on high stakes testing and highly qualified teachers, has changed the way instructional decisions are made in both general education and special education. High stakes testing protocols include both students with and without special education...
rulings. The curriculum testing programs implemented as a result of NCLB have brought focus on the mastery of grade level curriculum including annual progress and school accountability for progress (White House, 2001). Also included in NCLB is the emphasis on teacher qualification. This legislation requires specific changes in teacher education programs and state teacher licensure.

The ripple effect of these legislative acts prescribes the way schools are rated, determine the kinds of and manner in which tests are given, ascertain the programs for teacher training, guide how instruction is planned, and calls for research-based instruction. Prior to the signing of IDEA legislation of 1975, according to Lipsky (2005), special education reform efforts were by and large propelled by parents and parent organizations seeking public school educational opportunities for their children. The debate concerning how students with disabilities would be served culminated in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (1990, 1997) and later in the IDEIA (2004) reauthorization. The concepts of FAPE, LRE, and providing a “continuum of services” among other new requirements were introduced to the educational vocabulary (Dolan, 2004; Zirkel, 2006).

On a Federal level, the reauthorization of IDEA in 1997 firmly established that the general education setting could be eliminated as a LRE setting only after educators made ongoing and intensive efforts to find strategies to successfully support students in the general education setting. The Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) (2003) states that these strategies collectively are referred to as supplemental aides and services. The main focus of supplementary aides and services has, however, often been limited
logistically to testing modifications rather than actual daily accommodations partially due
to the lack of research based direction in defining accommodations
(Tindal & Fuchs, 1999).

The reauthorization of the IDEIA (2004) added another dimension to special
education service delivery. Eligibility for special education services is now more closely
scrutinized and is defined by the amount of time that a student receiving special
education services is removed from his or her peer group in a general education setting
(Lipsky, 2005). The decisions made for special education delivery are no longer relegated
to IDEA (1990, 1992, 1997) mandates alone. Compliance with AYP directives in NCLB
(2001) includes decisions about testing, staffing, and instructional methods for general
education as well as special education. The combined emphasis of NCLB (2001) and
IDEIA (2004) address socioeconomic status (SES), disability status, and racial/cultural
sub-groups among other areas both in general and special education. Because schools are
required to document achievement of the state-identified curricula for all students
including those students with disabilities, school districts now are very involved in
determining what factors can better influence student outcomes and, thus, effect the
compliance rates of IDEA and increase the quality of AYP (Dolan, 2004). Individual
states are charged with considering the conditions within the state that dictate the
parameters of local education including the policies of funding, instructional design, and
teacher education. Often the determining factors are based on case law as determined in
the state’s litigation history.
Mattie T. v. Johnson Consent Decree. Mattie T. v. Johnson (1979). The State of Mississippi was challenged in a 1975 class action suit for failure to identify, evaluate, and provide appropriate services for students with disabilities. The Mattie T. Consent Decree was agreed upon and entered into by the State in 1979. The Mattie T. Consent Decree (1979) was an agreement between participants to address the exclusion of students with disabilities from IDEA's (1997) requirement of FAPE, the overidentification of African American students as mentally retarded, and the segregation of students with disabilities in separate classrooms that provided less than appropriate services.


The efforts of the State resulted in limited changes between 1979 and 2002. In 2003, the courts found "insufficient progress" in the areas outlined in the Mattie T. Consent Decree (1979) predicated a Mattie T. Revised Consent Decree (2003) which is in effect until 2010 (Mississippi Center for Justice [MCJ], 2006). The Mattie T. Revised Consent Decree (2003) mandates that the Superintendent of Education report an increase in students with disabilities served in general education with a reduction in students served in self-contained settings. The modified decree also calls for an increase in the number of students with disabilities who receive instruction in a general education classroom less than 20 percent of the day (MCJ, 2006). Mississippi is working within the constructs of the Mattie T. Revised Consent Decree (2003) to be in compliance with the requirements of making the Annual Yearly Progress as required by NCLB (2001) and the special education specific requirements of IDEIA (2004). While the Mattie T. Consent Decree (1979, 2003) may be unique to Mississippi, every state is working under conditions unique to that state.
One of the issues the *Mattie T. Revised Consent Decree* (2003) addresses is the overidentification of male African American students in the categories of SLD and Mental Retardation (MR). As a result, a statewide focused monitoring system has been put into place to assure the compliance with several areas including the disproportionality of representation in special education as described in the *Mattie T. Revised Consent Decree* (2003) and deemed by the state to be out of the range of the set state goals (MDE, 2003). Considering the elements of the *Mattie T. Revised Consent Decree* (2003) requires looking more closely at the process of eligibility determination, the concept of overidentification, LRE, and validity of placement continuum options (MDE, 2003; MCJ, 2006). The guidelines of the *Mattie T. Revised Consent Decree* (2003) are focused on the disability categories of SLD and MR. It is the categories of SLD and MR that are most often found in general education classes and in resource rooms (Coutinho & Oswald, 2000).

Lipsky (2005) asserts the pending directions of *NCLB* (2001) and *IDEA* (1997) provide a more accessible connection for general and special education. Nonetheless, Lipsky continues, this connection remains between two separate systems. Andrews (2000) refers to the connections between *IDEA* and *NCLB* as bridging the special education divide.

Considering the implementation of *IDEIA* (2003) requirements of LRE, FAPE, and individualized planning along with the requirements of *NCLB*’s AYP, and Mississippi’s *Mattie T. Revised Consent Decree* (2003) requirements, there is much to be done to ascertain correct instructional decisions within Mississippi. According to a report published by the U. S. Department of Education (2002), 51 percent of the students with
special education rulings are served under the *IDEA* (1997) category of SLD. Correct identification of SLD becomes especially important with such high percentages and the increasing legal requirements.

Identification and Placement of Students with Specific Learning Disabilities

Identification and placement of students with SLD has historically not been determined by universal or consistent parameters. Significant variability between states continues to exist in prevalence of SLD, conceptual definitions, and classification criteria. This variability and lack of consistency significantly affects positive student outcomes. (Reschley & Hosp, 2004). Thus, the methods of determining eligibility and placement of students with SLD are often questioned as inaccurate, unnecessary, or biased.

*The Nature and Definitions of Specific Learning Disabilities.* The very definition of SLD, a term developed by Kirk in 1962 (Kirk, 1975), is in question. Learning disabilities have, in the past, been considered to be the result of a developmental imbalance (Gallagher, 1996), minimally brain damaged, students who are slow learners, dyslexic or perceptually delayed (Eisenmajer, Ross & Pratt, 2005; Elksnin, 2002; Martin & Fuchs, 2000; Speece, 2002). Learning disabilities are often referred to as a judgmental category because of the lack of observable and consistent descriptors (Fuchs, 1996). Kaufman & Hallahan (2005) suggest the category, in and of itself, is very controversial and could be considered a category that does not even really exist. Kaufman & Hallahan reflect the philosophy of a discrepancy approach by maintaining that it is the instruction offered in general education that causes student failure. Failure, Kaufman & Hallahan maintain, is measured by a student’s ability to respond to the instruction in the classroom as a whole. Students who do well with the instruction offered are rarely determined to have a SLD, but if a student
has difficulty with the instruction offered then the probability of a learning disability is considered. Contrary to this situational definition of SLD, The Interagency Committee on Learning Disabilities (1987) describes SLD as a general group of life-long difficulties caused by a central nervous system dysfunction which is primarily concerned with both receptive and expressive language acquisition, mathematical skills, and writing ability.

Tanner (2001) reports the attempts in defining SLD with medical or psychological terms are suspect because students were most likely identified as having SLD by those who simply identified all students who were in need of remediation or support as learning disabled. Tanner questions this type of definition because of the absence of research backed support between a central nervous disorder and a SLD. Mazzocco & Thompson (2005) illustrate the confusion and difference of opinion surrounding the nature of SLD in a four year study of 209 students. The findings indicated that, to a large extent, predicting learning disabilities in math is difficult because of the lack of a clearly agreed upon description of SLD. While the Mazzocco & Thompson study identified some factors that indicate future problems in math achievement, the definition itself made it difficult to state that the students were at risk for a learning disability in math.

McDermott & Goldbery (2006) identified the definition of SLD as deficiencies in neurological function that interfere with the storage of or processing of information that create an imbalance between ability and performance leading to significant academic and social difficulties. Traditionally, and simply put, learning disabilities have been defined as a basic psychological processing disability using a discrepancy model which considers the difference between the student’s ability and level of achievement excluding cultural and language related effects or any other existing disabilities. The continued controversial
conversation about the very nature, and sometimes even the existence, of learning
disabilities has significant implications for the identification of SLD students. Further,
this confusion concerning the description of SLD directly impacts federal and state
mandates for finding and serving students with SLD. With this in mind, an examination
of eligibility criteria, factors determining where services are provided, and how
determinations are to be made regarding intervention effectiveness is in order.

Identification Issues in the Professional Literature. There is some concern about the
eligibility process itself in the area of SLD. Fuchs, Mathes, Fuchs & Lipsey (2001)
conducted a meta-analysis of 79 studies concerned with the reading differences between
students who did not qualify as SLD but were considered low-achieving and reading skill
differences of students who were, in fact, served as a result of qualifying for a SLD label.
Reading achievement was chosen as the variable not only because it is listed as a part of
the SLD criteria but also because most students are identified as a result of problems with
reading. Based on the findings, there was little difference in the severity of the reading
problems and the achievement attained between groups. Fuchs et al. (2001) continued by
questioning the very label of SLD. Fuchs et al. suggests that all students with reading
difficulties be simply served without the connection to special education or at least in a
group that is not so tied to an arbitrary definition but rather to student outcomes.

Eligibility and educational planning are directly related to the definition controversy
(Anderson, Carnine, Coutinho, Edgar, Forness & Fuchs, 2000; Anderson, Kutash &
Duchnowski, 2001). Eligibility is difficult to determine when the definition of the
disorder is so diverse.

As Mississippi endeavors to meet the demands of the Mattie T. Revised Consent Decree (2003) and improve the special education services for the state, it becomes essential to investigate the role of overrepresentation. Overrepresentation is a complex combination of many factors from the very definition of disability categories, the eligibility and assessment process, culture, and economics. Tunnel vision is often developed in relationship to the overrepresentation or a total focus on overrepresentation can obscure progress. Isolating and understanding the causes of overrepresentation are the keys to improving student outcomes not the mere identification of the presence of overrepresentation.

The U. S. Census Bureau reports that in the year 2000, the national average poverty rate was 18.5 percent for students between the ages of five years old and twenty-one years old. During the same time period and for the same group of students in Mississippi, the poverty rate was 30.9 percent. The same Census report gives the national rate of students with disabilities between the ages of five years old and twenty-one years old as 6.7 percent. During the same time period and for the same group of students in Mississippi, the rate of students with disabilities was 8.3 percent.

Clearly based on these Census (2000) reports, Mississippi has areas of great concern for its students with disabilities and the quality of services these students are receiving. Mississippi, like every state, is unique in its requirements and student need. Close study of an accurate representation and correct identification translates into not only the improvement of service to students and compliance with federal and court mandates but also to the economic factors within the state.
The correct identification of students with SLD is an intricate combination of definition, identification, and eligibility determinations. With conflicting discrepant and response to intervention models for determining eligibility and levels of bias toward student cultural or linguistic diversity, the process remains infused with variability from school to school and state to state. Nonetheless, students with SLD, can with the proper instruction, learn at the same rate as their non-disabled peers by IDEA definition. These accommodations and instructional methods can be determined by using progress monitoring. Teacher Support Group interaction in Mississippi’s Three Tiered Response to Intervention model can enlarge the expert base and contribute to improved student outcomes.

The Mattie T. Revised Consent Decree (2003) dictates in Mississippi the imperative to determine what variables contribute to the rate of progress for students with SLD. The AYP requirements of NCLB (2001) require an understanding of the predictors of successful rates of progress for all of the diverse groups of students including those receiving special education services. Bias of any nature convolutes the potential for successful eligibility assessment and resultant instructional decisions.

Eligibility for Special Education Services. IDEA (1997) supplied federal nomenclature by designating the SLD category but did not provide definitive criteria thus providing little help for determining how a student was determined to be eligible for special education services. The IDEA categorization is more intended for determining eligibility and for measuring how the disability affects the educational experience. The definition suggested by Tanner (2001) speaks to causality. Nonetheless, the nebulous discussion of psychological processes makes the definition difficult to concretely observe or define.
IDEIA (2004) provided the definition that was missing in previous legislation. Thus, IDEIA (2004) provides a definition excluding students with difficulties learning as a result of any other disability, environmental, cultural or economic disadvantage. The term “specific learning disability” was created to reflect a psychological process included in reduced abilities in expressive and receptive language acquisition, mathematical calculations, and thinking or organizational abilities. The IDEIA (2004) definition of SLD also includes perceptual handicaps, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia.

