

IMPLEMENTING THE FEDERAL NCLB ASSESSMENT POLICY
AT THE LOCAL LEVEL
FOR LEARNERS AFFECTED WITH MODERATE TO SEVERE
DISABILITIES:
AN ANALYSIS OF EDUCATORS' DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

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A candidate for the degree of
DOCTORATE IN EDUCATION

And hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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ABSTRACT

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation of 2001 required 98% of students in the United States to be assessed annually to determine achievement levels in the area of communication arts and mathematics during grades three through eight. Students are also assessed in the area of science once during the elementary grade cluster. The State of Missouri uses the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) to assess students as required by federal legislation during the spring of each year. Certain accommodations to administration, setting, timing, and response can be provided to students with documented disabilities.

No Child Left Behind along with the Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Act (IDEIA) of 2004 allowed for the most profoundly disabled two to three percent of students in each school district to be assessed by an alternative process. The State of Missouri uses the MAP-A to assess students that qualify for an alternative assessment. Whether a student has qualified for accommodations or an alternative assessment, the decision, made by a team comprised of the student's parents and educators, is documented in their Individualized Education Plan.

Students challenged by a disability which moderately to severely affects their learning are among the most impacted by the requirements of federal and state government to be assessed annually. Likewise, the team making the decision for accommodations or alternative assessment, is faced with the challenge to make a decision for a testing route that provides the most leveled playing field possible for the student. The research gathered for this study attempted to determine how the decision-making teams in a large suburban midwest school district made decisions about assessment for its third, fourth, and fifth graders where challenged with moderate to severe disabilities.

The overall purpose of this study is to examine the training, knowledge, and procedures in determining the testing route for learners functioning in the moderate to severe range of disability. The study was conducted to determine if the federal, state, and local policies were in compliance with the federal laws while at the same time taking into account the individuals' academic best interest.

This study used a mixed method approach to triangulate the data gathered from IEP team members. First, confidential surveys were completed by special education teachers, regular education grade level teachers, principals, counselors, and building level special education supervisors. District level special education supervisors were then interviewed. Finally, special education teachers and building level special education supervisors were interviewed. The interview participants were recruited using convenience sampling and snowball sampling.

The research found that the majority of participants did not participate in training specific to making decisions for a testing route or accommodations for students with moderate to severe disabilities. Those that had participated in training had done so inconsistently. Some had participated in training on their own. Those that had received training felt it was ineffective in providing IEP team members with the tools necessary to make decisions for an assessment route.

Sixty-nine percent of the participants in the survey indicated they had knowledge of the criteria to make decisions for assessment for their students with moderate to severe disabilities. This information was contradicted through interviews. District special education supervisors felt very few teachers present with very much knowledge to help them make decisions. While the special education teachers and the building special education department chairs appeared to have adequate knowledge of the criteria for making decisions for assessment, they felt there were some criteria that was confusing. The criteria indicating a need for a documented “significant cognitive impairment” and for a student to be participating in an essential skills program were confusing and contradictory to the foundational laws of NCLB and IDEIA.

The procedures for making decisions for assessment for students with moderate to severe disabilities were also explored. The participants in the survey felt IEP teams made decisions as a team at IEP meetings. They followed a specific procedure examining available data such as disability label, diagnostic information including intellectual level, types of goals in the IEP and physical and emotional characteristics of the student.

IEP team members participating in interviews felt since teams are unclear about certain criteria. This made the process more difficult. Teams rarely made a decision for alternative assessment for any child other than those with a disability label of intellectual disability. This left many students with disabilities in the moderate to severe range of disability without the significant cognitive impairment to endure the challenges of the regular state assessment assisted only by the few allowable accommodations.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION OF THE STUDY

Background

During the 2006-07 school year, more than 6.6 million students ages from three to 21 labeled with a disability were educated in the United States (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). During the 2008-09 school year the state of Missouri served nearly 122,000 students labeled with disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). Some of these students fell in the middle category of moderate to severe disability. In order to comply with federal legislative policies for testing under both No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA), the process of implementing the federal policy of high-stakes testing at the local level for these students with moderate to severe disabilities affecting learning need to be examined.

The landmark 2001 federal legislation, NCLB, required all students to demonstrate proficiency at grade level by the end of the 2013-2014 school year (Friend & Bursuck, 2009). Each year in grades three through eight and once during high school, students take mandated assessments, as directed by their individual state, to display their level of achievement in communication arts and mathematics. In addition, students are tested once in each grade cluster in the area of science.

All students are required to participate in criterion-referenced statewide assessment to display personal growth and to provide accountability for annual growth to local school districts, schools, and individual teachers. These tests assess students' abilities to use higher-order thinking skills, strategies, and practices as applied to the grade level expectations in individual content areas (Westling & Fox, 2008). While states

are allowed to choose their own test, all students within that state at mandated grades participate in the same chosen test (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 1998). Students in Missouri are currently assessed by participating in the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP). Elementary-aged students participate in mathematics and communication arts assessments during third, fourth, and fifth grades. Fulfilling the requirement for science testing once per grade cluster, Missouri fifth graders participate in the science assessment. These criterion-referenced tests, taken by students each spring, are an important means of measuring progress levels of the Missouri Show-Me Standards (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2008).

The scores from the previous year's testing are reported the following Fall. The scores of individual students are reported to parents in one of four of the following quadrants: Below Basic, Basic, Proficient, or Advanced. The target for students exhibiting mastery is Proficient or Advanced. These individual scores are also reported to schools to be used for instructional improvement. In addition to reporting scores to parents, a summary of scores for all students are reported to community stakeholders via the published school report card. Also published on the school report card is a summary of scores in groups for students from minority backgrounds, those living in poverty, those identified with disabilities, and those whose primary language is not English (Goertz & Duffy, 2003).

Central to this study, the NCLB Legislation influenced changes to the 2004 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Such changes required a minimum of 95% of special education students to participate in the statewide standardized test.

Therefore, the majority of students with identified disabilities were mandated to participate in statewide testing. Friend and Bursuck (2009) state that “[s]tudents with disabilities who are tested are held to the same standards and levels of adequate yearly progress as their classmates without disabilities” (p. 121). To ensure validity, students with identified disabilities are allowed accommodations such as variances in setting, timing, response format, scribe and presentation as well as the oral presentation of the content on the mathematics and science tests. These accommodations are thought to provide disabled students an even playing field with their non-disabled classmates (Wright, Wright, & O’Conner, 2010).

Legislators recognized the fact that some students were challenged with profound disabilities, and as a result they added a clause to the requirement of testing. Up to three percent (Hamill & Everington, 2002) of students with significant intellectual disabilities are permitted to take alternative assessments designed to measure their individual progress as specified by their Individualized Education Programs. Although these students are required to meet the same grade level or course standards as other students, they demonstrate these expectations in different, more basic ways. In contrast to the typical high-stakes criterion referenced test (the MAP test in Missouri), teachers of students meeting the requirement to participate in alternative testing collect a portfolio of work to display growth in the required areas of assessment. This alternative assessment in Missouri is known as MAP-A.

The determination for testing was made for a student with an identified disability by a multidisciplinary staffing team also known as an IEP team through the provisions of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEIA). Along with a present level of

functioning, goals for the coming year, and a plan for service, the multidisciplinary staffing team considers the type of assessment the student will participate in and whether that student will receive any of a multitude of accommodations (Thompson et.al, 2001). These decisions are all documented in the students IEP document.

The Implementation Manual for MAP-A published by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2009) provides eligibility criteria for alternative assessment to guide school teams. Although the manual provides seven criteria, it does not direct local decision-making teams on how many of the criteria students are to meet in order to qualify for alternative assessment. The criteria were as follows:

- The student's reading ability is limited and, as such, the student acquires information primarily through other methods.
- The student's ability to demonstrate knowledge by writing or speaking is limited; thus, the student must often use other methods to express ideas, and share information.
- The student requires significant supports to access the general education curriculum while demonstrating modest progress in that curriculum.
- The student typically has difficulty solving novel problems or using newly acquired skills in differing situations.
- The student's education priorities primarily address essential skills that will be used in adult daily living.
- The student's post-secondary outcomes will likely require supported or assisted living.

- The student requires instruction in small groups or on a one-to one basis, with frequent prompts and guidance from adults (p. 12).

Williams (1986 in Friend & Bursuck), Thompson et al. (2001) and Elliott et al. (1997) provided guidance to choose accommodations for students with minimal disabilities. At the same time, students labeled with a profound disability are clearly allowed by IDEIA provisions for participation in an alternative assessment to display their progress (IDEIA, Section 614, 2004). Many of the criteria offered by Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE, 2009) were ambivalent when a student's learning was moderately to severely affected by his disability, especially during the elementary school years. Making a decision regarding a valid assessment for these students may be a more difficult task (Hamill & Everington, 2002). For example, team members were asked to make decisions for eight, nine, ten, and eleven year-old students who may be years away from being age appropriate. Concurrently, it was difficult for a team member to predict a third grader's post-secondary outcomes.

Additionally, students with moderate to severe disabilities affecting learning often display skills two or more grade levels behind their peers (Hamill & Everington, 2002). These students might not fit the criteria to qualify for an alternative assessment exemption. At the same time, even with all allowable accommodations, the assessment would not be a valid display of progress in the tested areas because students may only reach a minimal score. At this scoring level, there was no data to either show growth or to help a teacher identify the child's needs for instruction.

Conceptual Underpinnings

The conceptual underpinnings of this policy analysis consist of three sections. The first section provides a brief introduction to the history of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation and specifically critiques the assessment provisions of this law. The second section explains the provisions for accommodations and alternative assessment under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) as well as provisions by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to comply with the federal policies. Finally, the third section attempts to define one specific group of students affected by the federal assessment policy. The literature is examined in an attempt to define disabilities that moderately to severely impact learning. Further examined are the affects of moderate to severe disabilities on students' ability to fairly participate in high stakes testing.