Sabornie, Cullinan, Osborne, & Brock (2005) question if students in the IDEA (1997) designated categories, in general, are not more alike as far as symptomatic behaviors than they are different thus nullifying the needs for these categories at all. By definition (IDEIA, 2004), students with SLD have no comorbid disabilities and have the capacity to learn given appropriate instruction. Sabornie et al. concluded in a meta-analysis of 58 studies that categories are necessary to facilitate teacher focus in a classroom setting particularly in the areas of high-incidence disabilities.

Models for Determining Eligibility. Because of the considerable debate in the field and numerous studies such as those discussed earlier, new models for determining eligibility for special education services resulting from the presence of a specific learning disability have been explored. Fletcher & Reschley (2005) explain learning disability eligibility philosophy and practice in basically four schools of thought. Those are aptitude-achievement discrepancies, low-achievement, intraindividual differences, and response to intervention (RTI). These models are discussed in the following sections.
Discrepancy or Aptitude-Achievement Model. Concern surrounding the use of the discrepancy model for identification of students with disabilities was expressed prior to the passage of IDEA (1990). Wilson wrote as early as 1928 that decisions based on an accomplishment or lack of accomplishment might be inaccurate unless these decisions include considerations about the reliability and validity of the measures used. Further, Wilson wrote that all of these considerations should be made with the student’s level of maturation taken into account.

Fletcher & Reschley (2005) report both reliability and validity problems with the frequently used aptitude-achievement model. Fletcher & Reschley suggest there are psychometric problems resulting from identifying individuals as members of a group by a single reference to an arbitrary cut off point. Stuebing, Fletcher, LeDoux, Lyon, Shaywitz, & Shaywitz (2002) further support this concern in a meta-analysis of 46 studies concerning reading disabilities by reporting that measurement and placement based on one or two observable measures produces insufficient information about the underlying causes to allow for placing individuals in specific categories.

Fletcher & Reschley (2005) further caution that an aptitude-achievement approach can be very important but cannot represent assessment for all learning disabilities. Reschley & Hosp (2004) give support to this caution by questioning the stability and combinations of assessments used to determine eligibility. Continuing, Reschley & Hosp take issue with the IQ discrepant method because of the delay in providing services caused by the length of time required to establish the discrepancy.

MacMillan, Gresham & Bocain (1998) report in the findings of a study involving 150 students that even with the use of the state criteria (a discrepancy model), the schools
included in this study were identifying false positives for eligibility for special education services. The schools were not successful in determining students who were actually SLD or the method for effectively teaching them with reliability.

Francis, Fletcher, Stuebing, Lyon, Shaywitz, & Shaywitz (2005) note further difficulty with the discrepancy model by reporting findings from the Connecticut Longitudinal Study reporting that 39 percent of the identification decisions made were later determined to be incorrect. The original identification decisions were found to be based on underachievement caused by issues considered developmental in nature as compared to the discrepancy model. Fletcher & Reschley (2005) sum up the issues with the discrepancy model of determining SLD eligibility by asserting that this model can identify areas of concern between IQ and the expected achievement of a student. It does not, however, get at the different kinds of underachievement. Fletcher & Reschley further report there is insufficient validity because of lack of reliability between tests.

Low Achievement Model. A second school of thought in determining eligibility for special education services for students with SLD is the low achievement approach. There is supported validity for the low achievement approach (Fletcher, Francis, Shaywitz, Lyon, Foorman & Stuebing, 1998; Fletcher, Lyon, Barnes, Stuebing, Francis, & Olson, 2002; Lyon, Fletcher, Shaywitz, Shaywitz, Torgensen, & Wood, 2001; Moats, 2002; Morgan, Singer-Harris, Bernstein & Walker, 2000; Peterson & Shinn, 2002; Siegel, 1992). However, even though validity exists, the low achievement method does not allow for an operational definition of the SLD or the lack of achievement. The low-achievement model does not show the difference between those students with low-achievement that might be attributed to other factors such as economic disadvantage,
Inadequate instruction, or emotional disturbance and those students with SLD (Gresham, MacMillan & Bocain, 1996; Lyon et al., 2001).

_Intraindividual Differences Model._ The intraindividual differences model is a proposed alternative to the discrepancy model and the low achievement model. The National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD) (2002) attempts to bridge the controversy by suggesting that even though IQ tests do not measure the response to instruction or measure neurological functioning or information processing, the IQ evaluation should remain a part of the decision making process. The _NCLD_ supports this position with a reference to the _IDEA_ (1997) definition citing the ability-achievement model.

Torgensen (2002) suggests the intraindividual approach is based on behaviors but is not directly related to instruction, and therefore cannot lead to better outcomes for students with SLD. The interdependent method has validity for determining achievement markers which ultimately become a low-achievement model but does not facilitate direct intervention, according to Fletcher et al., 1998; Francis et al., 2005; Lyon et al., 2001; Morris, Fletcher, & Francis, 1993; Siegel, 1992; Torgensen, 1996.

Proctor & Prevatt (2003) compare the four models of assessment for consistency in diagnosis in a study of 170 community college students who were referred for academic problems and suspected themselves to have SLD. The results of the study indicated that the same students were not diagnosed across the models. Proctor & Prevatt found there was more agreement (70 percent) in diagnosis between the intraindividual and low-achievement models. There was less agreement (48 percent) between the discrepancy and the low-achievement models. Proctor & Prevatt continue by asserting
that these findings were disconcerting because they support the idea that the diagnosis of SLD is often so arbitrary that it can be considered less than accurate. These researchers warn that a student diagnosed with SLD in one setting might not be considered so in another. Shinn, Collins & Gallagher (1998a) caution that intelligence testing can result in labels such as slow learner. This practice of intelligence testing is perhaps another way of indicating that a student is not eligible or not even worthy of help because the time spent on intervention will not result in improved student outcomes. Shinn et al. (1998a) question if intelligence testing is important at all and if the IDEA (1997) classification of special education categories is even important in deciding the assistance a student might need to be successful. The concern, Shinn et al., maintain is that assessment is based on finding the cause of the disability and determining eligibility rather than remediation.

The aptitude-achievement discrepancies, low-achievement, and intraindividual differences methods are all based on assessments given at a single point in time resulting in concerns about reliability and validity. Further, according to Deno, 2003; Deno, Fuchs, Marston, & Shinn, 2001; Stone, 2001; Vaughn & Linan-Thompson, 2003; these models do not assess the underpinnings of low achievement. The intraindividual method attempts to circumvent these concerns by using multiple tests at the same point in time looking for a profile, however, the intraindividual method has not been validated (Francis, Shaywitz, Shaywitz & Fletcher, 1996; Lyon et al., 2001; Torgensen, 2002).

Response to Intervention Model. The fourth model of assessment for SLD is the RTI model. The RTI model creates an identification process around frequent use of curriculum-based, progress monitoring assessments. The assessment is directly related to the curriculum, given at multiple and frequent intervals, and operationally defines the
areas of difficulty. Multiple assessments can be connected to intervention thus the underachievement can be given operational or functional status that translates into instructional strategies (Ardoin, 2006; Berninger, 2002; Bocain, Beebe, MacMillan, & Gresham, 1999; Carnine, 1996; Deno, 1985; Deno, 1992; Deno, 2003; Deno et al., 2001; Fletcher & Reschley, 2005; Forness, Kavale, Blum & Lloyd, 1997; Francis et al., 2005; Fuchs, 1996; Fuchs & Fuchs, 1999; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2002; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Fuchs, Fuchs, Bahr, Fernstorm, & Stecker, 1990; Gerber, 2002; Hintze, Christ & Methe, 2006).

Areas with Potential for Inaccurate Referrals for Special Education. Variance and lack of consensus in the definition and methods of determining eligibility confound instructional decision making. A further complication is that of perceived bias in the eligibility process. Identification inequity is often viewed through the filters of bias toward those students that are perceived as underachievers for whatever the reason, non-English speaking students, minority students, or students in poverty.

Bias Toward Underachieving Students. Negative teacher attitude toward the referral process have also been considered as a possible reason for overidentification or misidentification of students with disabilities (Goodman & Webb, 2006; Hosp & Reschley, 2003; Hosp & Reschley, 2002; Podell & Soodak, 1993; Rice, 2003; Yates, Ortiz, & Anderson, 1998). Goodman & Webb (2006), Hosp & Reschley (2003), Hosp & Reschley (2002), Podell & Soodak (1993), Rice (2003), and Yates, Ortiz, & Anderson (1998) suggest that the attitude of the teachers toward the referral process or success of the intervention tried is a possible reason for the misidentification of students with disabilities. Kavale (2000) suggests that the attitude of the general education teacher is an influential factor determining the success of an underachieving student. Often, according
to Kavale, general education teachers express some negative attitudes, especially feelings of inadequacy, in dealing with students with disabilities which, in turn, becomes a referral. Giacobbe, Livers, Thayer-Smith & Walther-Thomas (2001) assert that the perception of teachers is that the time it takes for implementing interventions with low-achieving students should be spent with students who will most likely do well on tests. Further, this perception then becomes a reluctance to place low-achieving students in a general education class.

Fletcher, Denton & Francis (2005) report possible teacher bias in a study of 70 general education teachers. The findings of this study indicate that students with mild or less obvious disabilities were at risk for receiving inappropriate education interactions including referrals and untargeted interventions more often than students with more visible disabilities. Most often this was due to incorrect assumptions concerning the causes of low achievement such as possible MR rather than SLD. Cook (2001) reports teacher bias reflected in the interaction of teachers with students with less visible disabilities is because of a lack of discernment between the etiology of the disability and behavior. Students with less visible disabilities are, Cook maintains, often viewed as students with behavior problems.

Salend & Duhaney (1999) report that concerns voiced by teachers concerning teaching students with disabilities in the general education setting are complex and caused by many variables over time. Bocain et al. (1999) report data from a study of 76 second through fourth grade students who did not specifically meet SLD qualifications. These students were, in spite of the qualifying criteria, placed in special education classes because of behavior problems. Lopez, Forness, MacMillan & Bocain (1996) counter by
describing the issue of misdiagnosis of eligibility for special education services as often generated by genuinely concerned school personnel who may have placed students in the SLD category in order to provide at least some special education assistance. Gresham, McMillan & Bocain (1997) studied 240 students placed in special education as eligible for services as students with SLD. These students were placed on the basis of a discrepancy model decision. These placement decisions were not supported with data. However, Gresham et al. found that the teacher’s classroom observations and recommendations had been 91 percent correct in determining that a referral for special education assessment for SLD should be made.

Bias Toward Non-English Speakers. Other areas of concern related to bias are the areas of non-English speakers, (McCardle, McCarthy, Cutting, Leos, & D’Emilio (2005), race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status (SES), and culture (Coutinho & Oswald, 1998; Donovan & Cross, 2002). Howe, 1996; Morris, 2002; Oswald, Coutinho, Best & Sigh, 1999; Patton, 1998; Reed-Victor, 1998; Reschley, 2002; Skiba et al., 2005.) Deno et al., (2001) suggests that educators know more about students as a whole than about the uniquely specific cultural and linguistically diverse group needs. This lack of understanding in general, as Deno et al. continue, creates an atmosphere of bias as the learning needs and requirements inherent for students with linguistic and cultural diversity are misidentified.

One of the battle cries of some researchers is the overrepresentation of minority students in special education. The U. S. Bureau of Census published a report in 2002 that shows that more than 14 percent of African American students are in special education as compared to 13 percent American Indians, 12 percent white, 11 percent Hispanic, and 5
percent Asian Americans. Artiles & Trent (1994) contend these percentages are representative of unequal proportions of students with diverse backgrounds served in special education programs. Shinn et al. (1998b) concur by asserting that overrepresentation is an issue causing many educators to call for an end to the use of specific measurements for students from minority backgrounds.

Bias Toward Minority Students. Walther-Thomas et al. (2000) explain the overrepresentation of minority students in terms of cultural differences. Expressed values, attributes, and behaviors of students may be different from those of the teacher. These differences are often judged to be problematic areas rather than just differences. Heller, Holtzman & Messick (1982) maintain that disproportionality in and of itself becomes a problem only when students are recipients of poor instruction that is detrimental to educational progress whether in general education or special education. Cultural filters often become the defining factors for problematic high measures of overrepresentation or disproportionality in special education and gifted education (Brantlinger, 2001; Bryant & Maxwell, 1997; Keogh, Gallimore & Weisner, 1997).

Zhang & Katsiyannis (2002), Lester & Kelman (1997), and Parrish (2002) report significant regional variations in disproportionality. This disproportionality may not be reflected as acute in some geographic areas as in others for a variety of reasons including the culture of the area. Artiles & Trent (1994) propose that the larger the minority population of a school district, in general, the greater the percentage of minority students placed in special education classes. Parrish (2002) supports this by adding that there is a higher probability of overrepresentation of students with disabilities from minority groups in states where those minority groups are the largest. This result questions, as
Parrish continues, whether there are actually higher numbers of students with disabilities from minority backgrounds or, rather, if there is a bias toward the characteristics of students from minority backgrounds. The inevitable causal questions must arise. Is this a social injustice, hereditary issue, or bureaucratic oversight? MacMillan & Reschley (1998) explain that overrepresentation or disproportionality only becomes a problem within disability groups when it is based on subjective judgment without the consideration of the context of the student's difficulty.