Historical Background to NCLB and Provisions for Assessment

The landmark legislation, No Child Left Behind (NCLB), signed into law by President George W. Bush in 2001, both ended and started a struggle for accountability in our local schools. The grandfather of NCLB was the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) which established accountability provisions to evaluate the effectiveness of programs servicing low-income students (Glasser & Silver, 1994). The 2001 reauthorization of ESEA required state governments to (a) guarantee highly qualified teachers in every classroom, (b) employ research-based practices as the groundwork for instruction, (c) develop evaluation instruments to assess students so that data-driven decisions become a fundamental part of the educational system, and (d) hold local schools accountable for the learning of all students (Yell & Drasgow, 2005).

Goodwin (2003) explains the importance of NCLB - "... to ensure that all children have a fair, equal and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education" (p. 1). The assessment provision policy of NCLB is the focus of this research work.

While the passage of NCLB was a victory for those wanting local school districts and the nation as a whole to show accountability in teaching and learning for all PK-12 youth, it led to great controversy when applied to students who historically struggle in the educational system (Rose, 2004). Students with differing ethnic backgrounds, students identified as having low income backgrounds, and those identified with a disability or as speaking English as a second language were required to participate in high-stakes testing assessment and were accountable to the same standards. In addition, NCLB required local schools to report disaggregated test scores for each of the demographic groups. The implementation of this requirement of NCLB policy is thought to be its greatest weakness because the requirement does not take into consideration where demographic groups of students began on the achievement continuum (Rose, 2004). Further, this focus on statistics allows officials to ignore external factors that impede instruction and learning of the students (Baines & Stanley, 2004). Unfortunately, these students are the most deeply impacted by high-stakes testing (Amerin & Berliner, 2002; Horn, 2003). It is believed that inadequate decision making processes involving the selection and provisions for their mandated testing might result in unfair and inappropriate testing for these students. The legislators made provisions under federal law in an attempt deal with the testing of students with special needs.

Provisions for Accommodations and Alternative Assessment under NCLB and IDEIA

One of the most deeply impacted groups affected by high stakes testing mandates is the group labeled as having a disability. For the first time, the 1997 version of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act required all students participate in both district-wide and statewide assessments. With the passage of No Child Left Behind four years later, a more widespread mandate required 95% of individuals labeled with disabilities to participate in these high-stakes tests (Friend & Bursuck, 2009). Students with disabilities have their programs documented through a written document known as an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). The plan written by a group of multidisciplinary team members includes special and general education instructors, the parents, and the local administrator employ the provisions made for statewide and district wide assessment. These provisions can include accommodations in presentation format, timing, setting and response. In addition, using guidelines from state departments of education, some IEP teams can determine individuals eligible for alternative assessment. Together, NCLB and IDEIA allow one to two percent of a school's population to participate in statewide assessment using this alternative format (Westling & Fox, 2008).

Students Whose Disabilities Moderately to Severely Impact Learning

Using the guidelines for provisions for testing provided by NCLB and IDEIA, students with minimal to moderate disabilities may benefit from the allowable accommodations. Some examples of accommodations for students labeled as having a disability are taking the test in a small group setting or individually, providing the opportunity for frequent breaks, scribing the answers provided, and providing oral reading of mathematics and science assessments (Yell & Drascow, 2005). Because students functioning in the moderate to severe range of impairment learn in very different

ways (Vogler & Virture, 2007; Gaylord-Ross & Holvoet, 1985; Friend & Bursuck, 2009; Haring, 1988; Stokes & Baier, 1977; Westling & Fox, 2008; Zeaman & House, 1963), even with the maximum allowable accommodations, most fail to earn a minimal score on the standardized assessment. Further troubling the situation, these students whose disability affects their learning (in the range from moderate to severe) may find they do not qualify for alternative assessment.

NCLB and IDEIA provided guidance to special education teams in determining a student's qualifications to participate in either traditional assessment or alternative assessment. The main criterion to participate in alternative assessment is for the student to be identified as having a significant cognitive disability (Friend & Bursuck, 2009; U.S. Department of Education, 2003, 2005; Yell & Drascow, 2005). However, neither NCLB nor IDEIA provides a working definition of the term 'significant cognitive disability.' Historically, Section 200.1 of Notice of Proposed Rule Making of the Federal Register provided the following definition, "students with disabilities under the IDEA whose intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior were three or more standard deviations below the mean" (U.S. Department of Education, 2003, p. 68701). This specific definition was later removed to enable states more flexibility in applying the provision (Browder and Spooner, 2006). Students identified as significantly cognitively impaired often function in the moderate, severe, or profoundly disabled categories.

Although not a part of the special education law, literature provides definitions for the categories of minimal, moderate, severe, and profound. The special education law, IDEIA, requires a student to be identified using one or more of fourteen categorical labels. These labels are often placed into two categories: high incident and low incident

(Friend & Bursuck, 2009; U.S. Department of Education, 2009). High incident labels include speech or language disorders, learning disabilities, emotional disturbance, and intellectual disabilities. Low incident labels include other health impairments, educational autism, multiple disabilities, hearing impairment, vision impairment, a simultaneous vision/hearing impairment, traumatic brain injury, and orthopedic impairment. Further, the fourteenth label, Developmental Delay can be applied, under the federal law, to a child nine years of age or younger. But, under the Missouri law, this label applies to children aged seven and younger. Hence, this label does not apply to the assessment provisions of NCLB as testing takes place in third and subsequent grades. Children labeled as developmentally delayed are most often chronologically below the minimal grade standard to participate in the mandated testing.

These categorical labels are identified using criteria, definitions, and methods provided by the federal IDEIA legislation and found in the individual state's compliance plan with the federal special education law. All disability labels exist on a continuum. One student with a particular disability may be much more impacted by the disability than another student with the same disability label. These students, in the special education literature, can then be further labeled based upon how their disability affects their ability to function in the educational setting. Another method the labels of minimal, moderate, severe, and profound can be determined is based upon the amount of accommodation and support the student requires on a daily basis (Hamill & Everington, 2002).

Statement of the Problem

New complicated laws may leave local implementers with inadequate tools to confidently make decisions for the assessment of students with moderate to severe disabilities. These decision-making teams are charged with making decisions that are both in compliance with federal NCLB policy, but also are in the best interest of their students' achievement. NCLB essentially sets the standard that regardless of the child's language, income, or disability, that child should be able to make progress on the grade level curriculum. This challenge is further complicated by a local school's need to also protect its students' rights under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA). When the student is challenged by a more severe disability, the decisions made by local educators can be that much more difficult.

Sands, Adams, and Stout (1995) discuss the grade level curriculum as connecting what is written, taught, and tested. All students, even those with moderate to severe disabilities, need to have the opportunity to work on the assigned grade level expectations. It was found in a study that only fifteen percent of special educators believed that these grade level expectations should be the primary focus of the individualized education plan (Sands, Adams, & Stout, 1995). These researchers explain, "If we cannot align the instruction that students with significant cognitive disabilities receive with state content standards and appropriate means of alternate assessment, we have not completed the total portrait of a quality education for students with disabilities" (p. 309).

If NCLB legislation requires that we assess progress of the grade level curriculum for all students, we must ensure that students are actually working on the grade level

curriculum and participating in a valid assessment showing that student is progressing along those standards. Existing annual assessments may not be sufficient to provide teachers with feedback to improve student learning (Browder, 2001; Browder & Spooner, 2003).

Purpose of the Study

While research exists in many areas of high stakes testing, more is needed to help guide local educators to make decisions for their students with disabilities. A significant body of research does exist in the widespread testing portion of No Child Left Behind and fulfilling the obligations under its policies (Amrein & Berliner, 2002; Baines & Stanley, 2004; Carpenter, 2001; Cimbiez, 2002; Estey, 2007; Glasser & Silever, 1994; Goertz & Duffy, 2003; Homb, 2003; Horn, 2003; Nelson, et al., 2007; Peterson & Hess, 2005; and Vogler & Virtue, 2007). A significant body of research also exists in the area of providing accommodations for students with minimal disabilities to allow them to participate fairly on these mandatory tests under IDEA/IDEIA policies (Bolt, et al., 2008; Defur, 2002; Elliott & Thurlow, 2006; McDermott & McDermott, 2002; Thurlow, 2002a; Thurlow, 2002 b; and Thurlow et al., 2003). Further, a significant body of research exists on the topic of the variety of alternative assessments for students identified with profound disabilities (Browder, et al., 2008; Browder, et al., 2003; Browder, et al., 2006; Courtade, et al., 2007; Karvonen, et al., 2007; Kleinert, et al., 2002; Kleinert & Kearns, 2004; Kleinert & Kearns, 1999; Perner, 2007; Roach, 2006; Roach & Elliott, 2006; and Roach, et al., 2007). However, to date research is limited in the area to provide guidance for teams working with students falling in the range of moderate to severe disabilities. These students do not comfortably fit the definitions for neither minimal nor profound

disabilities. As a result, these students also do not quite fit the criteria to qualify for any of the testing routes and to provide a usable score to guide reflective practice.

The purpose of this study is to examine the training, knowledge and procedure used for making decisions regarding the testing route and accommodations for students with moderate to severe disabilities for state mandated high stakes testing. This information was examined at the building level. The professional members of the multidisciplinary staffing team assigned to one school district's third, fourth, and fifth grade students with identified moderate to severe disabilities were targeted. These professional members consist of the local education agency representative (LEA), regular education grade level teachers, and special education teachers. The study was conducted to determine how the IEP team members kept the federal, state, and local policies in compliance with the federal laws while at the same time taking into account the individuals' academic best interest. All information gathered was from special education teachers assigned as case manager to students moderately to severely disabled affecting learning, the general education teachers assigned to these IEP decision making teams, special education district administrators, and building administrators serving students in grades three, four, and five in a large east central Missouri suburban school district.

Special education and regular education teachers along with their local building administrators may be assigned to individualized education plan (IEP) teams for students challenged with disabilities moderately to severely affecting their learning. Decisions for the individual students must be made annually when writing the IEP to include how the student will complete statewide assessments. These IEP meetings could be held anytime of the year. However, Missouri's Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

(DESE) does give a deadline during October for school districts to register students for the MAP-A assessment. It also should be noted that MAP-A testing occurs in January, February, and March. Traditional MAP testing occurs during April. This leaves decision making teams a window of May to September to make decisions regarding statewide testing for students with moderate to severe disabilities.

In order to provide each of the IEP teams guidance in decision-making for state mandated assessment, several methods of training are offered. The State of Missouri provides limited guidance to these teams through the *Missouri Assessment Program-Alternate (MAP-A) Instructor's Guide and Implementation Manual* (MDESE, 2009). This manual is available in hard copy format or online year round. The State of Missouri further makes available training in decision-making during a short portion of its optional day-long training on implementation of the MAP-A through regional meetings in the fall of each year. Finally, the State of Missouri mandates local school districts to provide testing proctors and school administrators with a brief training lasting about one hour in December prior to implementation of the MAP-A testing in January. Again, a brief portion of this training is dedicated to outlining the qualifications of MAP-A participants. Since the only required training on decision-making is very limited, not required for the entire decision making team, and is past the registration deadline, this information may not be adequate for IEP teams to make appropriate testing decisions for their students.

This study will attempt to fill the gap in policy analysis study in the area of implementing high-stakes provisions of NCLB and IDEIA at the local level in order to provide IEP teams effective guidance for making appropriate decisions for testing for individual students with moderate to severe disabilities.

In order to inquire about the effectiveness of decision-making processes, this study sought to answer the following questions.

Research Questions

The following research questions were answered:

1. What training have IEP team members experienced to assist in making decisions for a testing route for learners affected with moderate to severe disabilities?
2. What knowledge about the federal, state, and local mandates for assessment do IEP team members have to assist in making decisions for a testing route for learners affected with moderate to severe disabilities?
3. What are the procedures for decision making and identification processes for selecting high stakes testing instruments and accommodations for learners affected with moderate to severe disabilities and how effective are these processes for accessing general education curriculum in order to measure instructional practice?

Limitations, Assumptions, and Design Controls

This study was geographically limited to an east central Missouri suburban public school district. Only the teams working with students in grades three, four, and five identified with targeted moderate to severe disabilities who participated in either MAP or MAP-A testing and worked at an elementary school in the targeted school district during the spring of 2010 were used. At the request of the cooperating school district's administration, the employees of one elementary school were eliminated from study due to the researcher being employed at that school. This decision was made to protect the respondents as well as the confidentiality of the students in their charge.

This sample was selected because its nine elementary schools had a large enough population of students to draw a sample size of decision-making teams from the single district without going outside the boundaries (Fink, 2006). This district was further chosen because the qualities of a suburban school district appear to be neutral to the subject of the study. Application can then be made to many of the qualities of both rural and urban school types of districts.

The research for this study consisted of a quantitative part and a qualitative part. First, the quantitative portion consisting of both closed and open ended questions were distributed to potential participants. Second, the qualitative portion will consisted of individual and focus group interviews.

The survey and interview questions were developed by the researcher to gather information on both demographics to describe the decision-maker and to gather information on how decisions were made. For the first time, during both the 2010 MAP-A and MAP testing periods, quality assurance teams from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education were required to visit schools during testing periods. As a requirement of the assessment quality assurance, trainings were provided to test proctors and administrators in December of 2009. These trainings provided the questions that would be asked by quality assurance teams with answers provided in a scripted format. Although confidentiality was assured, a limitation of the study was the forthrightness of participants. The risk was in team members providing scripted answers from training rather than honest answers from their individual experience (Merriam, 1998).

Definition of Key Terms

For the purposes of this study, the following definitions apply:

Accommodations. Accommodations are changes in test presentation or response requirements that are designed to provide all students with an equal opportunity to demonstrate what they know and can do. Accommodations do not substantively alter a test's content, level, or performance criteria (Friend & Bursuck, 2009; MDESE, 1998b).

Adequate Yearly Progress. Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) is the minimum level of improvement, set by each state, that schools and districts must achieve toward reaching the goals of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (Friend and Bursuck, 2009).

Alternative Assessment. Alternative assessment is a way of gathering information on the performance and progress of students who are unable to participate in the assessments used with the majority of students (MDESE, 1998b)

Annual Review. Annual review is the yearly process of convening a team that includes a parent, general education teacher, special education teacher, and local school or school district administrator. The purpose is to review and update an individual's IEP (Friend & Bursuck, 2009).

Developmental Disability. A developmental disability is a severe, chronic disability of an individual attributable to a mental or physical impairment or a combination of impairments likely to continue indefinitely resulting in substantial functional limitations in three or more areas of major life activities: self-care, receptive or expressive language, learning, mobility, self-direction, capacity for independent living, or economic and self-sufficiency (Smith, T. in Hamill & Everington, 2002)

Disability. A student with a disability is an individual identified through the provisions of the Individual's with Disabilities Education Act as meeting criteria in one or more of fourteen categorical disability labels. These students qualify for an Individualized Education Plan (Friend and Bursuck, 2009).

Evaluation. Evaluation is procedures used to determine whether teaching is effective, to provide feedback to students and their parents about student learning, and to determine eligibility for special education services (Friend & Bursuck, 2009).

Expressive Language. Expressive language is language used to communicate with other originating in a person's brain. Expressive language can be in written, gestural, or spoken form (Kuder, 2008).

Functional Curriculum. A functional curriculum is an instructional approach in which goals and objectives are based on real-life skills needed for adulthood (Friend & Bursuck, 2009).

General Education Teacher. General Education Teacher is an elementary, middle school, or high school teacher whose primary responsibility is teaching one or more class groups.

Individualized Education Program (IEP). Document prepared by the multidisciplinary team or annual review team that specifies a student's level of functioning and needs, the instructional goals and objectives for the student and how they will be assessed on district and statewide testing, nature and extent of special education and related services to be received, and the initiation date and duration of the services (Friend and Bursuck, 2009).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA). IDEIA is the 2004 current federal special education law updating the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975. This legislation outlines the procedures for ensuring students with disabilities are provided with special education and related services to make progress on their individual goals (Friend & Bursuck, 2009).

Intellectual Disability. Intellectual Disability is the label used as a synonym for mental retardation characterized by significant sub average cognitive ability and adaptive behaviors that interfere with learning. (Friend & Bursuck, 2009; Hamill & Everington, 2002).

Language Impairment. A language impairment is one of fourteen categorical labels a student can qualify for under provisions of IDEA. The criterion includes deficiencies in the area of either receptive or expressive language or both. A student must display a 22 point discrepancy between intellectual abilities and their functioning level as tested on two or more standardized measures (Kuder, 2008)

Missouri Assessment Program (MAP). The Missouri Assessment Program is a statewide assessment program mandated by the Outstanding Schools Act. The assessment program consists of three parts: constructed response items, performance events, and multiple-choice questions (MDESE, 1998b).

Moderate to Severe Disability. Moderate to Severe Disability is commonly defined as conflicting definitions that influence functioning of the individual. See chapter two.

Multidisciplinary team (MDT). The multidisciplinary team includes teachers, specialists, administrator, and parents who assess a students' individual needs, determine eligibility for special education, and develop the IEP (Friend and Bursuck, 2009).

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965; this law set high standards for student achievement and increased accountability for student learning and criteria by which teachers are considered highly qualified (Friend & Bursuck, 2009).

Performance-based assessment. Performance-based assessment is a method of evaluation that measures what students can do with knowledge rather than measuring specific bits of knowledge the students possess (Friend & Bursuck, 2009).

Receptive Language. Receptive language is the language entering a person's brain as stimulus to be processed neurologically. Receptive language can be auditory such as spoken language or visual such as gestural or print (Kuder, 2008).

Show-Me Standards. Show-Me Standards are academic standards developed by the state of Missouri that are comprised of 40 knowledge standards and 33 process standards (MDESE, 1998a).

Significant Cognitive Impairment. Literature shows conflicting definitions. Significant cognitive impairment is commonly seen as how an individual's cognitive impairment affects their daily functioning. See chapter two.

Special Education. Special education is specially designed instruction provided by the school district or other local education agency that meets the unique needs of students identified as disabled (Friend & Bursuck, 2009).

Special Education Teacher. Special education teacher is a teacher whose primary responsibility is delivering and managing the delivery of special education services to student with disabilities (Friend & Bursuck, 2009).

Summary

For the first time in history, the 1997 reauthorized version of the special education law IDEA mandated all students with disabilities to participate in district-wide and statewide assessment. IEP teams were forced to comply as additional 2001 NCLB and 2004 IDEIA legislation expanded the federal requirements. The legislation required 95% of all students to participate. Provisions were also made for the one to two percent of the most intensely impaired students to be able to participate in an alternative assessment.

The purpose of high stakes assessment is to measure progress made on grade level expectations set by state departments of education. For some students functioning in the moderate to severe range of functioning, IEP teams may have difficulty showing a student qualifies for an alternative assessment while functioning too low to be able to show a valid score on state standardized assessments due to multiple grade academic gaps in reading, writing, and mathematical functioning. This extremely low score fails to aid educators in prescribing and/or diagnosing instructional paths needed for these students' intervention.

This study sets out to understand the process undertaken by the members of multidisciplinary staffing teams in determining a testing route of accommodations or alternative assessment in the best interest of the student's instruction. The study sets out to determine whether the needs of the individual student affected moderately to severely by their disabilities are addressed at the local level through the implementation of federal

and state policy guiding high stakes testing, and whether or not decision-making teams selected fair and appropriate accommodations.