Rueda & Windmueller (2006) suggest that the underlying problems of overrepresentation are often overlooked with the focus centering on the overrepresentation alone. Rueda & Windmueller continue by claiming that the overrepresentation is as a result of failure on the part of the school district to provide for individual intervention strategies, the organization of instruction, institutional level policy, or considerations of social and cultural background. Coughlin & Oswald (1998) suggest that the referral and assessment processes for determining eligibility are themselves based on instruments that are inappropriate for measuring students with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Concluding, Coughlin & Oswald continue by supporting the importance of well constructed and considered conceptual frameworks that are appreciative of diversity. One of the effects, according to Fierros & Conroy (2002), of a bias toward diverse students in referral, assessment, and eligibility determination is that students are less likely to be successfully reintegrated into general education.

Oswald, Coutinho, Singh & Best (1998) and Oswald, Coutinho & Best (2002) question if the disproportionality is a product of a bias that is systemic created from
dysfunctional social conditions themselves. Conversely, Artiles & Trent (1994) and Artiles, Trent & Kuan (1997) suggest that overrepresentation calculations are often determined by an inaccurate understanding of the scope of the problems related to cultural and linguistic diversity. Zhang & Katsiyannis (2002) suggest that disproportionality results from the legal actions, educational reforms, and legislative requirements. In a study conducted by Marshall (2001), the variables of racism, poverty, assessment bias, language differences, cultural behaviors, IQ, and parent attendance of meetings were considered. The findings concluded that race was not a significant factor regarding student low achievement. MacMillan & Reschley (1998) suggest that the disproportional numbers of minority students referred for special education services is caused less by race than the educational deficits often attributed to poverty for students of minority groups. Skiba et al. (2005) conclude that race is only one part of a complex issue.

**Minority Students in Poverty.** Some researchers suggest that the disproportionality of minority students receiving special education services is more related to economic status than that of race or ethnicity or is, at the very least, as important as race and culture (MacMillan & Reschley, 1998). U.S. Census (2001) data show that minority students are very likely to be a part of families living below the line of poverty. Skiba et al. (2005) suggest that the connection of race or minority status to poverty in society and research has lead to the presumption that the reasons for disproportionality in special education are determined by poverty. Skiba et al. (2005) suggest that the overrepresentation is not predicated by race but by the magnification of race caused by poverty. Considering the high number of Latino families that live below
the poverty line and the lack of overall disproportional representation of students receiving special education services, Losen & Orfield (2002) report that poverty cannot be considered as the sole cause of overrepresentation.

Skiba et al. (2005) suggest that minority students are disproportionally poor and exposed to a variety of social demographic conditions typically associated with poverty that leave students less developmentally prepared for school. Skiba et al. conclude that this poverty induced developmental vacuum produces negative academic and behavioral concerns. This being the case, the effects of poverty increase the potential risk of special education placement for minority students. The results of poverty, according to Blair & Scott (2002) in a study of 159,129 participants in Florida, often are a result of lower levels of maternal education. This factor contributes to the higher rates of special education placement among children from low SES backgrounds. These higher rates of special education placement, Blair & Scott (2002) contend, would not be accepted if they were not children in lower SES levels. Hutchins (2001) reports the most substantial impact on students in poverty is the limited number of opportunities for experiences typically available to middle class students therefore making students in poverty more at risk for special education referral.

MacMillan & Siperstein (2002) indicate that some researchers yield inconsistent results that are contradictory in the investigation of the relationship of race and poverty in the disproportionality of minorities in special education. The *Mattie T. Revised Consent Decree* (2003) focuses Mississippi on the overrepresentation particularly of African American males in the categories of SLD and MR especially in the areas of LRE and FAPE.
Determination of Appropriate Environments to Provide Educational Services.

Two key components of IDEIA (2004) critical to making placement decisions are FAPE and LRE provision. IDEIA (2004) requires that placement options be fluid and open to change as the student and situations change. This requires a continuum of service options. Special education has been discussed as the process of service not the place that delivery of service occurs (Fuchs, 1996). Gartner & Lipsky, 2002; Skiba, Poloni-Staudinger, Gallini, & Feggins-Azziz (2006) address the issue of place for special education services by maintaining that there has been a shift since the 1980s to provide special education services in general education settings.

IDEIA Requirements for FAPE and LRE. The IDEIA (2004) concepts of FAPE and LRE are central to any discussion of appropriate instructional delivery for students with disabilities. Placement or the setting in which a student will receive special education services is determined by the individual student’s IEP team. The plan of educational programming determined by this team of stakeholders must, according to IDEIA (2004), reflect FAPE. An appropriate education is facilitated by making the instructional decisions based on progress monitoring and determining the most appropriate place for services to be provided. The IDEIA (2004) definition of SLD precludes any other disability such as MR, therefore the student with SLD should be able, given appropriate instruction, to achieve on grade level (Berninger, 2002). The IDEIA (2004) requirement of LRE determines the setting in which a student can be successful with the least amount of separation from non-disabled peers. This LRE setting is also determined to be the appropriate setting as required by FAPE. To be able to provide appropriate services in the LRE requires the IEP team have options of services and settings in developing the
instructional plan of service and accommodations necessary for each individual student. **IDEA (2004)** requires these placement options or this continuum of services be available to all students receiving special education services.

Regardless of the debate concerning the definition of SLD, the requirements of **IDEA (1990, 1992, 1997)** and **IDEA (2004)** for FAPE and LRE dictate that placement decisions be facilitated not by the school’s predetermined program but, rather, by individualized planning for students receiving special education services. The level and intensity of support determines the place where the services will be provided or the LRE. Regardless of the eligibility decision, the setting for the student’s instruction is determined by the IEP team based on the individualized needs of the student not the specific disability ruling. This determination is a complicated process based on individualized assessment and planning (Thompson, Lazarus, Clapper & Thurlow, 2006). The serious implications of this placement and planning do not only affect compliance with statutory and regulatory requirements but also affect the long term outcomes for a student. Placement is the culmination of meeting the letter of the law to provide the conceptual cornerstones for the educational program for a student with disabilities (Havey, 1998). Encapsulated in placement, at its best, are the long and short term goals for a student, the fulfillment of FAPE, the manifestations of LRE, results of research and progress monitoring, and the requirements based on statutory and case law.

The determination of where to provide educational services for students eligible under **IDEA (2004)** is made by the IEP committee and must be based upon assessment information, including assessments conducted in the formal evaluation process and...
continuous progress monitoring in the classroom. The IEP process guides the
determination of placement, goals, benchmarks, expectations, and methods of service.

*The Continuum of Special Education Placements and Services.* The U.S. Department of
Education reported in the Annual Report to Congress (2002) that five and one-half
million students have disabilities enough to require special education services. This is
nine percent of the 2000-2001 school population. Of this nine percent of the student
population, 96 percent are served on regular education campuses for the majority of the
day. These figures reflect an 87 percent increase from 1990 until 2000.

Crockett & Kaufman (1999) trace the growth even further back by reporting that
there were six million more students attending schools in the late 1990s than in the late
1980s. Crockett & Kaufman warn this number will increase in 2025 to 48 to 58 million
children, which is an 18 percent rise. These changes come at a time, Crockett & Kaufman
maintain, when government funding is scarce and public confidence in the nation’s
schools is declining. Finn (1982) agrees that school districts find it increasingly more
difficult to meet the mandatory statutory requirements, balance resources, and increase
student outcomes. Placement decisions become not only ideological considerations as
Kavale (2000) labels them, but also decisions that affect school districts as they are
evaluated in relationship to AYP goals as outlined in NCLB, compliance with IDEIA,
and local financial planning considerations.

The National Education Association (NEA) (2002) asserts that a full continuum
of placement options is a vital part of the placement decision making. NEA’s written
policy supports there should be a team consisting entirely of all stakeholders (the IEP
team) involved in the determination of services for each student and specified in the IEP.
Changes in placement over time may result from skill advancement, mastery of compensation skills such as cognitive learning strategies, improving or degenerating medical prognosis, maturation, changes in academic expectations, success or failure of interventions, pharmaceutical interventions, or a variety of other reasons (VanderHeyden, Witt, & Naquin, 2003). Because of this, it is impossible to make placement decisions based on any one factor including a disability ruling such as SLD. The call for all services and supports to be provided in the general education setting regardless of the disability ruling has fueled much of the inclusive education movement in the United States (MacMillan, Gresham, & Bocain, 1998). Giacobbe et al. (2001) suggest an approach that determines policy on the basis of research and evaluation findings, as well as, ideological and political findings. The following sections detail both ideological and evidence-based issues relating to decisions regarding where services and supports are provided.

**Ideology Relevant to Placement Decisions.** Some researchers take an ethical stance on placement issues by asserting that placements in general education exclusively are the right thing to do (Johnson & Bauer, 1992). Kavale (2000) adds to the controversial commentary by referring to this debate concerning placement as one fueled by political and ideological concerns. These concerns, Kavale maintains, create an ideological divide between those who are somehow considered “anointed” and “the vision of the benighted” (page 281). Kavale continues describing placement decisions for increasing time or full time placement in general education as the perceptions of the “elite intelligentsia” (page 281) whose revelations prevail over all others in determining policy. The issue of placement continues, Kavale contends, because empirical evidence is neither
considered before or after a policy has been put in place. Those who disagree, according to Kavale, are seen as being not just in error, but “in sin” (page 281). Conversely, Vaughn, Gersten, & Chad (2000) suggest that good placement decisions can be made as student needs are given a higher priority than a specific philosophy or ideology, and a continuum of placement options are available. It is only when, according to Vaughn et al., there are adequate resources available including resource people, the effectiveness of the interventions used are evaluated, and parents are included in the decision making that high quality placements are made.

While districts are responsible for providing the full continuum of services and placement options, services to students with SLD are most often provided in general education classrooms supplemented with pull-out resource delivery (Bentum and Aaron, 2003; Marston, 1996; Rea, McLaughlin & Walther-Thomas, 2002). While this approach has been advocated by many, it is important to understand that simply selecting a particular place or option on the continuum of services does not necessarily mean that those services will be effective. This point is emphasized by Danielson and Bellamy (1989) as they assert that low placement rates in segregated settings do not necessarily indicate effectiveness of services. Effectiveness is demonstrated when students receive the services they need to be successful.

The debate over placement has spanned years. There are those researchers who support that social development is the hidden benefit of LRE in general education and those benefits outweigh the academic concerns of pull-out programs and self-contained settings (Vaughn, Elbaum & Broadman, 2002). There is also an element of insistence that
there is only one option for placement and that is general education (Wiener & Tardif, 2004).

Research Relevant to Placement Decisions. Yet another segment of the debate over placement is presented by a study of elementary students in third through sixth grades who were placed in general education settings exclusively. Klingner, Vaughn, Hughes, Schumm, & Elbaum (1998) compared the progress of students with and without special education labels and reported that while some of the students with SLD made progress, not all of the students with SLD benefited from the placement. The full-time placement of students with SLD in the general education classroom did not adequately meet the needs of the students with SLD.

Research by Walker & Ovington (1998) indicates there are benefits for students with disabilities who received instruction in general education settings including access to a broader curriculum and teaching methods, opportunities for developing social skills and independence, and the increased support of both general and special education staff. The National Center on Educational Restructuring and Inclusion (1995) reports that the sense of community that is often available in a general education classroom provides increased motivation for students with disabilities to try more rigorous tasks. Other researchers support the presence of advantageous opportunities for social interaction (Hunt, Hirose-Hatae, & Doering, 2000), providing easy access to general education curriculum (King-Sears, 2001), and more positive student outcomes (Salend & Duhaney, 1999).

Mississippi is no different from other states in its search for ways to increase student productivity and outcome. The MDE (2003) reports that in order to meet the
mandates of the *Mattie T. Revised Consent Decree* (2003), the state must increase the number of students with disabilities served in general education for more than 80 percent of the day from 26.75 percent to 32 percent by 2010. Further, the number of students with disabilities served in segregated settings for more than 60 percent of the day must be decreased from 29 percent to 24 percent by the year 2010.

*Determinations of Appropriate Environments Relating to the Mattie T. Revised Consent Decree* (2003). Mississippi’s challenges in determining appropriate environments to effect the most educational progress is not unique in the United States. However, Mississippi is bound by very specific targets as designated in the *Mattie T. Revised Consent Decree* (2003) which place increased emphasis on serving students in less restrictive settings, particularly the general education classroom. Coupled with the LRE requirements of the *Mattie T. Revised Consent Decree* Mississippi, like other states, must consider carefully how the placement decisions are made particularly for students with mental retardation and specific learning disabilities. The MDE (2005) states that to meet the *Mattie T. Revised Consent Decree* (2003) mandate of LRE, every school in Mississippi with a total enrollment that includes a four percent white population or whose school enrollment is 20 students or less must maintain a district-wide SLD identification rate of 5.65 percent or less. Meeting these requirements as well as the requirements for AYP in student outcomes as mandated in *NCLB* (2001) requires that educators consider carefully the eligibility criteria and placement decisions of students with SLD in Mississippi.
Ongoing Assessment of Progress for Students with Specific Learning Disabilities

Correct eligibility and placement decisions must, according to IDEIA (2004), be based on progress monitoring. Progress monitoring is a scientifically based, systematic, and consistent method of checking for student progress and evaluating instructional effectiveness (National Center on Student Progress Monitoring, 2006). Progress monitoring which includes Curriculum Based Measurement (CBM) provides individualized and specialized information about a student's learning status. From the data collected in progress monitoring, educators can determine the effective accommodation or instructional structure (Fuchs, 1996). A tiered approach to intervention, according to O'Connor, Harty, & Fulmar (2005), is a structured, accountable basis for providing the intervention strategies in a timely manner for students who are experiencing difficulty with a skill. Tiered intervention includes progress monitoring of all students with interventions targeted at identified needs in a scientifically-based approach to increase the intensity of the intervention as data collected indicates the need (Torgensen, 2002). Torgensen (2002) continues by reporting that students with SLD frequently require more intensive interventions that can become strategically focused using progress monitoring. The systematic use of progress monitoring or CBM is used in the state of Mississippi providing targeted intervention for all students in general and special education. The tiered intervention system used in the state of Mississippi is a three tier system that includes short termed intervention monitoring as well as intensive instruction interventions by a Teacher Support Team (TST).

The tiered approach, regardless of the number of tiers, in a response to intervention approach requires that all students be monitored routinely and consistently
(Ellis, 1997; Etscheidt, 2006). While these methods may be varied, CBM which was developed by Deno at the University of Minnesota in the mid-1970s, is most commonly used (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2004).

**Progress Monitoring.** The methods of progress monitoring can include classroom assessments either from teacher developed materials, system developed probes, adaptive assessments, or large scale assessments used during the year to monitor growth of individual students and groups of students (Quenemoen, Thurlow, Moen, Thompson, & Morse, 2004). CBM provides a process of progress monitoring the continuing levels of achievement within a school year. This data can be used to establish an intervention or even the (IEP) framework for a student.

**Curriculum Based Measurement.** Curriculum-Based Measurement is a system of systematically checking for learning using readily available curriculum materials within the school. This is accomplished by using a system of curriculum probes to quickly assess and document progress and potential problem areas (Hosp & Hosp, 2003; Steckler, 2006; Steckler & Fuchs, 2000). Hartman & Fuller (1997) demonstrate in a study using 403 first through third grade students finding that CBM involves using standardized measurement procedures to quantify student performance. Educators identify what Walther-Thomas et al. (2000) identify as skill sequences for specific units of learning and objectives based on behaviors and create operational objectives for the classroom through CBM.

**Use of Curriculum Based Measurement.** Commonly cited uses of CBM are to improve individual instructional programs, predict performance on important criteria (Steckler & Fuchs, 2000), enhance teacher instructional planning (Steckler, 2006),
develop norms, increase the ease of communication (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1999), screen students who might be academically at risk (Gersten & Dimino, 2001), evaluate classroom prereferral interventions, reduce bias in assessment (Deno et al., 2001), provide alternative special education identification procedures, predict high stakes testing achievement (Quenemoen et al., 2004), measure growth in secondary programs and content areas, assess the learning of non-English language learners, and predict success in early childhood education (Deno et al., 2001; Deno, 2003; Gersten & Brengelman, 1996; Gersten & Dimino, 2001). Deno et al. (2001) illustrated support for CBM in a study involving 638 students with reading difficulties for grades one through six over a five year period. The results showed that the growth patterns were different for different students but the end result was very unified reading levels. Fuchs & Fuchs (1999) suggest that most of the assessment done currently in classrooms is reliant on mastery measurement and that a single skill is tested. When a single skill is mastered the instruction continues on to the next skill in the sequence of skills. Mastery measurement has unknown reliability and validity, and does not account for sustaining the mastery level. The National Center for Learning Disabilities (2006) supports progress monitoring (CBM being one method) because it allows the IEP to incorporate the state standards and develop goals that can be measured and tracked. Fuchs & Fuchs (2002) suggest that CBM bridges the gap between traditional discrepancy methods and classroom based assessment by combining the concepts of standardized measurement with the qualitative classroom observations techniques. Steckler (2006) supports the value of CBM for all students. Both general education and special education educators can accomplish
class-wide individual student monitoring. Steckler (2006) continues by describing CBM as a form of alternative assessment methodology that supports judging the effectiveness of a program and the provision of information for meaningful redevelopment.

Various concerns are expressed by Deno (2003); Fuchs et al. (2001); Torgensen, 2002; Vaughn & Linan-Thompson (2003) that assessment can be better addressed using progress monitoring techniques such as CBM than traditional discrepancy model assessments. While progress monitoring and CBM are hailed as a most effective measure, these approaches do not escape the concerns of some researchers. Quenemoen et al. (2004) cites the limited access rigorous and challenging curriculum often presented in the past to be a limiting challenge to progress monitoring. Possible barriers to using CBM, as expressed by Fuchs & Fuchs (1996) and Fuchs & Fuchs (2004), include the necessity to assess every child in every classroom every week, to evaluate placement settings, to implement interventions with fidelity, and to evaluate the results of the interventions. Yell, Deno, & Marston (1992) synthesize the barriers to CBM as the amount of time it takes to consistently and successfully use CBM but optimistically solves this barrier with focused staff development and training for teachers.

*Tiered Approach to Assessment and Intervention.* The tiered approach to progress monitoring and remediation is intended to address weaknesses in the educational system at large. This tiered system is based on a medical intervention model originally designed for health care workers. Intended for staged or tiered disease intervention, the model has been adopted for strategic, timely educational interventions (Sugai, 2006). Among issues cited earlier are the desire to identify students with true disabilities rather than those with learning needs not being met by the current instructional approaches in a particular
classroom or school (Reschley & Hosp, 2004), a need to reduce or eliminate disproportionate representation of students from minority backgrounds (Skiba et al., 2005), to eliminate the potential for teacher bias when encountering underachieving students (Hosp & Reschley, 2002), and to ensure that progress is exhibited by all students by early identification of learning problems (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1996).

Three Tiered Response to Intervention Model. Hasbrouck, Ihot, & Parker (2000) and Pemberton, Rademacher, Tyler-Wood, & Cereijio (2006) suggest that not only are the underlying causes for underachievement more likely determined using progress monitoring, but this approach also provides the vehicle for moving from state curriculum standards teaching to specific skill intervention and evaluation. Many states, including Mississippi, have incorporated an RTI model within progress monitoring and intervention. The data concerning student response to a particular intervention has been used for both eligibility assessment and also ongoing monitoring to determine if a student is mastering skills (Bradley, Danielson, & Doolittle, 2005; Cawley, Pamer, Foley, Salmon, & Roy, 2001; Fuchs, Mack, Morgan & Young, 2003; Gresham, 2002; Speece, Case, & Mallory, 2003; Torgersen, 1996; Vaughn et al., 2000). Agreement on the use of multiple tiers of prevention is evident and intervention is nearly universal, (Reschley, 2005). There are several interpretations of the exact make-up of each tier and even how many tiers there should be. Supporters of a four-tiered process advocate for the addition of a fourth tier incorporating identification of a possible disability (Reschley, 2005).

Most widely advocated and used, however, is a three-tiered approach to monitoring and intervention (Torgersen, 1996). Tier I includes all students with progress monitoring and effective classroom instruction based on state-articulated high academic
standards. If progress monitoring reveals that a student is not making the level of progress expected (as compared to his peers), that student should then move into Tier II. This allows for immediate and specific support designed by the classroom teacher in the form of a temporary and specific intervention. When a Tier II intervention is effective, the student returns to Tier I. The student can move between Tier I and II as needed throughout the year. It is estimated that 20-30 percent of students will require Tier II intervention at one time or another (MDE, 2005b).

Those students who are not responsive to Tier II interventions are referred to Tier III. Tier III is intensive instructional support (MDE, 2005). O'Connor, Harty, & Fulmar (2005) validate the tiered approach to intervention. A reading intervention study was conducted on a cohort of students in grades kindergarten through third grade from two schools over a four-year span. This cohort demonstrated the need for more interventions on a short termed basis rather than long termed basis. The findings of the study indicated that a tiered approach to reading intervention was very successful. The targeted interventions based on progress monitoring and delivered in a progressive tiered method were successful in meeting the interventions throughout the four years of the study. Torgensen (2002) reports on a five year study of students beginning in the first grade. A tiered approach to intervention was employed and produced results of increasingly fewer students falling below grade level in each progressing year which suggests that the targeted interventions based on progress monitoring in the intensifying three tiers was successful.

Value of the Tiered Approach. Vaughn, Gersten, & Chad (2000) conducted a review of research done between the years of 1970 until 2000 based upon teaching
practices for teachers of students with learning disabilities. The findings of this review maintain the most successful teaching strategies are based not only on research but also on the individualized approach uniquely suited to the student. Vaughn et al. (2000) suggest that the teaching techniques that have been shown to produce the most positive outcomes are good for students with SLD and general education students as well. Vaughn et al. concludes that this meta-analysis suggests that there are researched based individualized instructional practices that produce substantial outcomes for students.

The targeted intervention of the tiered process proactively produced targeted results for students experiencing difficulties with concepts taught. Tier I and II are used in the general education classroom to give in-class, quick response, targeted interventions. O'Connor et al. (2005) Sturomski (1997) suggests that these targeted interventions have the potential to teach students how to learn and organize information as well as the concepts. One of the values of using a multi-tiered approach is in allowing for multiple, targeted interventions that, for more unsuccessful students, involve support for the teacher and collective expertise of a TST at Tier III. The range of interventions and expertise available is increased before there is a referral for special education assessment. O'Connor et al. (2005) Reschley (2005) supports the importance of tiered interventions citing the substantiated importance of early intervention and value of the secondary interventions or Tier III interventions suggesting that this multi-tiered intervention strategy has a broad level of support among researchers.

A tiered model paired with RTI has been used to bridge the gap between the discrepancy model of assessment and determining the most instructionally effective practices (Fuchs et al., 2002). The process gives a functional and operationalized process
to determine needed interventions and the accountability for the outcome (Ardoin, 2006; Berninger, 2002). The RTI model becomes a framework that teachers in the classroom can directly use on a daily or frequent basis to determine if teaching strategies are effective and if concepts are mastered (Bocain et al., 1999; Deno, 2003; Deno et al., 2001). Students with SLD have been shown to benefit from RTI and are provided with a mechanism to successfully remain in the less restrictive setting of the general education classroom (Fletcher & Reschley, 2005; Francis et al., 2005; Fuchs, 1996; Fuchs & Fuchs, 1999; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2002; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Fuchs et al., 1990). The data made available in each tier by progress monitoring and data collection can be used as a structure for the IEP (Steckler, 2006).

*Mississippi Requirements for the Three Tier Model.* Mississippi has adopted the Three Tier Response to Intervention approach for instructional planning, placement, and eligibility decision making. By adopting the Three Tier model, it is Mississippi’s intent to fully comply with the mandates of NCLB, help dramatically decrease the number of referrals to special education, avoid misidentification of those without true disabilities (with particular emphasis on African American students), and to meet other state goals (MDE, 2005a.) The Three Tiered Response to Intervention used in the state of Mississippi, Tier I is used to measure effective classroom instruction using CBM on a systematic basis to determine student progress through the Mississippi Curriculum Frameworks. All students in the state of Mississippi begin on the Tier I level and move to the Tier II as deemed necessary by CBM to provide the temporary level of supplementary instruction. Students requiring Tier II interventions return to Tier I upon mastering the needed skill (MDE, 2005a). Mississippi has made the Mississippi Student Progress
Monitoring System (SPMS) available to all districts in an effort to facilitate progress monitoring. The SPMS is designed as a CBM tool aligned with the Mississippi Curriculum Frameworks (MDE, 2004).

In Mississippi, it is required that interventions conducted in Tier III must be completed within 18 weeks from referral. In Mississippi, Tier III includes a referral to a Teacher Support Team (TST) made up of specific staff with very specific skills. The TST then begins an intensive process of investigation and problem solving. The TST recommends specific, measurable intervention and creates a plan that involves establishing not only the interventions but the responsible staff and specific data to be collected. The responsible staff reports the success or lack of success of the intervention using the data collected at the prescribed time. The TST evaluates the success or lack of success and makes a determination on modifying the intervention. This process might include, though not always, a request for special education assessment (MDE, 2005).