In the following chapter, the review of literature related to the assessment provisions of federal policy as applied to students identified with a disability will be examined. Further, the provisions in the state of Missouri's policy for testing accommodations and alternative assessment will be examined. Lastly, the disability labels of moderate to severely impaired will be examined. The methodology for examining the implementation of assessment for students affected moderately to severely by their disabilities at the local school district level will be discussed in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 details the analysis of data. Chapter 5 concludes the study with explanations of findings, conclusions, and implications.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

In order to hold public schools accountable for student achievement, recent legislation requires all students to participate in testing annually to measure their skills in reading, writing, mathematics, and science. Students with disabilities are allowed certain accommodations in the areas of administration, timing, response, and setting during testing (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2010). Groups of two to three percent of students challenged with profound disabilities are given the opportunity to display their skills in an alternative portfolio format. However, students with moderate to severe disabilities may find they do not qualify for alternate assessment. At the same time, all allowable accommodations are not helpful enough to receive a score that shows progress of grade level expectations. The impact of high stakes testing on students challenged with moderate to severe disabilities is the focus of this literature review.

The following pages describe the policies specifically guiding assessment of students identified with disabilities by the federal government under No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) are described. Furthermore, the provisions for the state of Missouri to comply with these federal policies are described. Then, a subgroup of students affected by this policy, those students affected moderately to severely by their disability impacting their learning, is described in order to provide a definition from literature. Finally, the special

characteristics of this group of students are described as it relates to annual statewide testing.

Federal Assessment Policies

The educational assessment movement began with the 1957 launch of Sputnik. When the Russians beat the Americans into space, journalists and politicians reasoned there must be something wrong with American schools (Amrein & Berliner, 2002). Schools began giving high priority to math and science. Achievement levels for some schools rose to an all time high in the next ten years (Guthrie & Springer, 2004).

In 1965 Congress passed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act which established services for low-income students and required performance data to evaluate the effectiveness of programs serving these students (Glasser & Silver, 1994). In 1966 the Coleman Report called for the development of forms of assessment to indicate student learning. During this decade, Congress also established the Center for Educational Assessment responsible for generating a standardized test for the National Assessment of Educational Progress. The National Assessment of Educational Progress standardized test is administered to randomly selected groups of students throughout the nation (Homb, 2003).

The 1970s and 1980s saw a return to minimum standards and teaching centered on content (Amrien & Berliner, 2002). Testing in the 1970s to early 1980s was provided in the form of standardized multiple choice tests. These tests were considered to be a good indicator of student accomplishment and general knowledge (Etsey, 1997).

The tenth amendment to the United States Constitution requires that powers not specifically given to the state, but not prohibited from being assigned to state

governments are given to the states. Public education remained a constitutional responsibility of state government. Prior to the 1970s, the state government delegated decision-making to the local school districts within each state. The school districts then delegated to teachers and textbook publishers. Districts did not set curriculum (Massell, et al, 1997; Walker, 1990).

President Ronald Reagan asked Secretary of Education Terrell Bell to prepare a proposal to delete the office of Secretary of Education along with the Department of Education. In response, Bell created a commission to praise the American public education system and give the President advice on education. The newly-formed commission did not like Reagan's agenda. They also did not like Bell's agenda of praise for the system in place. As a result, in 1983 the Commission on Education published the report *A Nation at Risk*. Believed to have been the catalyst for the standards movement and the high stakes testing era (Vogler & Virtue, 2007), officials called for reforms to improvement and efficiency in public schools. The reform included increased rigor of the curriculum and standardized testing of students at regular intervals in order for schools to provide enrichment and remediation. The report shifted the focus of the public school system from resources for schools toward the results of schools (Estey, 1997; Goertz & Duffy, 2003). This report promoted the use of standardized tests to compare results state to state and nation to nation (Estey, 1997).

Quickly, six million copies of *A Nation at Risk* were distributed around the world. Although the report embraced public education, it also declared it a failure (Guthrie & Springer, 2004). As a result, all of America believed schools were failing (Guthrie & Springer, 2004). Groves (2002) considered the publishing of this document the beginning

of the excellence movement. Amrein and Berlinger (2002) called it the “standards movement”. Regardless of its name, it appeared to be effective in jumpstarting the educational reform movement.

Within three years of the publishing of *A Nation at Risk*, 35 states had begun comprehensive reform (Horn, 2003). A first wave of change included longer school days and years along with more required courses especially in math and science (Guthrie & Springer, 2004). A second wave of change included alignment of testing, teacher certification, and accountability programs to the standards (Carpenter, 2001; McDermott, 2003). During the 1990s, all states began educational initiatives that formed educational standards and challenged content (Goertz and Duffy, 2003). Finally, a third wave of change brought about the restructuring of state laws to make districts and schools accountable for meeting the standards of the previous reforms along with the measurement of outcomes (Guthrie & Springer, 2004).

A few states led the change by developing curriculum alignment and capacity building. Capacity building is empowering teachers and administrators to deliver better education (Carnoy & Loeb, 2002). The central message of the reform efforts was a common set of academic standards for all students that measured student performance and accountability that focused on outcomes (Goertz & Duffy, 2003). These standards were often called grade level expectations. Large scale assessment became the norm for judging how schools, teachers, administrators, and the individual student were meeting grade level expectations.

Decision-makers felt the cost of assessment-based accountability was much lower than input policies such as controlling class size (Lee, 2006). For example, Texas based

their reform on four principles: (1) declaring the curriculum; (2) assessment by measuring what was learned; (3) reporting of results and school accountability; and (4) increasing student learning. Outcomes, rather than inputs, defined the effectiveness of school districts. Texas reform measured the quality of education by output of students' assessment (Nelson, et al, 2007).

Former President George H.W. Bush met with the National Governor's Association in 1989 to identify a common set of educational standards for schools and set standards-based reform as a priority for states (McDermitt, 2003). This first Educational Summit identified six national educational goals that were later expanded to eight goals by Congress. For the first time in history, leaders from both parties met and reached consensus on the nation's highest educational priorities.

The Goals 2000 Report called for standards-based reform focusing on accountability, instructional improvement, and program evaluation (Cimbiez, 2002). A single, mandated test indicated how well schools performed, held schools accountable for performance, determined grade advancement, caused teachers to alter instructional practices, and improved instructional decisions. These accountability systems, as a part of the standards-based reform movement, shifted the focus of accountability from educational resources to educational results and from school districts to individual schools (Goertz & Duffy, 2003).

The National Educational Goals Panel (NEGP) was created in 1990 to monitor the progress of states toward these educational goals. In 1991, the panel recommended states be required to put a systematic assessment of educational progress of students in place. The panel further suggested that there be an alignment between state assessment systems

and academic state standards. The NEGP changed the way states judge the effectiveness of their education systems because of the emphasis on results (Joles, 2003).

Title 1 of the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA) set out to encourage states to establish challenging content and performance standards, measure student performance against those standards, and make school systems accountable for the learning of all students (Goertz, 2005). Enacted in 1994, IASA further required the development of high quality assessments which were aligned to the state standards. IASA stated,

High quality, yearly student assessments...will be used as the primary means of determining the yearly performance of each local educational agency and school served under this part in enabling all children served under this part to meet the state's student performance standards. Such assessments shall be the same assessments used to measure the performance of all children if the state measures the performance of all children [and will]...provide for the participation in such assessments of all students. (Sec. III (b) (3) (A))

These assessments were required once per grade span. A grade span is typically defined as elementary (kindergarten through five), middle school (grades six through eight), and high school (grades nine through twelve). Funds from this act were used to pay for standards-based reform (McDermott, 2003).

In 1997, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was reauthorized. Mirroring the wave of accountability, this new legislation added the provision of assessment for all students with disabilities alongside their typically developing peers. Thompson, et al. (2001) provided reasons to assess everyone. These authors posted that

this broad testing provided an accurate picture of education and could be used to make accurate comparisons for students with disabilities to benefit from reform, while promoting high expectations. This provision included both statewide and district-wide assessments (Joles, 2003).

By 2000, 48 states had implemented statewide assessments in reading and mathematics. Thirteen states required public reporting. Although progress was being made, at the time of the signing of No Child Left Behind, the states still had far to go in meeting the mandates (Lewis, 2002). With full compliance needing to be met by 2013-14, much work needed to be done (Mintrop & Trujillo, 2005).

President George W. Bush signed the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation in 2001. This legislation was designed to further “transfer American schools from a culture of compliance to a culture of achievement and results” (p. 55, Vogler & Virture, 2007). NCLB was an update to the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The legislation required local school districts to test more and to set more ambitious improvement goals. This law placed more importance on state assessment.

The new law increased testing to every year in grades three through eight, and once during high school for reading and math by 2005-06 and testing in science once per grade span by 2007-08. Further, NCLB required all students to be tested, specifically 95% of individuals from a variety of low achieving categories (Goertz & Duffy, 2003). The tests were required to align to state standards. Adequate yearly progress of students and schools were tracked with the goal of all students meeting state mandated proficiency levels by 2013-14. The federal government committed money for developing

assessments. However, the individual states were to absorb administration and scoring costs.

In addition, sanctions were put into place for failing schools (Goertz & Duffy, 2003). The use of standardized tests, as a measure of student/academic success, became viewed as a means of measuring the success of schools. NCLB was written to “...ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education” (Goodwin, 2003, p. 1).

NCLB required school districts to report disaggregated test scores of demographic groups of students such as those from minority groups, those living in poverty, those learning to communicate in the English language, and those identified as having a disability (Rose, 2004). These students are the most deeply impacted by high-stakes testing (Amrein & Berliner, 2002; Horn 2003).

Alternative High Stakes Testing and Assessment

Central to this study, NCLB legislation allowed students identified with disabilities to be administered tests with accommodations such as differences in presentation, timing, setting, and response. These accommodations are documented as part of the individualized education program as decided by the multidisciplinary team. These accommodations are allowed as a way in which to even the playing field so that each student’s abilities, rather than disabilities, are assessed (Thurlow, Elliott, & Ysseldyke, 2003). Without appropriate accommodations, students with disabilities typically under perform (Horn, 2003).

Additionally, IDEA '97 allowed for the development of alternate assessments within states to ensure students with the most significant cognitive disabilities are

included in state and district assessments in a way that was fair and equitable. This requirement was reiterated in NCLB 2001 and IDEIA 2004. There are three methods in which to gather assessment data in an alternative manner: alternative assessments based on alternate achievement standards (AA-AAS), alternate assessments on grade level achievement standards (AA-GLAS), and alternative assessments based on modified achievement standards (AA-MAS). While AA-MAS is just emerging and AA-GLAS is used limitedly in a number of states, AA-AAS is the primary method used by states (Quenemoen, Rigney, & Thurlow, 2002).

AA-AAS is designed for a small percentage of the student population with the most significant cognitive disabilities for whom traditional paper and pencil assessment, even with appropriate accommodations, would be an inappropriate measure of student progress of the general education curriculum. It is estimated that about 9% of students with disabilities or approximately one percent of the total student population has significant cognitive disabilities that qualify them to participate in an assessment based on alternative achievement standards (U.S. Department of Education, 2005; Ysseldyke, et al., 1994). Students participating typically have special education labels such as autism, intellectual disability, or multiple disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, 2003).

Alternative assessments can take three approaches: the portfolio, checklist, or performance assessment. The portfolio, also known as the body of evidence approach, is a systematic collection of student work evaluated against predetermined scoring criteria. The checklist requires teachers to be able to identify whether the student is able to perform certain skills tasks, or activities. The score is based upon the number of skills the student is able to perform successfully. Finally, the performance assessment, also known

as performance event, is a direct measure of a skill in a one-to-one assessment format (Roeber, 2002).

Testing and Instructional Alignment

In addition to mandating assessment, NCLB required the testing to be tied to instruction. The underlying assumption of state mandated high-stakes testing is that testing drives instruction and what teachers do; therefore, if tests are changed, the test can drive pedagogical changes (Cimbriez, 2002). The tests taken by the majority of students are aligned to grade level criteria standards known as grade level expectations. For students participating in alternative assessments, their assessment is coupled with alternative performance indicators that represent a clear link to grade level expectations on a much more simplistic plane displaying differences in depth, breadth, and complexity or modified to reflect prerequisite skills (U.S. Department of Education, 2004, 2005).

The alternative achievement standards (AAS) must meet a variety of conditions. AAS must be aligned with the state's academic content standards. It must describe a minimum of three levels of achievement: basic, proficient, and advanced with each level providing a description of the competencies associated with the level. Finally, AAS must include scores to differentiate between achievement levels.

The responsibility for curriculum alignment lies within the local states. The following is the history of the state of Missouri's improvement of instruction and its compliance with the federal legislation.

Missouri Assessment Policies

In 1985, Missouri passed the Missouri Excellence in Education Act (MEEA). The purpose was to expand opportunities to all students and to increase the equality of

outcomes (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 1986). This law included a list of Core Competencies and Key Skills. This was a list of learned outcomes considered important in individual subject areas. Although promotion and retention policies were still left to local school districts, teachers were no longer allowed complete freedom of curricular choice within their classrooms.

The assessment developed to go along with the Missouri Core Competencies and Key Skills was the Missouri Mastery and Achievement Test. Students in grade two were tested in the area of reading/language arts and mathematics. Students in grades three through ten were tested in the areas of reading/language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies/civics at every grade level. Professors, K-12 teachers, and curriculum consultants from DESE collaborated to construct the tests in cooperation with the Center for Educational Assessment (CEA) and the University of Missouri (Osterlind, n.d.).

Reflecting a new trend of accountability of application, Governor Mel Carnahan signed the Outstanding Schools Act in 1993. This legislation required a new testing system replacing the MMAT. The new test was performance-based with open-ended questions and authentic learning tasks (Massell, et al., 1997). “Performance assessment requires the student to demonstrate in some way that he or she has mastered the competencies necessary to perform a certain task” (Alper & Mills, 2001, p. 69). A performance-based test measures not only what the student knows but how the student would apply that knowledge to a problem-solving situation. CTB/McGraw-Hill was contracted to develop the assessment for Missouri. The assessment consisted of three parts: constructed response, performance event, and selected response. The Missouri Assessment Project (MAP) was designed not only to assess student achievement, but to

provide professional development for teachers to test, use, and score. As a result, about two-thirds of assessments were hand scored (Missouri Assessment, 2006).

NCLB required testing to be closely tied to the curriculum and to be considered a valid assessment. To measure this validity, select students across the nation participate in the National Assessment of Educational Progress exam. This exam measures what students know and can do in a variety of subjects including mathematics and reading. In 2003, Missouri was one of just five states receiving an A on scores (Peterson & Hess, 2005). This high score indicates Missouri students score the same on the NAEP as they did on the MAP making MAP scores a valid representation of their performance (U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

NCLB affected the assessment practices in the state of Missouri. Beginning in 2006, students would be tested every year in math and communication arts instead of every three years. Additionally, by 2008-09, science was to be put in place as an assessment on a three-year rotation. In Missouri, science is tested at fifth and eighth grades using the MAP assessment and also in high school with end of course exams.

The MAP alternative was first piloted in the spring of 2005 (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, n.d.). Students are determined eligible to participate in this type of assessment through their individualized education plans (IEP). The IEP document is written annually by a team of individuals including the student, parent, general education teacher, special education teacher, and the local district administrator. The IEP includes documentation of the student's disability, a plan for growth, a summary of their service plan, and accommodations for both daily instruction and annual state and district testing (Friend & Bursuck, 2009). The IEP team can

determine if the student is eligible for a variety of accommodations on typical testing. In addition, the IEP could find the student eligible for alternative testing. These decisions are made using guidelines provided by the State Department of Education. “Decisions about participation should not be based on program setting, category of disability, or percentage of time in the regular classroom,” (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 1998, p. 7).

The Implementation Manual for MAP-A published by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2009) provided eligibility criteria for alternative assessment to guide school teams. This decision is designed to be made during the individual child’s IEP meeting using the criteria stated in the manual. In addition to having a significant cognitive impairment, the seven additional criteria that must be considered for determination of the qualifications for MAP-A are as follows:

- The student’s reading ability is limited and, as such, the student acquires information primarily through other methods.
- The student’s ability to demonstrate knowledge by writing or speaking is limited; thus, the student must often use other methods to express ideas, and share information.
- The student requires significant supports to access the general education curriculum while demonstrating modest progress in that curriculum.
- The student typically has difficulty solving novel problems or using newly acquired skills in differing situations.
- The student’s education priorities primarily address essential skills that will be used in adult daily living.

- The student’s post-secondary outcomes will likely require supported or assisted living.
- The student requires instruction in small groups or on a one-to one basis, with frequent prompts and guidance from adults (p. 12).

The Missouri alternative assessment consists of a portfolio type collection of work gathered during two collection periods in January through March of each year. The MAP-A Implementation Manual identifies the following twelve step process:

1. Verify student eligibility
2. Determine instructional team for MAP-A
3. Identify mandatory strands
4. Select APIs for assessment
5. Review documentation requirements
6. Determine data collection system
7. Collect and record data
8. Select data points and student work to submit
9. Complete Student Work Record
10. Complete Entry/Data Summary Sheet
11. Assemble to MAP-A
12. Submit MAP-A (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2009b)

Proctors select alternative performance indicators (APIs) from the MAP-A Implementation Manual (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2009) for the assessed student. The student is assessed in four areas in mathematics in the

categories of Numbers and Operations, Algebraic Relationships, Geometric and Spatial Relationships, Data and Probability, and Measurement. The four areas for assessment in communication arts include two from reading and two from written expression. Additionally, if the student is in a tested grade for science, two areas for assessment are chosen. The science process strands are Scientific Inquiry and Impact of Science, Technology, and Human Activity. Each of the process strands must be paired with a content strand. The content strands are Characteristics and Interactions of Living Organisms, Changes in Ecosystems and Interactions of Organisms with Their Environments, Properties and Principles of Matter and Energy, Properties and Principles of Force and Motion, Processes and Interactions of the earth's Systems, and Composition and Structure of the Universe and the Motion of the Objects within It (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2009).

The proctor provides six activities for each API to display the student's level of application in each of the chosen areas for mathematics, communication arts, and science. The proctor writes a brief description of each activity, administers the activities, and records data. The student's performance is then illustrated to include a description of the student's level of accuracy and independence (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2009).

Finally, the portfolio is then sent to the state department to be scored. The official scoring is based on a rating system that examines the level of accuracy, level of independence, and connection to standards. Like the MAP assessment, MAP alternative scores are provided to local school districts in the fall of the year following assessment in the categories of Advanced, Proficient, Basic, and Below Basic. These scores are used

together with the student's peers' scores to determine the school's status of AYP (adequate yearly progress) (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2009).

As the state of Missouri strives to comply with federal legislation, it must serve the specific population of students focused upon in this body: students whose disability moderately to severely affects their learning. Although not specifically defined in the legislation, these disability labels are defined in the literature. The next section discusses the basis for these labels.

Students with Moderate to Severe Disabilities

The State of Missouri currently offers two professional certifications that certify a teacher to teach students with moderate to severe disabilities. The certificates are "Mild/Moderate Cross Categorical Disabilities" and "Severely Developmentally Delayed" (DESE, 2011). The MO Step Standards offer curriculum expectations for university preparation programs to have these special education professionals trained to follow the federal special education law. The curriculum standards for Mild/Moderate Cross Categorical Disabilities specifically applying to assessment are:

CAT4 [GC8S3; 3.6] selecting, adapting, and modifying assessments to accommodate the unique abilities and needs of individuals with mild/moderate disabilities, including functional and curriculum-based assessment and analysis.

CC5 [3.2] appropriate selection, administration, modification, and interpretation of informal and formal assessment procedures and instruments (MO DESE, 2004a).

The curriculum standards for Severely Developmentally Disabled certification applying to assessment are:

SDD1 [IC8K1] specialized terminology used in the assessment of individuals with disabilities.

SDD5 [IC8S2] using exceptionality-specific assessment instruments with individuals with disabilities.

SDD6 [IC8S3] selecting, adapting, and modifying assessments to accommodate the unique abilities and needs of individuals with severe disabilities (MO DESE, 2004b)

In order to ensure the knowledge of special education professionals in the area of assessment, candidates for certification in either of these areas of special education are required to pass an exit test which includes information in these areas (MO DESE, 2005a, 2005b). The following is a description of the students targeted in this study, those found to have a moderate to severe disability.