Efficacy of the Tiered Approach. The tiered approach to RTI provides a framework for the interventions strategies determined necessary by the data collected using progress monitoring (Fletcher & Reschley, 2005). In a review of research-based instructional practices, Vaughn et al. (2000) established that a tiered approach to RTI allows timely interaction with instructional techniques that are evaluated for effectiveness through the use of progress monitoring. Kavale (2000) suggests that not only is the tiered approach important for quality intervention but also for facilitating interventions that do not reflect teacher bias.
O'Connor, Harty, & Fulmar (2005) illustrated the multi-tiered approach in a study of kindergarten through third grade children. The study measured the effects of tiered or increasing levels of intervention in order to determine if reading disabilities could be impacted. The tier system in this study included professional development and specialized training as a first level, followed by small group instruction as necessary. The third tier of intervention was used if the first two tiers did not adequately address the underachievement with the fourth tier being intense and individualized interventions as required. O'Connor et al. (2005) found that by third grade there were moderate to large differences in favor of the students who received the tiered interventions.

Treatment validity can be assigned to a tiered RTI method because of the dual discrepancies required to be considered for special education services. A student can be assigned only if there is evidence through progress monitoring that the student not only performs below grade expectation but also demonstrates a lower rate of learning. Requiring both a demonstrated level of below grade level achievement and lower rate of learning is then a dual discrepancy. The dual discrepancy then becomes an index of failure to thrive. This dual discrepancy or index provides the empirical basis for decision making and allows for dealing directly with the problem, is data based, and creates a proactive approach to intervention (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Speece, 2002).

Summary of the Review of Literature

Successful students and schools are facilitated based on the use of appropriate methods of assessment and instruction. Neither assessment nor instructional decision making are accomplished through simple linear processes. The variables inherent with
the students, educators, and other stakeholders; and the dynamics of the school institution itself make assessing and monitoring students appropriately difficult and complex. Scientific-based methods such as progress monitoring are used to control these variables as much as making student outcomes potentially more positive and schools more able to meet the requirements of AYP. The state of Mississippi, through the Department of Education, is closely monitored by the courts on the basis of the *Mattie T. Revised Consent Decree* (2003) primarily in the areas of overidentification of African American male students in the areas of SLD and MMR. Meeting the requirements of the *Mattie T. Revised Consent Decree* (2003) requires appropriate placement and eligibility decisions free from bias of any sort. Opinion, cultural, racial, SES, and linguistic bias can be filtered through the process of progress monitoring giving more pristine data upon which to make decisions. The use of progress monitoring has been shown to help eliminate bias in the referral of students for special education by systematically providing data on which targeted and individualized interventions can be predicated. The data accrued through progress monitoring is not only more scientific-based but also a more accurate representation of the student and the student’s needs.

Progress monitoring has been shown to be an accurate and effective indicator of student progress and effective instructional strategies. The rates of progress for students both with and without SLD are similar when using progress monitoring. One of the requirements of the *Mattie T. Revised Consent Decree* (2003) is to more accurately identify students with SLD. The use of progress monitoring provides a systematic record of all intervention attempts and the results while complementing the tiered approach of Response to Intervention. The marriage of progress monitoring and Response to
Intervention not only affords the ability to provide strategic, successful interventions but also to do so within a time frame that is beneficial to the student. Instructional planning, the setting for instruction, and determination of the rate of progress for students without the filters of SES and race are central to decreasing the outcome of widely supported overrepresentation.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Overview

The State of Mississippi is especially concerned with improving eligibility decisions as a result of the *Mattie T. Revised Consent Decree (2003)* and improving state testing scores as a direct result of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB)*. Concerns regarding both testing for students with disabilities and placement decisions are well documented in the literature. One of the contributing factors of a review of previous literature is then gleaning the information necessary for the schools in Mississippi to improve eligibility and placement decisions in line with the requirements of Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) and Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). LRE and FAPE are areas of concern not only for *The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA)* of 2004 but the *Mattie T, Revised Consent Decree (2003)* as well. Further, considering previous research results is of importance to Mississippi as it strives to meet the testing goals of *NCLB*. Mississippi, like all states, has its unique socioeconomic status, cultural, and racial personality. Against the backdrop of the current body of knowledge and research concerning placement and testing for students with disabilities, it is necessary for Mississippi to consider variables unique to this state in order to design effective programs to meet student outcome needs and legal requirements.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to determine if the amount of time students are placed in special education makes a difference in the rate of progress in a school on state-wide testing. Further, this study examines the role of socioeconomic status (SES), levels of
disproportionality, and race in predicting the rate of progress on the Mississippi Curriculum Practice Test (MCPT).

Research Design

One hundred fifty-four students including seventy-seven students with special education rulings of specific learning disabilities (SLD) from five schools across the state of Mississippi participated in the study. The Mississippi Curriculum Practice Test was administered three different times during the spring semester to assess rate of student progress. The affect of time in special education on the rate of progress for students was assessed though an ANOVA. Factors of SES, race, and the district’s percentage of disproportionality on rate of progress were evaluated by calculations using multiple regression.

Participants

Participants. Participants were special education students whose classifications are typically served on a general education campus and are most likely to be eligible for the MCT were included in this study. Those classifications are general education, resource, and separate room.

Participants were to be approximately 100 third grade students meeting the criteria for SLD and currently receiving services in one of the designated service settings and 100 general education students also in the third grade and matched as closely as possible by SES and race. Stipends of $10.00 per student completing all three data collection points were given to participating schools and were paid for by U. S. Department of Education State Personnel Development Grant.
Recruitment

Participating schools were selected from the schools designated to participate in U. S. Department of Education State Improvement Grant. The specific schools were determined on the basis of the number of third grade students with SLD rulings available in each school in order to include the number of students required for a moderate effect size. However, actual data collection revealed that the numbers of such grade students available in the sample were low. To increase the effect size of the study, matched pairs of students participated in the study. General education students were matched with students with SLD rulings selected for the study based on grade, SES (as determined by free and reduced lunch status), and ethnicity on a school level.

Sample

As a result, the actual participation included 164 students third through fifth grades from five representative schools. Demographic information on the 154 participants who completed the instruments is presented in Table 1. The participants were primarily fourth and fifth grade \( (n_{4\text{th} \text{ grade}} = 60, n_{5\text{th} \text{ grade}} = 60) \) African American \( (n = 94, 61\%) \) students. Participants were primarily eligible for free or reduced lunch \( (n = 106, 69\%) \) according to federal guidelines as represented in Tables 2 and 3. Fifty percent \( (n = 74) \) of participants were students with a special education ruling of SLD.
Table 1

Characteristics of Participants

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<th>Variable</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Total</th>
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</thead>
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<td>77</td>
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<tr>
<td>SP0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Black/Other</td>
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<td>.63</td>
<td>97</td>
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<td>SES</td>
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<tr>
<td>Free/Reduced Lunch</td>
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<td>.69</td>
<td>106</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not Free/Reduced Lunch</td>
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<td>.31</td>
<td>48</td>
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<tr>
<td>School Percentage of Disproportionality Goal Met</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>5</td>
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Table 2

*Income Eligibility Guidelines for Free Price Lunch*

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Household Size</th>
<th>Annual Income</th>
<th>Monthly Income</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>37,869</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>42,107</td>
<td>3,509</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For Each additional family member add 4,238 354


http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/Extrel/News/06CACFP_Income_Eligibility_Guidelines.doc
Table 3

*Income Eligibility Guidelines for Reduced Price Lunch*

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<tr>
<th>Household Size</th>
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<th>Monthly Income</th>
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<td>4,491</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>53,891</td>
<td>4,994</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For Each additional family member add 6,031 503


http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/Extrel/News/06CACFP_Income_Eligibility_Guidelines.doc
Time in Special Education

For the purposes of this study, time spent in special education was used to define placement in special education. This method is consistent with categories set forth by the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE). These categories were based on the categories as determined by *IDEIA* (2004) and are defined below:

Regular Class – Students who receive the majority of instruction in the regular classroom and receive special education and related services outside the general education classroom for **less than 21 percent of the day**.

Resource Room – Students who receive special education and related services outside the general education classroom for **more than 21 percent of the day but no more than 61 percent of the day**. This may include students placed in resource rooms (pull-out) with part-time instruction in the general education classroom.

Separate Class – Students who receive special education and related services outside the general education classroom for **no more than 60 percent of the day**. Students may be placed in self-contained classrooms with part-time instruction in general education classes or placed in self-contained classes full time on a general education school campus.

Separate School Facility – Students who receive special education services in separate day schools for students with disabilities for **50 percent of the day**.

Residential Facility – Students who receive special education in a public or private residential facility, at public expense, for **more than 50 percent of the day**.

Homebound or hospital - Students who receive services in hospital and homebound programs (MDE, 2004).
Additionally, students although with special education rulings of SLD receiving no time in special education settings will be included as a group.

**Socioeconomic Status**

Socioeconomic status (SES) of students was reported by participating schools. The data reported is illustrated in Table 1. The definition of SES is eligibility of students for free or reduced priced lunch. As indicated in Table 2, free/reduced priced lunch and non-eligibility for free/reduced price lunch is based on federal guideline, determined by the family income and number of family members (MDE, 2005c).

**Race**

Race as a variable was determined by the designations used in the Student Progress Monitoring System (SPMS) Schools in Mississippi routinely report data in this format. Those designations are Asian/ Pacific Islander, Black, Hispanic, American Indian or Alaskan, or White. Race is not a variable of the research question determining the effect of time spent in special education on rate of progress for students with SLD. Race does become a variable, however, based on the parameters of the Mattie T. Revised Consent Decree (2003), in the research question determining the predictive value of race on the rate of progress for students with SLD. The race of participants in each school, as indicated in Table 1, is considered in determining the possible predictive value of a student’s race. For the purposes of this study, race was collapsed into two groups: majority (White) and non-white (Black or other). This is consistent with the race-related reporting required by the Mattie T. Revised Consent Decree (2003).
District Percentage Disproportionality

School districts must attend to their percentage of disproportionality as determined by a formula required by the MDE. The formula is based on the overall population of the school, the ethnic (Asian/Pacific Islander, Black, Hispanic, American Indian or Alaskan, or White) population of the district, and numbers of students in each of these groups receiving special education services in the IDEIA category. Based on this information and the district’s disproportionality goal, a district may be subject to focus monitoring (MDE, 2006) as a result of the requirements of the Mattie T. Revised Consent Decree (2003). Each district is given a target percentage of special education identification in each of the IDEIA recognized areas of disability. Goals of disproportionality are also determined for other demographic categories such as English-speaking and non-English-speaking, Black, White, and Other racial/ethnic groups (MDE, 2006). For the purposes of this study, a district’s percentage goal of disproportionality in the area of race was considered. The actual information provided by MDE in the Annual Report Card sent to each district indicates the state goal for the district and the actual reported percentage. This information is then used to determine if the school met its disproportionality percentage goal or not. For the purposes of this study, schools were coded using the district information as having met the goal or not having met the goal as indicated in Table 1 \( (n_{\text{met}} = 2, n_{\text{not met}} = 3) \).

Instrumentation

Reliability and Validity

The data was collected using the Mississippi Curriculum Practice Test (MCPT). Reliability and validity for the MCT (and by extension MCPT) is difficult to establish.
The MDE provides statistical data to confirm content validity which has been accomplished through Advisory Committees. The MCT Teacher Committee included teachers who were nominated by school districts as “exemplary.” Committees were formed representative of each congressional district, district accreditation level, and ethnic category. A technical advisory committee was formed to address specific issues such as test design, scoring and equating, and standard setting. After being compared to the Mississippi Curriculum Frameworks for curriculum alignment, the test items were administered in a pilot administration or item tryout. This process culminated in a statistical review including a consideration of question bias. The unacceptable questions were then eliminated or corrected.

Construct validity information has not been provided by MDE. However, social validity can be established, as proposed by Cronbach & Gleser (1965), by specific evidence showing the relevance of the scores for the specific purpose and the use of the scores in the applied setting, where the use of these tests is considered statewide to reflect the benefits of testing relative to its costs. The MCPT produces scores that are value implications for the specific purposes determined by the state of Mississippi. These tests are used for uniform purposes state-wide.

Test Forms

The MCT is available in three operational forms or tests (Forms A, B, & C). The MCT is also available in graduated levels with Level 12 designed for second grade through Level 18 for eighth grade. These forms are routinely administered on a random or spiraled basis. Reliability information provided by the MDE is only available to indicate there is no statistical difference between Form A, B or C.
Rate of Progress

The rate of progress was to be determined on a multiple-step process of first the individual student results from the MCPT 1 as compared to results from the MCPT 2; second, a comparison between MCPT 2 and MCPT 3; and third, overall rate of progress will be determined by MCPT 1 & 2 to MCPT 2 & 3. A review of current literature indicates student difficulties in reading are the academic area most likely to produce referrals for special education services. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, only the Reading/ Language Arts Subtests of the MCPT were to be used. However, the actual data collected was not sufficiently representative of the school as a whole. There were large numbers of fourth and fifth grade students with very small numbers of third grade students.

The unanticipated technical problems of securing the actual testing materials and difficulty of taking the test in an on-line format delayed the beginning of the data collection period. This shortened the amount of time schools had to strategically design instruction with the results of each test before the next testing began, and resulted in the third Mississippi Curriculum Practice Test (MCPT) being administered closely the actual administration of the Mississippi Curriculum Test (MCT).

Therefore, in the interest of maintaining sufficient power and statistical significance, schools were considered as a whole rather than by individual grades. Further, based on information from the MDE, there were three test administrations of the Language Arts MCPT. However, in reality there were only two tests. Concerns for establishing enough data points resulted in elimination of the Language Arts practice tests.
from this study. However, the Language Arts practice tests were administered to students and data was made available to participating schools for internal purposes only.

The rate of progress was determined by three comparisons of individual scores from MCPT 1 to MCPT 2 and MCPT 2 to MCPT 3. However, because of concerns surrounding the number of participants and possible inconsistent administration between the tests, the rate of progress was determined by a comparison of means between three testing rates of progress (Tests 1 and 2, Tests 2 and 3, and Tests 1 and 3).

Procedures

Consent

Schools participating in this study are also participating in Mississippi’s State Personnel Development Grant and have consented to participate in research relevant to grant activities. Permission was secured to use routinely generated demographic reports for information concerning the variables of time in special education, race, and SES. (See Appendix A for demographic information collections sheets.) Schools were asked not to share identifying information with the researcher, and therefore students were coded to ensure anonymity. Schools have the authority to release information such as special education rulings, placement decisions, and test scores for legitimate educational use. (See Appendix B for letters of agreement to participate.) The compiled data was shared with the schools that retained the identifying codes to be used in instructional decision making.

These procedures were reviewed by the Institutional Human Subjects Review Board (IRB). The IRB concluded that there was not potential harm presented to
participants or threat of confidentiality. The IRB concluded that this study was approved on an "exempt" basis. (See Appendix C for Institutional Review Board Approval.)

Mississippi Curriculum Practice Tests Administration

Participating schools all had access to the MCPT. Some districts in the state pay to have access on-line to the Mississippi Progress Monitoring System (SPMS) which includes all MCT versions. One participating school did not have access to SPMS and was provided paper copies of the tests. Schools utilizing the paper copy of the test were also provided with standardized bubbled answer sheets specifically designed for use in the SPMS.

The MCPT was given with equal increments of time between each administration beginning in February, 2007. There are multiple areas of the MCT and MCPT. While the test was made available in its entirety as a service to the schools, for the purposes of their study, only the scores from the reading test was used. Participating schools had access to the MCPT either on-line through SPMS or were provided paper copies of the MCPT. Tests followed the administration directions as designated by the state with standardized directions concerning test collection.

Data Return

The data were analyzed and results returned to the schools at no cost to them. The data provided included scores based on each benchmark tested. The schools were given the calculated data returned to them in hard copy form in a timely fashion for local use.
Data Analysis

Answer forms were hand scored by the researcher. The results were confirmed by a random recheck by a qualified individual. Four bubble sheet answer sheets were rechecked for each grade level in each participating school on each of the MCPT test administrations. One error was found in 180 rechecks. The error rate was determined to be .01 and further checks were deemed unnecessary. The data was entered into a Dell computer using Microsoft Office word processing software. The statistical analysis was done using SPSS Version 13 software.

Several derived variables were calculated. The percentage of correct responses was recorded by actual number of correct answers divided by the total number of test questions. These scores were then multiplied by 100 for ease of handling. The percentage for Test 2 was then subtracted from Test 1 and named RP 1/2. The percentage for Test 3 was subtracted from Test 2 and named RP 2/3. The percentage for Test 3 was subtracted from test 1 and named RP 1/3. Rate of progress data was determined to be more representative by comparing Tests 1 and 2 (1/2), Tests 2 and 3 (2/3), and Test 1 and 3 (1/3) using an ANOVA for comparison.

The following research questions originally considered were;

Question 1. Is there a significant rate of progress for students without a special education ruling in third grade at the individual school?

Question 2. Does time in special education affect the rate of progress for students with SLD rulings in third grade?

Question 3. Does race, SES or the individual school’s rate of disproportionality predict the rate of progress for students with SLD rulings in third grade?
However, because of the number of participants, ranges in scores between tests, and the lack of significance established, the questions were revised to be: (1) Does the amount of time in special education make a significant difference in the rate of academic progress for students? (2) Does race, SES, and the district’s level of disproportionate representation predict the rate of progress for students with a ruling of SLD?

**Question 1**

Is there a significant rate of progress for students without a special education ruling in third grade at the individual school? Originally, two One-Way ANOVA’s were to be conducted. First, visual evaluation of the rate of progress data was assessed to look for abnormalities. Next, three One-Way ANOVA’s were conducted for analysis of the rate of progress on RP<21%, RP<60%, RP0%, and RPGE as a result of student placement. Due to the fact that three ANOVA were conducted, the Bonferroni method was used to control for type 1 error (0.05/3 = 0.017).

**Question 2**

Do race, SES, and the district’s percentage of disproportionate representation predict the rate of progress for students with a ruling of SLD? Originally, the predictability was to be determined by regression methods. Despite the changes in the questions and sample size, the researcher was able to conduct three multiple regressions with each of the three progress rates (RP1/2, RP2/3, and RP1/3). The value of SES, race, school percentage of disproportionality, placement in general education classrooms, or resource room settings in determining the rate of progress were calculated using simultaneous regression methods to detect a moderate effect of ($R^2 = .10$) or higher.
Because three multiple regressions were conducted, the Bonferroni method was used to control for type 1 error (0.05/3 = 0.017).
Chapter IV

RESULTS

Overview

This chapter presents the results of the analysis conducted to determine if the amount of time spent in special education affects the rate of progress for students with specific learning disabilities (SLD). Further, the results of an analysis of the predictive value of socioeconomic status, race, and the district's percentage disproportional representation in special education are presented.

The data was originally intended to be analyzed by grade; however the actual data collected was not sufficiently representative of specific grade levels. There was a majority of fourth and fifth grade students with small numbers of third grade students. The actual sample size was smaller than intended. Because of these conditions and in the interest of maintaining sufficient statistical significance, schools were considered as a whole rather than by grade levels.

Affect of Time in Special Education

Descriptive Data

There were 154 students completing all three data collection points including 77 participants with special education rulings of SLD in grades three through five and 77 participants in grades three through five with no special education ruling. Rate of progress was determined by comparison of means between tests.

Test 1 and 2. A mean for the rate of progress between Test 1 and 2 (RP1/2), was calculated for each of the "time in special education" variables. As indicated by Table 4, those variations were as follows;
• **Group 1**: Students with SLD rulings receiving instruction for less than 21% of the day in special education ($SP<21\%$),

• **Group 2**: Students with SLD rulings receiving instruction for more than 21% but less than 60% of the day ($SP<60\%$),

• **Group 3**: Students with SLD rulings but receiving no instruction in special education ($SP0\%$), and

• **Group 4**: Students without SLD rulings receiving instruction in general education settings ($GE$).

Table 4

*Descriptive Statistics for Time in Special Education*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Group 1</th>
<th></th>
<th>Group 2</th>
<th></th>
<th>Group 3</th>
<th></th>
<th>Group 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$SP&lt;21%$</td>
<td>$SP&lt;60%$</td>
<td>$SP0%$</td>
<td>GE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Test 1</td>
<td>55.50</td>
<td>16.69</td>
<td>51.06</td>
<td>26.11</td>
<td>37.77</td>
<td>14.91</td>
<td>56.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Test 2</td>
<td>42.22</td>
<td>19.68</td>
<td>42.86</td>
<td>21.42</td>
<td>35.73</td>
<td>8.44</td>
<td>53.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Test 3</td>
<td>51.47</td>
<td>22.96</td>
<td>52.28</td>
<td>25.87</td>
<td>32.48</td>
<td>13.71</td>
<td>62.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RP1/2</td>
<td>-13.28</td>
<td>23.50</td>
<td>-8.20</td>
<td>15.82</td>
<td>-2.04</td>
<td>19.62</td>
<td>-2.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RP1/3</td>
<td>-4.03</td>
<td>23.20</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>16.17</td>
<td>-5.29</td>
<td>17.87</td>
<td>6.17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5

Range of Scores for Time in Special Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Group 1</th>
<th>Group 2</th>
<th>Group 3</th>
<th>Group 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SP&lt;21%</td>
<td>SP&lt;60%</td>
<td>SP0%</td>
<td>GE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Min</td>
<td>Max</td>
<td>Min</td>
<td>Max</td>
<td>Min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Test 1</td>
<td>15.56</td>
<td>82.22</td>
<td>13.33</td>
<td>95.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Test 2</td>
<td>15.56</td>
<td>86.67</td>
<td>13.33</td>
<td>95.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Test 3</td>
<td>17.78</td>
<td>91.11</td>
<td>15.56</td>
<td>97.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RP1/2</td>
<td>-60.00</td>
<td>28.89</td>
<td>-44.44</td>
<td>17.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RP2/3</td>
<td>-42.22</td>
<td>64.44</td>
<td>-15.56</td>
<td>44.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RP1/3</td>
<td>-55.56</td>
<td>48.89</td>
<td>40.00</td>
<td>29.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Test 1 and 2. The mean score for Group 1 participants (SP<21% n = 43) was -13.28 ranging from -60.00 to 28.90 with a standard deviation of 23.50. Group 2 participants (SP<60%, n = 21) had a mean of -8.20 with scores ranging from -44.44 to 17.78 and a standard deviation of 15.82. Group 3 participants (SP0%, n = 13) had a mean of -2.04 with scores ranging from -42.22 to 22.22 with a standard deviation of 19.62. Group 4 participants (GE, n = 77) had a mean of -2.89 with scores ranging from -57.78 to 66.67 and a standard deviation of 25.70.

Test 2 and 3. A mean for the rate of progress between Test 2 and 3 (RP2/3), was also calculated for each of the “time in special education” variables. The mean score for Group 1 participants (SP<21%, n = 43) was 9.25 with scores ranging from -42.22 to 64.44 with a standard deviation of 24.09. Group 2 participants (SP<60%, n = 21) had a mean of 9.42 with scores ranging from -15.56 to 44.44 and a standard deviation of 16.70.
Group 3 participants (SP0%, n = 13) had a mean of -3.25 with scores ranging from -24.44 to 17.78 with a standard deviation of 14.67. Group 4 participants (GE, n = 77) had a mean of 9.06 with scores ranging from -40.00 to 64.44 and a standard deviation of 21.86.

Tests 1 and 3. A mean for the rate of progress between Test 1 and 3 (1/3), was also calculated for each of the “time in special education” variables. The mean score for Group 1 participants (SP<21%) (n = 43) was -4.03 with scores ranging from -55.56 to 48.89 with a standard deviation of 23.20. Group 2 participants (SP<61%, n = 21) had a mean of 1.22 with scores ranging from -40.00 to 29.05 and a standard deviation of 16.17. Group 3 participants (SP0%, n = 13) had a mean of -5.29 with scores ranging from -29.68 to 22.22 and a standard deviation of 17.87. Group 4 participants (GE, n = 77) had a mean of 6.17 with scores ranging from -57.78 to 66.67 and a standard deviation of 27.52.

Concerns surrounding the administration of Test 2 are reflected in the generally large variability of rate of progress means. This caused the researcher enough concern about the reliability and validity of the data collected from the test administrations that 1/2, 2/3, and 1/3 were used as the rate of progress. This caused the researcher enough concern about the reliability and validity of the data collected from Test 2 to choose the 1/3 test data as the measure of rate of progress.

Rate of Progress

Three one-way analyses of variance (ANOVA) were conducted to evaluate the relationship of time in special education with rate of progress for participants. The independent variables were school and placement data was examined for violations of ANOVA assumptions and showed that the assumptions of homogeneity and normalization were violated because the variance of the dependent variable (rate of
progress) was not the same for the population. This was due to the extreme ranges of scores and large standard deviations. Due to violation of assumptions, a Kruskal–Wallis, a non-parametric test, was conducted to account for these assumptions. Findings were the same as the ANOVA, therefore, ANOVA findings will be reported as indicated in Table 6.

Table 6

ANOVA Results for Rate of Progress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rate of Progress</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RP1/2</td>
<td>2, 151</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RP2/3</td>
<td>2, 151</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RP1/3</td>
<td>2, 151</td>
<td>1.78</td>
<td>.17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Progress Test 1 to Test 2

First, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) with placement status (GE, SP<21%, SP<60% and SP0%) as the factor and RP1/2 as the dependent variable was conducted.

Using the Bonferroni adjustment, the test for academic status was not significant, ($F = 2, 151 = .2.99, p = .22$) as reported in Table 6. Due to the non-significant $F$, post hoc tests were not conducted.
Progress Test 2 to Test 3

A second one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) with placement status (GE, SP<21%, SP<60% and SP0%) as the factor and the RP 2/3 as the dependent variable was conducted.

Using the Bonferroni adjustment, the test for academic status was not significant ($F = 2.151 = .16, p = .15$), as reported in Table 6. Due to the non-significant $F$, post hoc tests were not conducted.