Neither NCLB nor IDEIA define “significant cognitive impairment” or the spectrum labels of “moderate” or “severe” disability. A lack of clarity about the definitions of these terms may create additional confusion when professionals seek to make decisions for assessment. These terms are defined in the literature (Westling & Fox, 2008; Browder, 2001) related to students with disabilities. In order to further discuss assessment as it relates to students with moderate to severe disabilities, it is important these terms are understood.

The criteria for participation in alternative assessment does not specifically spell out a specific educational label, it does provide as one of its criteria, “significantly

cognitively impaired” (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2009b). The students participating in the MAP Alternative in the state of Missouri have a variety of categorical labels. The majority (60%) have the educational label of Intellectual Disability. Fifteen percent have the educational label of Autism. Twelve percent have the educational label of Multiple Disability. Five percent have the educational label of Traumatic Brain Injury. The remaining eight percent of students participating in MAP Alternative are diagnosed with a variety of other educational labels (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2009). The students qualifying for this type of assessment are functioning in the moderate, severe, or profound spectrum of their individual disability.

The term “moderate to severe disability” is a term used to identify students who have been classified with one or more disabilities. These students are most often identified with the educational labels of intellectual disability (ID), developmental disability or autism (Hamill & Everington, 2002). The disability labels of ID, developmental disability, and autism are described since these labels encompass the majority of students who fall in the moderate to severe range of disability. The American Association on Mental Retardation (AAMR) defines disability as follows:

Mental retardation refers to substantial limitations in present functioning. It is characterized by significantly sub average general intellectual functioning existing concurrently with related limitations in two or more of the following adaptive skill areas: Communication, Self-Care, Home Living, Social Skills, Community Use, Self-Direction, Health and Safety, Functional Academics, and Leisure and Work. (Luckasson, et al, 1992, p. 17)

The term “significantly sub average intellectual functioning” is defined as a full scale intelligence quotient (IQ test) of 70 to 75 or below (Luckasson et al., 1992). In addition, the 1992 AAMR definition of mental retardation classifies individuals by the levels of support needed to participate in daily activities and to function independently (Schalock et al. 1994).

Labels based upon IQ are no longer used. Instead the terms mild, moderate, severe, and profound have been introduced in an attempt to move the field from labeling of individuals to describing the person and the supports needed (Schalock, et al., 1994). Supports are classified as intermittent, limited, extensive, and pervasive. Intermittent supports are provided on an as-needed basis. The person does not always need the supports. Limited supports are not intermittent in nature. The support may be minimal intensity, but provided consistently over time regularly in at least some environments. Pervasive supports are provided constantly, are high intensive, are provided across environments, and include supports with potential life-sustaining nature (Luckasson, et al., 1992).

Although not used under IDEIA to label school aged children, the federal government does provide a definition for the term Developmental Delay. A developmental delay is a severe, chronic disability of an individual five years of age or older that:

- is attributable to a mental or physical impairment or combination of mental and physical impairment;
- is manifested before the individual attains the age of 22;
- is likely to continue indefinitely;

- results in substantial functional limitations in three or more of the following areas of major life activity (a) self-care, (b) receptive and expressive language, (c) learning, (d) mobility, (e) self-direction, (f) capacity for independent living and, (g) economic and self-sufficiency;
- reflects the individual's need for a combination and sequence of special interdisciplinary, or generic services, supports, or other assistance that is of lifelong or extended duration and is individually planned and coordinated (Hilton & Ringluben, 1998, p. 9).

Comparing the definitions for mental retardation and developmental disability, the latter term is more functional. It can include both persons with mental retardation and those who do not have a cognitive disability (Smith, 1998). The definition for developmental disability is different from the definition for mental retardation because it does not require a cognitive impairment. However, it does require a substantial deficit in three or more areas. This is in contrast to the definition for mental retardation requiring deficit in only two adaptive skills areas (Hamill & Everington, 2002).

Congress first identified autism as a separate disability under IDEA in 1991 (Turnbull, 1999). Autism is a developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and nonverbal communication and social interactions. Generally evident before age three, it adversely affects educational performance. Other characteristics often associated with autism are engagement in repetitive activities and stereotyped movements, resistance to environmental change or changes in daily routines, and unusual responses to sensory experiences (Hamill and Everington, 2002). Four core features appearing to be hallmarks for a person with autism include (1) social skills deficits, (2) severe problems with social

interactions, (3) insistence on sameness, and (4) disturbances in responses to sensory stimuli (Sturmev & Sevin, 1994).

Regardless of the identified label, students functioning in the moderate to severe range of disability have several characteristics in common. These characteristics will be discussed in the next section as each relates to the student with moderate to severe disabilities' capacity to be successful at the mandated high stakes tests.

Characteristics of Students Related to Success on High Stakes Tests

The high stakes tests designed to assess progress of students under the mandates of the No Child Left Behind legislation were specifically designed to not only measure reading and mathematics levels but to measure the students' ability to complete complex higher order thinking activities (Vogler & Virture, 2007). Students challenged with moderate to severe disabilities impacting their learning have difficulty with performance on these tests due to the nature of their disabilities.

These students learn at a significantly slower rate than do their same age peers who do not have disabilities and may also learn less material (Gaylord-Ross & Holvoet, 1985;). In addition the student with a diagnosed disability may experience difficulty maintaining the skills and knowledge they have acquired (Horner, Dunlap & Koegel, 1988). This characteristic often makes students with a disability in the moderate to severe range function years behind their grade level peers in mathematics and literacy. Expected to be tested along side their grade level peers, these students may find themselves fighting to even reach a basic level on the mandated assessments.

Students with moderate to severe disabilities affecting their learning often have great difficulty with generalizing skills learned in one setting to a different situation

(Haring, 1988; Stokes & Baier, 1977). In addition, they find it extremely hard to combine skills that have been previously taught (Westling & Fox, 2008). The high stakes tests require students to combine skills in order to answer the assessment items. For example, a student may be required to read a graph, make calculations, write a response in a sentence form or to read a passage, and make a prediction about the conclusion of the piece providing reasons for the response in sentence form (MO DESE, 2009c).

These students respond to new problems in a trial and error fashion (Zeaman & House, 1963). The high-stakes tests often contain a mixture of selected response, constructed response, and performance event questions designed to test knowledge of subject matter as well as ability to apply learning on that content matter (MO DESE, 2009c). While a student may be able to guess or give a logical choice provided a group of answers when given a selected response type question, it will be much more difficult for a student identified with a moderate to severe disability to answer constructed response questions (Zeaman & House, 1963).

Students with moderate to severe disabilities take longer than peers without disabilities to focus on the relevant stimulus dimensions of a task and find the solution (Westling & Fox, 2008). Although students may be given accommodations through their IEP such as extended time or be given the assessment in more than allotted sessions, it is within the realm of thought that a student could take hours to process a single question and still have only made minimal progress creating unneeded frustration affecting the remainder of the test.

The unique needs of learners identified with moderate to severe disabilities may affect local districts' ability to make decisions for assessment of these individuals. In the

following chapter, the methodology for examining the implementation of the federal policy of assessment for these students at the local school district level will be discussed. Chapter 4 details the analysis of data. Chapter 5 concludes the study with explanations of findings, conclusions, and implications.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Overview

Local school districts are faced with the difficult task of merging the pressures of raising the achievement levels of all students but specifically those identified with moderate to severe disabilities as mandated by federal law. At the same time, those same school districts must conform to the provisions of the individualized nature of the special education law. High-stakes testing, paired with accountability, has forced teachers to question whether decisions are made in the best interest of the whole group of students or in the interest of the individual as legally mandated. In addition, as these decisions are made, one has to examine whether the results of testing can actually be used to assess the students' progress along the grade level curriculum.

A variety of methods exist to investigate the decision-making process of school teams to determine the most appropriate assessment for students with the targeted disabilities, as well as the type of accommodations each student will be provided. The following information illustrates both the qualitative methods (Creswell, 2003; Merriam, 1998; Seidman, 2006; Krueger, 1994) and quantitative methods (Creswell, 2003; Fink, 2006; Field, 2005; Weiss, 1994) used in this study. The methods used for distribution selection, data collection, steps to insure individual privacy, and data analysis, including assurances of rigor, will be described. This study examined the decision-making process of local education teams implementing federal high-stakes testing policy. The study was intended to explore the training, knowledge, and procedures used to make decisions for

the assessment of students with moderate to severe disabilities in third, fourth and fifth grade.

Research Questions

Within the context of this study, the following research questions were addressed:

1. What training have IEP team members experienced to assist in making decisions for a testing route for learners affected with moderate to severe disabilities?
2. What knowledge about the federal, state, and local mandates for assessment do IEP team members have to assist in making decisions for a testing route for learners affected with moderate to severe disabilities?
3. What are the procedures for decision making and identification processes for selecting high stakes testing instruments and accommodations for learners affected with moderate to severe disabilities and how effective are these processes for accessing general education curriculum in order to measure instructional practice?

Population and Sample

“Five Town” school district is located 40 miles from downtown of a major U.S. city. It is located in one of the fastest growing counties in the country and the fastest growing county in its mid-west state. The 2008 average attendance was 11,089 students. Of these students, 1,570, or 14.1 percent, received special education services as determined by an individualized education plan. To underscore the growing demographic nature of the area, the overall attendance for Five Town School District is projected to grow to 13,526 students in 2011 (District Report Card, 2008).

The school district is comprised of ten elementary schools, three middle schools, and two high schools. Three of the district's elementary schools are designated as Title I schools. One of the elementary schools houses only primary grade students in kindergarten through grade two. Another school houses grades three through five while the remaining six buildings house grades kindergarten through five. It should also be noted that two schools were new for the 2010-11 school year. Because this study focuses on the events surrounding high-stakes testing and the decisions made during the 2009-10 school year, the leaders and teachers in these schools will not be surveyed. Additionally, because the focus of this study will be on the NCLB mandated assessment years during elementary school, grades three, four, and five, the research will focus on the seven district buildings enrolling students in grades three through five during the 2009-10 school year only.