Progress Test 1 to Test 3

Last, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) with placement status (GE, SP<21%, SP<60% and SP0%) as the factor and RP1/3 as the dependent variable was conducted.

Using the Bonferroni adjustment, the test for academic status was not significant ($F = 2.151 = 1.77, p = .57$), as reported in Table 6. Due to the non-significant $F$, post hoc tests were not conducted.

To summarize, when students placement statuses were compared on rate of progress, no significant differences were found between GE, SP<21%, SP<60% and SP0% in any of the three rates of progress evaluated.

Predictive Value of SES, Race and School Percentage of Disproportionality

Three standard multiple regression analyses were conducted to assess the prediction value of race and socioeconomic status (SES) for students grades three through five with special education rulings of SLD, and the school’s disproportionality on student’s rate of progress. The independent variables were race, SES, and school’s percentage of disproportionality. The data was examined for violations of regression...
assumptions and showed that the assumptions of linearity and normality were violated because the variance of the dependent variable was not the same for the population.

_Test 1 and 2_

Regression results, as indicated on Tables 7 and 8, for RP1/2 showed that the linear combination of SES, race, and school’s disproportionality significantly predicted rate of progress, $R^2 = .15$, adjusted $R^2 = .112$, $F = (3, 73) = 4.28, p = .008$ adjusting for family-wise error. Standard Betas (β) indicate that the school’s disproportionality has a more predictive relationship to the rate of progress (β = .31) followed by race (β = .14), and SES (β = .08)

_Test 2 and 3_

Regression results, as indicated on Tables 7 and 8 for RP 2/3 showed that the linear combination of SES, race, and school’s disproportionality significantly predicted rate of progress, $R^2 = .135$, adjusted $R^2 = .100$, $F = (3, 73) = 3.80, p = .014$ adjusting for family-wise error. Standard Betas (β) indicate that the SES has a more predictive relationship to the rate of progress (β = .07) followed by negative relationship of race (β = -.05), and a negative relationship of school’s disproportionality (β = -.35)

_Test 1 and 3_

Regression results, as indicated on Tables 7 and 8, for RP1/3 showed that the linear combination of SES, race, and school’s disproportionality did not significantly predicted rate of progress, $R^2 = .030$, adjusted $R^2 = -.010$, $F = (3, 73) = .754, p = .523$ adjusting for family-wise error.
Table 7

ANOVA Results for Rate of Progress as Predicted by Socioeconomic Status, Race, and School Percentage of Disproportionality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rate of Progress</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RP1/2</td>
<td>3, 73</td>
<td>4.28</td>
<td>.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RP2/3</td>
<td>3, 73</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>.014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RP1/3</td>
<td>3, 73</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>.523</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8

Model Summary for Rate of Progress as Predicted by Socioeconomic Status, Race, and School Percentage of Disproportionality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R²</th>
<th>Adjusted R²</th>
<th>p</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rate of Progress</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RP1/2</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RP2/3</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RP1/3</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.523</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summary

The three One-Way ANOVA showed no significance between the RP1/2, RP2/3, and RP1/3 and the variables of GE, SP<21%, SP<60% and SP0%. The wide range of
variance indicated no homogeneity of variance violation and of the assumption of normalization.

Concerns surrounding the administration of test 2 resulted in using the rate of progress for Test 1 and 3 (1/3). ANOVA findings for each of the levels of time in special education indicated that participants with SLD rulings receiving special education instruction for >21% but <60% of the day made the most gains (9.2), followed by participants with SLD rulings receiving special education instruction <21% of the day (9.0), participants receiving instruction in general education (7.7), and participants with SLD rulings receiving no special education instruction (6.5). Regression analysis indicated the school’s disproportionality, race and SES, respectively, are predictors of rate of progress.
CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The primary purpose of this study was to determine if the amount of time spent in special education affected the rate of progress for students with special education rulings of specific learning disabilities (SLD). The importance and attention given to increasing the rate of progress is rooted in federal legislation and is the basis for decisions made for students with disabilities. This legislation creates the strategy for the service plan. These requirements and guidelines do not, however, stand alone. The *NCLB (2001)* legislation places emphasis on testing that measures the mastery of grade level curriculum including annual progress and school accountability (White House, 2001) that encompasses all students including students with disabilities.

A further purpose was to ascertain if race, socioeconomic status (SES), and a school percentage of disproportionality as determined by the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) and based on the requirements of the *No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) (2001)* were predictors of rate of progress. The findings indicate that while some students in Mississippi are making progress, some are not. Indications from the placement of students with SLD are important for structuring instruction. Schools are social organizations serving diverse populations. The findings of this study indicate that rate of progress for students with SLD rulings in Mississippi are influenced by the school’s percentage of disproportionality and SES.

Time in Special Education

Recent literature indicates that the benefits available to students with disabilities served in general education settings such as access to broader curriculum and teaching...
methods, opportunities for developing social skills, and increased staff support often override the negative effects (Hunt, Hirose-Hatae, & Doering, 2000; King-Sears, 2001; National Center on Educational Restructuring and Inclusion [NCERI], 1995; Salend & Duhaney, 1999; Walker & Ovington, 1998). Presenting a different view were Klinger, Vaughn, Hughes, Schumm, & Elbaum (1998) as these authors disagreed maintaining all students with SLD rulings do not have their needs met in a general education setting. The findings of this study appear to support Klinger et al. (1998).

It is important to understand that the findings of this study were based on data which included means for all four of the variables (RP<21%, RP<60%, RP0%, GE) that were skewed. The range of scores was wide spread with standard deviation scores as much as half of the mean. Three analyses of variances (ANOVAs) were conducted and showed there was no significance. The possible explanations for the erratic means, ranges and standard deviations might include that there were no positive rates of progress to measure at all. Another more probable consideration could be that the data was collected using the Mississippi Curriculum Practice Test (MCPT). The Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) has not provided reliability and validity information for these instruments. These instruments are, however, the tools schools in Mississippi are given to help prepare for the Mississippi Curriculum Test (MCT).

While the ANOVA analyses were not significant and no post hoc testing was performed, visual analysis of the descriptive results indicate that students with SLD rulings in Mississippi show a greater rate of progress when receiving special education instruction for < 21% of the day (RP<21%) or receiving special education instruction >21% but <60 % of the day (RP<60%). That not withstanding, participants with SLD
rulings served in any setting did not demonstrate the same rate of progress demonstrated by students in general education settings regardless of the special services.

There is an apparent contradiction for participants in Mississippi with Hunt, Hirose-Hatae, & Doering, 2000; King-Sears, 2001; Murray & Greenberg, 2006; National Center on Educational Restructuring and Inclusion (NCERI), 1995; Salend & Duhaney, 1999; and Walker & Ovington, 1998 who support general education placement of students with special education rulings. This could be explained by considering that in an effort to meet the mandates of the Mattie T. Revised Consent Decree (2003), schools may have hastily placed participants with SLD rulings in general education without considering the alignment of services to make this a successful placement. The domino effect of this Mattie T. Revised Consent Decree decision on placement directly impacts the AYP requirements of NCLB (2001).

The low increase in the mean for students with SLD rulings who receive no instruction in special education (SP0%) could reflect the manner in which inclusion plans are implemented in the state of Mississippi. Crockett & Kaufman (1999), Finn (1982), Fuchs & Fuchs (2006), and Kavale (2000) suggest that the pressure to meet mandates is extreme to the point of losing sight of the goals of student achievement.

Darling-Hammond (2003); Ingersoll (2001); Loeb, Darling-Hammond, & Luczak (in press); and the Texas Center for Educational Research (2000) suggest the increasing costs of providing special education services and the attrition of teachers creates a situation of sacrificing good student-centered decision making. Inappropriate supplemental aides and services according to Thurlow, Lazarus, Thompson and Morse (2005) result in unsuccessful service delivery. The increasing need for staff development in the areas of
inclusion and meeting diverse needs suggests Thompson, Lazarus, Clapper, & Thurlow (2006), create situations in which it is difficult to produce good instruction and student achievement. Perhaps the actual data in this study is a reflection of the reality in which schools are required to cope. However, with the reauthorization of IDEA (IDEIA, 2004) the requirement of systematic and continuous curriculum based measurement may show, as the review of literature indicates, an increase in the appropriate intervention for all students (Ellis, 1997; Etscheidt, 2006; Hartman & Fuller, 1997; Hosp & Hosp, 2003; Quenemoen, Thurlow, Moen, Thompson, & Morse, 2004; Steckler, 2006; Steckler & Fuchs, 2000.) Mississippi is just beginning its training and implementation of the Three Tiered Approach to Response to Intervention. Perhaps this training and implementation will bring a balance to the requirements of the Mattie T. Revised Consent Decree (2003) and other mitigating conditions.

Interestingly, while the visual comparison of means for the participants (SP<21%) and participants (SP<60%) show a higher increase than participants (SP0%), the mean is still not as high as participants (GE). These findings appear to indicate a consideration that special education teachers are making progress in the pull-out settings. The goal of special education services is to provide individualized educational planning and to support students in such a way that the students can participate with non-disabled peers. Participants receiving special education services for a part of the day (SP<21%, SP>60%), according to this data, were apparently receiving some support and effective services but not enough to meet age level expectations. The general education participants (GE), according to this data, were making progress but not performing to the passing minimum standard expected by MDE. Considering these analyses, it is safe to

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say there is work to be done before students can meet minimum expectations.

Theoretically, against the backdrop of Vygotsky's (Wertsch, 1985) "zone of proximal development," it would appear that the testing involving MCPT material or format is out of the "zone." This theory might be better tested with the MCT which has a better established reliability and validity.

Analyzing the placement effect on students is important for making instructional decisions and designing instruction. The consideration of other factors that might affect the rate of progress is beneficial in this process. Another purpose of this study was to consider if the rate of progress for participants is affected by the participant's race, SES or by the school's percentage of disproportionality.

Predictive Value of Race, SES, and School's Percentage of Disproportionality

Race

Literature (Artiles & Trent, 2000; Shinn, Collins, & Gallagher, 1998; Reschley, 2002; Skiba, Poloni-Staudinger, Simmons, Feggins-Azziz, & Chung, 2005; Skiba, Poloni-Staudinger, Gallini, & Feggins-Azziz, 2006) suggests that there is evidence of overrepresentation of minority students, particularly Black students, in special education programs. Mississippi then, if these writers are correct, is a part of a larger trend. The Mattie T. Revised Consent Decree (2003) is an indication that race is of concern in providing student services in Mississippi. Therefore, there is a strong effort on the part of MDE to decrease the percentage of Black students served in special education under the categories of SLD and mental retardation.

The results of the analysis of the data collected for this study indicate that race was a predictor in Test 1 & 2 (RP1/2) and Test 2 & 3 (RP2/3) but not Test 1 & 3 (RP1/3).
Nonetheless, it is important to remember that these findings are based on data that is speculative and while the results are statistically significant, all of the variables (race, SES and percent of disproportionality) account for only 15 percent of the variance. Perhaps these findings are more related to Blair & Scott (2002), Hutchins (2001), MacMillan & Reschley (1998), and Skiba et al. (2005) who suggest that special education placement is not influenced by race alone but is the result of race as affected by SES.

SES

The results of the analysis of the predictive value of SES on rate of progress based on this data were significant for all three tests (RP1/2, RP2/3, RP 1/3). The Department of Commerce (2007) reports, as indicated in Table 9, that the personal per capita income in Mississippi is $22,300 per annum as compared to the national per capita income of $37,800 (CIA World Factbook, 2007). The poverty line for a family of four is established at $18,400 per year (Department of Health and Human Services, 2006). Low SES is a considerable concern in Mississippi not only as an economic factor but also as a predictor of success for its students. Educators in Mississippi, on the basis of these findings, need to heed what Payne (2005) refers to as the “hidden rules” of poverty. Understanding the predictive affect of SES calls educators in Mississippi to understand and teach from a perspective that students learn new paradigms and information that can make them successful within the demands of their SES.
Table 9

*Per Capita Income for County of Participating Schools*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Per Capital Income</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Forrest</td>
<td>$23,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harrison</td>
<td>$25,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newton</td>
<td>$19,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>$19,400</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Per Capita Comparison

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Per Capital Income</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mississippi</td>
<td>$22,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>$37,800</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Blair & Scott (2002), Hutchins (2001), MacMillan & Reschley (1998), and Skiba et al. (2005) suggest that it is SES combined with race that contributes to overidentification of students for special education. While race, according to this data, is not a predictor, its combination with SES should not be ignored. If Vygotsky’s (Wertsch, 1985) “zone of proximal development” is to be taken seriously, then it is not only the developmental indicators that are of importance but also those that are related to SES that will bring students into the “zone” for optimal learning. The *Mattie T. Revised Consent Decree* (2003) required the reduction of Black students in specific areas of special
education. Considering these findings, perhaps one of the keys to meeting those requirements is in using instructional strategies designed to meet the needs of students in poverty first and secondarily consider race. Perhaps the connection between SES as it relates to race and the ability of schools to meet this need is an important link.

School’s percentage of disproportionality

The findings in this study indicate that the percentage of overrepresentation in a school does have an affect on the rate of progress for students. It is of interest that a school’s ability to meet its over identification or disproportional percentage goals was found to be a predictor of rate of progress. Race alone was not. One consideration might be that the schools who are meeting the disproportionality percentage goals are being more proactive and incorporating more prescriptive classroom interventions so students can be successful in a general education setting thus avoiding special education placement at all (MacMillan & Reschley, 1998).

Limitations

This study had several limitations. First, the sample size was small. The original number of participants was adequate for a moderate effect size. The schools that originally agreed to participate dropped from the original number of 201 participating students to 176 before testing began because of access difficulties with the Student Progress Monitoring System (SPMS). This is the system made available to school districts for a fee. After the first test was administered, two more schools dropped from the study because of online test administration difficulties and local issues leaving a total of 154 participants.
Second, the original research design was established to analyze the affect of time in special education on rate of progress by grade level beginning with third grade. The small sample size made the data difficult to study. It was decided to collapse the data across grade levels to provide a stronger study.

Third, the access to the online instruments was more limited than indicated by MDE. Therefore, all of the schools ultimately used paper copies of each test. This required hand scoring by the researcher and verification of the scoring by an outside person. The paper scoring procedures further delayed the return of the data analysis to the schools. It increased the cost of the study and the dependence on delivery methods such as the university delivery process and FedEx once again delaying the data return both to the researcher and the analysis to the schools.

Fourth, because of the technical difficulties of access the test, the researcher was required to secure access to the testing materials. The original information from MDE was that this could be provided. However, the reality was quite different. MDE had no problem with the researcher using the materials since they were available to any public school in the state; however, MDE could not give the test copies out themselves. Contacting the publisher directly did not solve the problem since the researcher did not hold an access code. With MDE’s permission, the tests were finally accessed through a local school district school testing coordinator. Copies were then made and shipped to the participating public schools in Mississippi. The planning, recruiting, and training period was established to begin in January, 2007 with tests given at equal intervals in February, March, and April. The statewide Mississippi Curriculum Test (MCT) is given in early May. This schedule allowed for the return of analyzed benchmark data to the schools in
time for schools to strategically remediate. The unexpected technical problems delayed the beginning of the study creating a shorter amount of time between test administrations. While the time was adequate for the purposes of the study, it did not allow for the desired length of time for schools to use the data to plan instruction for the MCT in May.

Implication for Future Research and Practice

The value of this study is not only in its findings but the implications for future findings. Student achievement is the goal for all educators regardless of the placement, race, SES or school’s percentage of disproportionality. The data generated by this study is inconsistent. Perhaps this is a good indicator there are issues to be resolved before highly effective research can be conducted. This is the reality for Mississippi schools. Within that reality lie the questions concerning what can be done to increase student achievement and reliable methods to measure that achievement.

Future Practice

The NCLB (2001) requirements carry with them heavy accountability for AYP. If schools in Mississippi are to be held accountable for AYP, it would be valuable to be using instruments with established reliability and validity to measure this progress. The MCPT are provided by the state to help prepare students for the MCT given annually and used for the AYP indicators. Schools should be assured that the MCPT does, in fact, relate to the MCT with reliability and that the MCT is, in fact, a reliable measure in and of itself.

The findings indicate that students (SP0%) were the lowest scoring group. The inclusion procedures appear to be not effective. It is hoped that further implementation of the Response to Intervention (RTI), in its early stages in Mississippi, will address this.
This being the case, this analysis indicates a mandate for organizing staff development and training in such a manner that RTI becomes a priority for all local staff including special and general education staff and administrative staff responsible for its oversight.

The technical problems for schools indicate a real need for reconsideration concerning the use of SPMS. Either the system needs to be made more user friendly, a different system considered, or much more intensive training needs to be provided for local staff in order for SPMS to be effective. Another aspect of SPMS usage is the lack of general access to hardware and access codes needed to use SPMS as an individual student testing tool.

Findings indicating the predictive value of SES should be a consideration in planning for staff training. The techniques for teaching students in poverty and increasing parent participation for families in poverty are needed. Considering the levels of what Payne (2005) refers to as "generational poverty" may create concrete and specific techniques for increasing student achievement. The mainline teaching strategies generated in textbooks may not be enough to meet the needs indicated by this data suggesting that SES is a predictor of rate of progress. Mississippi teachers may need more specific teaching strategies to make instructional planning more specific to students with low SES.

A part of the value of the findings in this study is producing questions. Questions are best answered by research. Quality teaching strategies are research based. Effective teaching strategies specific to Mississippi students and educators dealing with Mississippi’s measurement tools must be research specific to the situation.
**Future Research**

Possible research opportunities would include using a larger sample. Samples for research in special education are historically small because of the very nature of special education and the variety of students served in special education. However, a larger sample would be more likely to stabilize the effects on the data and would increase the effect size.

Research using other states and their preparation materials for state wide testing might be interesting to compare to the results of Mississippi’s procedures. Though each state has the same requirements of NCLB (2001), the testing instrument is individualized by state. It would be of interest to determine if other states have the same results of special education placement and the predictive values of race, SES, and school disproportionality in using the respective testing or training materials.

It would be of interest to determine if these findings are duplicated when using the actual state testing instrument or the MCT in a longitudinal study. The reliability and validity, though sketchy, is more available for this test. The MCT is being redesigned for next year. Establishing the predating factors for success will be important.

Another research opportunity would include an analysis of inclusion methods as they are related to rate of progress and placement. Mississippi is just beginning efforts in Response to Intervention. Theoretically, using curriculum based measurement will close the rate of progress gaps. Research would determine if it is successful.

Research would be of value in the other categories of special education. Educators are charged with meeting the needs of all students including those with diverse learning,
cultural, social, racial backgrounds. An investigation into the predictors of a successful rate of progress would be of value in making instructional decisions.

Conclusion

While there was problematic data included in this study, it is important to remember that data is just data and is representative of the sample from which it was collected. There are good things happening in special education classrooms in Mississippi, but they are not enough. The need for effective, strategic instruction is evident as indicated by these findings. It is hoped that as the Response to Intervention (RTI) effects are felt in Mississippi schools that the needs of special education students who are placed in general education without special education support will progress at a higher level. The promise of RTI is that all students, regardless of their placement, will be successful. This lower rate of progress for students with special education rulings but receiving instruction in a pull out program could be as a result of the inclusion practices themselves, the reliability of the testing instruments, the appropriate use of supplementary aides and services, or a combination of these. In any case, AYP requires achievement. An evaluation of the causes of this lack of achievement is necessary.

This data indicates there is in fact an overrepresentation problem in Mississippi as pronounced in the Mattie T. Revised Consent Decree (2003). There is a link, according to this data, between the school’s ability to meet the disproportionality goals and overall rate of progress. The race to meet these disproportionality goals appears to present a risk to the students involved. This is clearly a complex, multidimensional issue involving special education identification policies as well as providing for the needs of students both
academically and socially in the case of SES and not just a process of making numbers match.

This study contributed to the body of knowledge in special education by providing evidence that placement is an issue in the expectations of achievement and progress for students with SLD rulings. This study further contributes by supporting Thompson, Lazarus, Clapper, & Thurlow (2006) as they maintain that the determination of placement is a complicated process that is supported by individualized assessment and planning also supporting the concepts of Response to Intervention.

Another contribution to the body of special education knowledge is that for students in Mississippi with SLD rulings, the school’s disproportionality does matter and adds weight to the need for serious consideration to decreasing disproportionality with responsible and individualized interventions.
APPENDIX A
DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SHEET

Mississippi Curriculum Practice Test Research Project
Demographic Information

Student Identifying Number _______________________________________
(No names. The school should keep the master list of ID numbers and
names. Data will be returned according to ID number.)

Grade (3, 4 or 5) ______

Ethnicity

• Black ______
• Hispanic ______
• White ______
• Asian/Pacific Islander ______
• American Indian ______

Qualifies for free or reduced lunch (yes or not) _____________________

Special Education Ruling of Learning Disability (yes or no) ___________

According to the IEP:

• Time Spent Daily in a Special Education Setting ____________
• Time Spent Daily in a General Education Setting ____________
APPENDIX B

LETTERS OF PARTICIPATION FROM SCHOOLS

BEL-AIRE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
10531 Klein Road
Gulfport, Mississippi 39503

JAMES R. LINDSAY
Principal

HENRY ARLEDGE
Superintendent of Education

Dr. Hollie Filce
And Ms. Marge Crowe
REACH MS
The University of Southern Mississippi
118 College Drive, Box 5057
Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001

Dear Dr. Filce and Ms. Crowe:

Our school would be pleased to participate in the proposed MCT Practice Test Research Study. The MCT practice tests are available to all public schools in Mississippi and are routinely administered by many districts across the state.

A designee from our school will submit the following information:

1. An individual demographic sheet for each participating 3rd - 5th grade student with an assigned identification number, special education status, grade, gender, race, and free/reduced lunch status. I understand that student names or other individually identifying information must not be sent to researchers.

2. Copies of MCT Practice Test protocols (reading/language arts) that are identifiable only by the individually assigned identification number. There will be three submissions of the practice tests; one in February, one in March, and one in April.

School Name: Bel-Aire Elementary

Number of potential participants with learning disabilities (grades 3, 4, 5): 11

I understand that for each participant with a learning disability, we will identify a demographically similar student without a special education ruling.

Contact Person: Judy Boyd

Phone: 228-832-7436 E-Mail: jboyd@harrison.k12.ms.us

I understand that there is assistance available from REACH MS staff for test administration or other tasks if needed.

Sincerely,

James R. Lindsay, Principal
Bel-Aire Elementary
February 6, 2007

Dr. Hollie Gabler Filce  
118 College Drive #5057  
Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001

Dear Dr. Filce:

The Forrest County School Board met in a regular session on Monday, February 5, 2007, and I am pleased to inform you that it was approved for Ms. Margie Crowe to conduct a research which is related to the overall goals of the Mississippi State Personnel Development (REACH-MS) to get an overall picture of the state of Mississippi. We understand that the data will not be compared at a school or district level and no determinations about performance of particular schools will be made or shared.

If you have any questions about this, please let me know.

Sincerely,

Kay H. Clay, Ed.D.  
Superintendent of Education

[signature]
Dr. Hollie Flice  
and Ms. Marge Crowe  
REACH MS  
The University of Southern Mississippi  
118 College Drive, Box 5057  
Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001

Dear Dr. Flice and Ms. Crowe:

Our school would be pleased to participate in the proposed MCT Practice Test Research Study. The MCT practice tests are available to all public schools in Mississippi and are routinely administered by many districts across the state.

A designee from our school will submit the following information:

1. An individual demographic sheet for each participating 3rd - 5th grade student with an assigned identification number, special education status, grade, gender, race, and free/reduced lunch status. I understand that student names or other individually identifying information must not be sent to researchers.

2. Copies of MCT Practice Test protocols (reading/language arts) that are identifiable only by the individually assigned identification number. There will be three submissions of the practice tests; one in February, one in March, and one in April.

School Name: South Forrest Attendance  
Number of potential participants with learning disabilities (grades 3, 4, 5): 05  
*I understand that for each participant with a learning disability, we will identify a demographically similar student without a special education ruling.

Contact Person: Christi Cummins  
Phone: 545-7714/277-5561  Email: cummins2@comcast.net  
I understand that there is assistance available from REACH MS staff for test administration or other tasks if needed.

Sincerely,

John Brown, Principal  
Sam Smith Elementary School
Dear Dr. Filce and Ms. Crowe:

Our school would be pleased to participate in the proposed MCT Practice Test Research Study. The MCT practice tests are available to all public schools in Mississippi and are routinely administered by many districts across the state.

A designee from our school will submit the following information:

1. An individual demographic sheet for each participating 3rd - 5th grade student with an assigned identification number, special education status, grade, gender, race, and free/reduced lunch status. I understand that student names or other individually identifying information must not be sent to researchers.

2. Copies of MCT Practice Test protocols (reading/language arts) that are identifiable only by the individually assigned identification number. There will be three submissions of the practice tests; one in February, one in March, and one in April.

School Name: Fulwiler Elementary School

Number of potential participants with learning disabilities (grades 3, 4, 5): 

I understand that for each participant with a learning disability, we will identify a demographically similar student without a special education ruling.

Contact Person: Henrene Sharkey
Phone: (662) 334-7111 Email: hsharkey@guillemot12.ms.us

Sincerely,

Henrene Sharkey, Principal
Beatrice Fulwiler Elementary School
TO: Margie W. Crowe  
2008 Oak Grove Road #5  
Hattiesburg, MS 39402

FROM: Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.  
HSPRC Chair

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 27031906  
PROJECT TITLE: Factors Affecting the Rate of Progress for Students With Specific Learning Disabilities

Enclosed is The University of Southern Mississippi Human Subjects Protection Review Committee 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.
REFERENCES


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Highlands, TX: aha! Process Inc.