According to the most recently published district report card (District Report Card, 2008), each of Five Cities' targeted elementary buildings boasts a varied enrollment for the 2007-08 school year. B Elementary had an average enrollment of 811 students. C Elementary had an average enrollment of 846 students. D Elementary, the district's newest school at that time, had an average of 504 students. G Elementary had an average of 695 students. H Elementary had an average of 723 students. R Elementary had an average of 492 students. Finally, V Elementary had an average of 717 students.

The Free and Reduced Lunch rates as well as the attendance also varied among Five Cities School District's elementary schools. The rate varied from 10.2% at G Elementary to the three highest of 24.3%, 25.1%, and 27.4% at V, H and D elementary schools. These three schools were provided with Title I funding for the 2007-08 school

year. Daily attendance rates varied from an average of 94.5% to 95.9 %. D Elementary was the lowest while C and R Elementary schools were the highest (“District Report Card”, 2008).

Since the focus of this study is on decision making for children with IEPs, it was important to examine the scores on statewide tests of those students. Each school must report the average scores of all students scoring proficient or advanced as well as the disaggregated scores of students with IEPs scoring in the same quadrants. In the spring of 2008, Five Town School District’s elementary schools scored from 13.8 percent proficient/advanced at G Elementary to 26.3 percent proficient/advanced at B Elementary on the communication arts assessment. Furthermore, mathematics assessments results were reported ranging from 3.6 percent at R and V Elementary Schools to 28.3 percent at D elementary schools (“District Report Card”, 2008).

The researcher is employed as a special education teacher in the school district. Due to concerns of confidentiality, the hosting school district was concerned about collecting data in the school in which the researcher is employed. The IRB was also concerned. The researcher decided to use the teachers of G Elementary as a source of data collection in either the surveys or the interviews.

Data Collection and Instrumentation

The research was completed using a mixed method approach involving a researcher- authored survey followed by focus group interviews of selected stakeholders. Creswell (2003) described the mixed method sequential explanatory strategy as “the collection and analysis of quantitative data followed by the collection and analysis of qualitative data” (p. 215). The quantitative strategy was implemented first. The

qualitative methods were then used to “assist in explaining and interpreting” (Creswell, 2003, p. 215).

By using both quantitative and qualitative methods, the weaknesses of each method were counterbalanced by the strengths of the other method (Creswell, 2003). Quantitative surveys are, “information collection methods used to describe, compare, or explain individual and societal knowledge, feelings, values, preferences, and behavior” (Fink, 2006, p. 1). These surveys provide a numeric description of “trends, attitudes, or opinions” (Creswell, p. 153). This type of data collection was beneficial because it has a quick turn around and painless analysis. Self-administered questionnaires were implemented using an electronic computer-based format making contacts through email. The survey was completed through the computer software with results tallied in a manner keeping the subject hidden unless self-disclosed. This electronic survey allowed individuals the ability of completing the survey confidentially, privately, and at their leisure. When reporting information regarding individuals or organizations, a pseudonym was used to further ensure confidentiality. A further strength of this method was the ability to use a company specializing in electronic surveying. The company provided the researcher with reports of computed data customized by the survey author to the research needs.

Survey and interview subjects were chosen through purposive or purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2003; Merriam, 1998; Seidman, 2006), convenience sampling (Weiss, 1994) and snowball sampling (Seidman, 2006, Krueger, 1994; Weiss, 1994). The participants were chosen based on their ability to “... best help the researcher understand the problem” (Creswell, p. 185). Those participating were both volunteer and invited.

Snowball sampling (Krueger, 1994) also was beneficial as original participants provide connections to colleagues who could add valuable knowledge. Efforts were made to interview a sampling of individuals similar in demographics of the professional population of the school district.

In choosing a mixed method approach, the data found in the first quantitative phase of research could be verified and triangulated with the discoveries in the second qualitative phase of research. Triangulation involves using multiple sources to “build a coherent justification” (Creswell, 2003, p. 196). Information obtained in the surveys was followed up through interviews. Because individuals surveyed and interviewed are random, this ability to cross-check information was used to ensure the integrity of the responses. The same person may or may not have been chosen to participate in a survey or to be interviewed.

In order to protect the researcher and the integrity of the research, the following steps were taken. Permission was granted from the local school district’s superintendent to host the research. The organization’s participants were informed of the process and signed a written consent form. The researcher discussed methods, purpose, benefits, and risks, as well as provided an assurance of confidentiality (Fink, 2006). The participants were also free to ask questions about the study and were provided with contact information for future questions. The investigator was also obligated, when working under the supervision of a university, to have their research methods approved by the university’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). Seidman (2006) counseled, “... an IRB review ... almost always leads researchers to a heightened awareness of important ethical

issues embedded in the proposed research” (p. 59). An application was filed to have the research methods approved as required by the local IRB.

The research in this proposed study centers on surveying and interviewing members of IEP teams in each participating district elementary school. Although, teams can contain a variety of support service personnel, the federally mandated team members (Friend and Bursuck, 2009) were the targets of surveys. These school roles included those serving as Local Education Agency representative, typically principals, counselors, and special education process coordinators or department chairs; special education instructors; and grade level regular education instructors.

The participants in the quantitative portion of data collections will be discussed in the next section.

Data Analysis

Data were collected in two ways. The first was through the use of surveys. The second was through the use of interviews.

Quantitative Methods of Data Collection

Of the 401 emails sent to recruit participants, 125 people used the link provided in the email to access the survey. Of the potential participants, 123 people actually agreed to participate. These participants were asked to provide their job assignment during the 2009-10 school year. Four participants were principals, two participants were building level special education directors/department chairs, two were counselors, 64 were grade level teachers, and 19 were special education teachers. In addition, seven participants were not employed by the school district during the targeted school year and 17 described their job as something other than the choices provided. These jobs were listed as nurse,

reading interventionist or literacy coach, gifted teacher, special area teacher, speech-language pathologist, paraprofessional/instructional assistant, librarian, and psychological examiner. This purposive sampling (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) appears to provide a large enough, yet manageable distribution to provide for rich data (Merriam, 1998).

School district personnel responded from a variety of buildings. Elementary School B had seven respondents. Elementary School C had 12 respondents. Elementary School D had 11 respondents. Elementary School H had 28 respondents. Elementary School R had 13 respondents. Elementary School V had 16 respondents. Twenty-one respondents skipped the question.

Table 3.1. Number of Electronic Recruitment Messages Distributed/Completed

| School | Number of Electronic Recruitment Messages Distributed | Number of Participants Completing Surveys |
|--|---|---|
| Elementary School B | 82 | 7 |
| Elementary School C | 78 | 12 |
| Elementary School D | 62 | 11 |
| Elementary School H | 48 | 28 |
| Elementary School R | 59 | 13 |
| Elementary School V | 72 | 16 |
| Respondent from Unknown School | | 21 |
| Respondent from School Outside Parameters of Study | | 17 |

Further, 17 respondents stated they were employed at two different elementary schools outside of the targeted six schools for the study. See Table 3.1.

Respondents varied in years of experience. Nineteen percent had been employed in the field of education for 0-5 years. Thirty-five percent had been employed for 5-10 years. Thirty-three percent had been employed for 10-20 years. Ten percent had been employed for 20-30 years. Three percent had been employed for thirty or more years. Sixty-two participants chose to skip this question. The median age of participants was in the 5-10 years and 10-20 years categories. See Table 3.2.

Table 3.2. Description of Participants-Year of Experience in Education

| Years of Experience in Education | Number | Percentage |
|----------------------------------|--------|------------|
| 0-5 | 12 | 19% |
| 5-10 | 22 | 35.9% |
| 10-20 | 21 | 33.3% |
| 20-30 | 6 | 9.5% |
| 30+ | 2 | 3.2% |
| Skipped Questions | 62 | ----- |
| Total | 125 | 100% |

Respondents also varied in age. Participants age 20 to 25 numbered three percent. Participants age 25-30 numbered 19%. Participants age 30-40 numbered 48%. Participants age 40-50 numbered 22%. Participants age 50 or more numbered 8 percent. Again, 62 participants chose to skip this question. The median age of participants was in the 30-40 years of age category. See Table 3.3.

This study targeted participants who met certain criteria. These criteria were first to have been employed at one of six elementary schools in the targeted school district

during the 2009-10 school year. The number of participants that met this criterion was 87. The next criterion was to have been a member of an IEP decision making team. The number of participants that met this criterion was 51. The last criterion was to have made decisions for students with moderate to severe disabilities. The number of participants that met this criterion was 43. The response rate for this survey was 31%. See Figure 3.1.

Table 3.3. Description of Participants-Age

| Age of Participant | Number | Percentage |
|--------------------|--------|------------|
| 20-25 | 2 | 3.2% |
| 25-30 | 12 | 19% |
| 30-40 | 30 | 47.6% |
| 40-50 | 14 | 22.2% |
| 50+ | 5 | 7.9% |
| Skipped Questions | 62 | ----- |
| Total | 125 | 100% |

A description of the participants using qualitative methods of data collection follows.

Qualitative Methods of Data Collection

The qualitative portion of the research consisted of individual interviews and focus group interviews. The researcher individually interviewed the elementary special education process coordinators and the assistant to the superintendent in order to gain information on the training offered and procedures for decision making in the school district for students' assessment. See Figure 3.2 for an illustration of the Hierarchy of Special Education Personnel in the targeted school district.

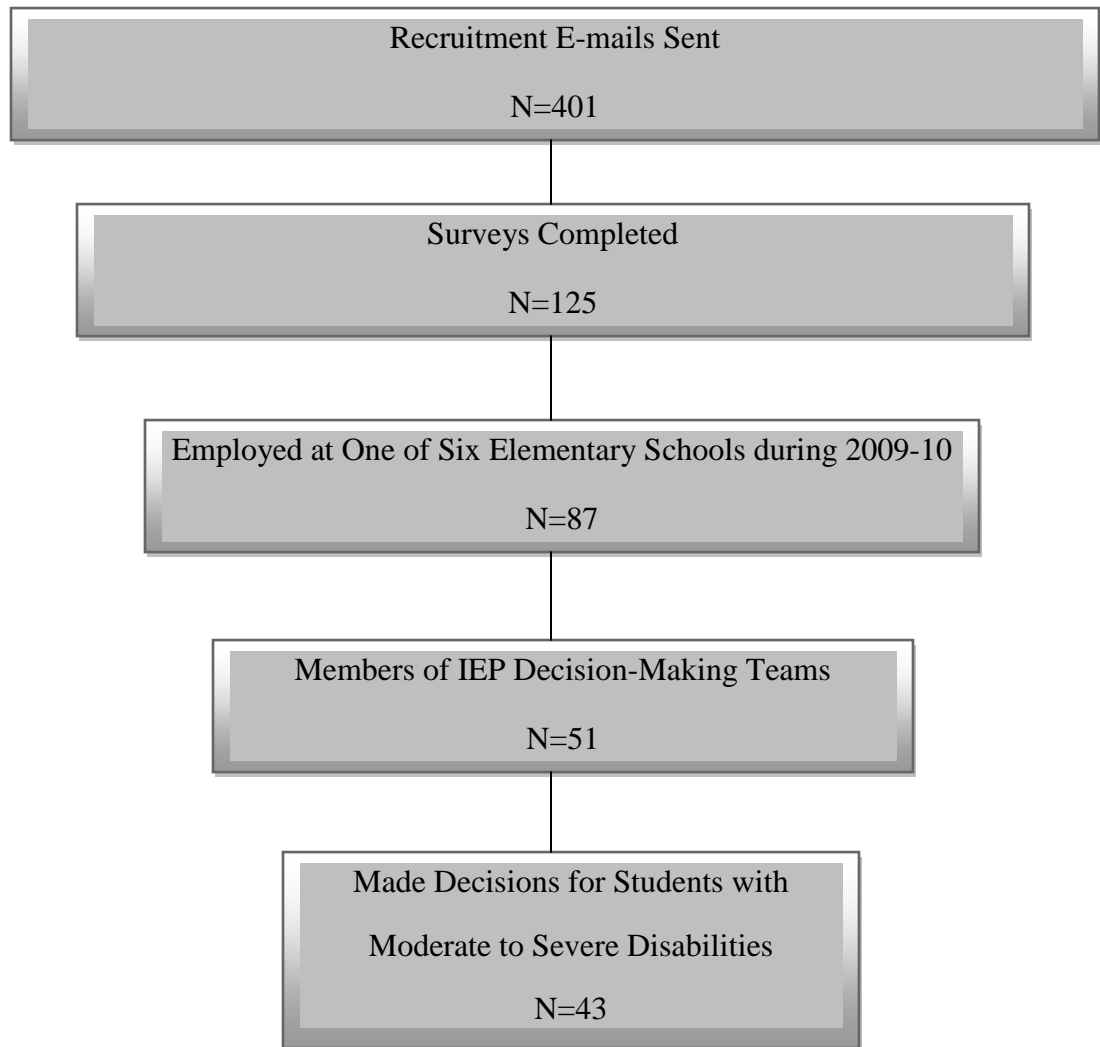
The total number of people interviewed was nine people. Four of the people were special education leaders in the district. The remaining five people were key decision-makers in their buildings for students with moderate to severe disabilities. The low numbers were due to several factors. Since the researcher was employed in the school district, care had to be taken to ensure participant willingness to contribute as well as confidentiality. In addition, timing of the study was affected by extreme winter weather as well as a flu outbreak. While the numbers of participants was small, it was felt that those represented were strategic members of the personnel who implemented special education policy in the targeted school district.

The Assistant to the Superintendent for Special Services was the first interview completed. She has taught in the special education field for nearly thirty years. She is in her fifties. Her experience while teaching was with a vast array of students from students with intellectual disabilities to emotional disturbances. Most of the students' disabilities have fallen into the category of moderate to severe. She has been the Assistant to the Superintendent for Special Services for fourteen years.

The targeted school district has three Process Coordinators for Special Education that each are assigned a group of schools in which to supervise their special education programs. The first process coordinator supervises the district's two high schools along with D Elementary and G Elementary. She is in her forties and has been in the field of special education for over twenty years. She is a former special education teacher.

The second process coordinator is assigned to supervise the district's three middle schools and B Elementary. This process coordinator is in her thirties and has been

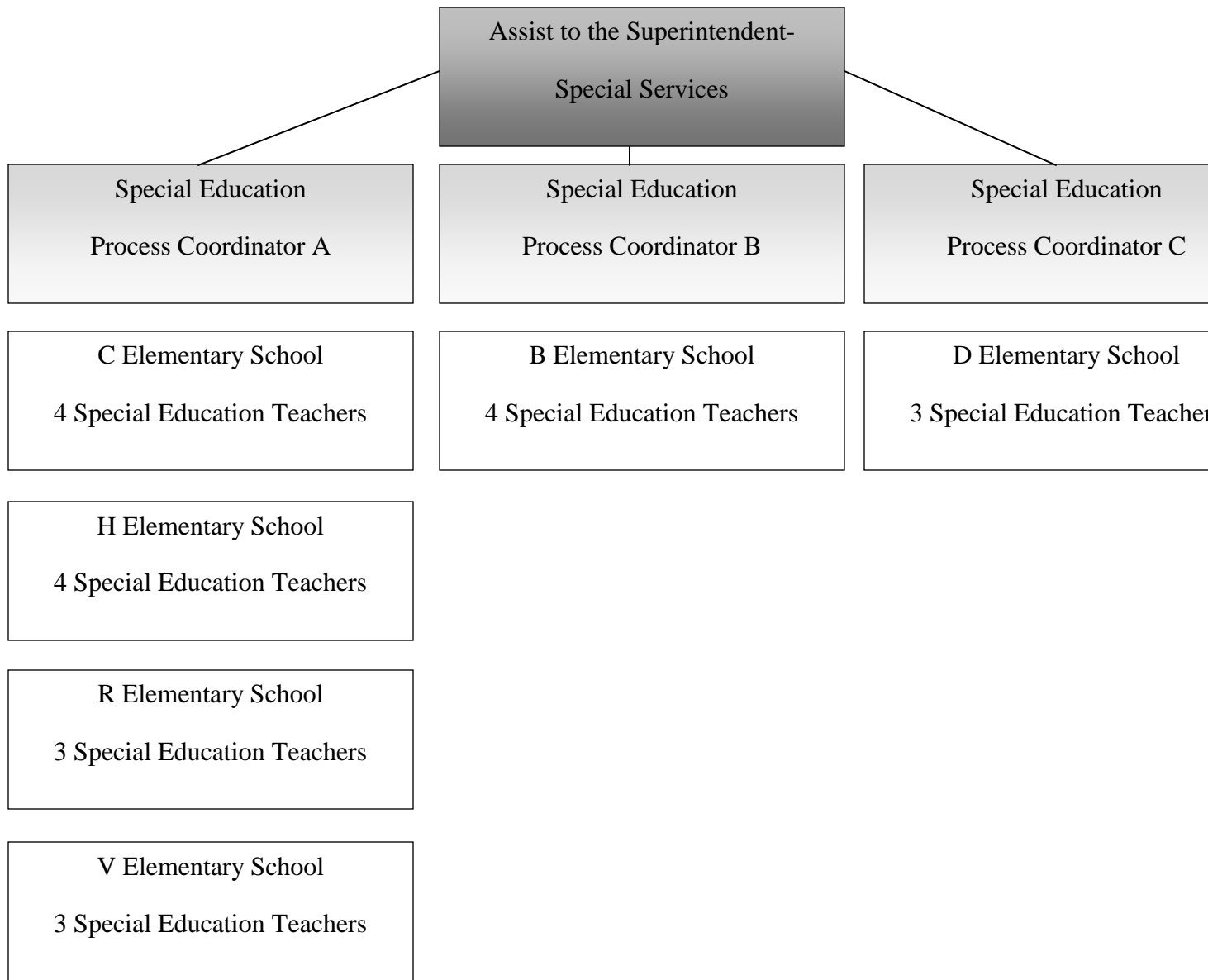
Figure 3.1. Participants Meeting Criteria for Study



working in the education field fifteen years. Before she was a process coordinator, she worked as a special education department chair and a speech and language therapist.

The final process coordinator is assigned to supervise the remaining district's elementary schools. Three of the schools were not included in the study. Two were not included because they were new for the 2010-11 school year. A third was not included

Figure 3.2. Hierarchy of Special Education Personnel in Targeted School District's Central Office and Elementary Schools



because students were only in kindergarten through second grade and not required to participate in statewide testing. She does supervise H Elementary, R Elementary, V Elementary and C Elementary. This process coordinator is in her thirties as well and has been in the field of education for fifteen years. She is also a former speech and language therapist.

A series of interviews were held with school-based special education department chairs and special education teachers. Krueger (1994) discusses five advantages of focus group interviews. First, the social environment of the focus group allows for the possibility of more candid responses. Second, the interviewer is able to explore more information than through the structure of a survey. Third, responses have a high validity. Fourth, the financial cost is low. And, fifth, the procedure is quick.

Focus Group participants were nominated through a variety of methods. They nominated themselves through the survey, by the Assistant to the Superintendent for Special Services, during the focus group interview with Special Education Process Coordinators, and during the first focus group with IEP team decision-makers. This snowball process (Seidman, 2006, Krueger, 1994; Weiss, 1994) helped to maintain confidentiality as well as helped the researcher find interview participants likely to provide thick rich data (Merriam, 1998). See Figure 3.3. In total, seven individuals were nominated as being knowledgeable about the area of study. A total of five individuals were ultimately interviewed. Two focus group interviews and one individual interview was held. These interviews were each held at the participants' school of employment at a day and time convenient for the individuals.

Figure 3.3. Process Used to Recruit Focus Group Participants

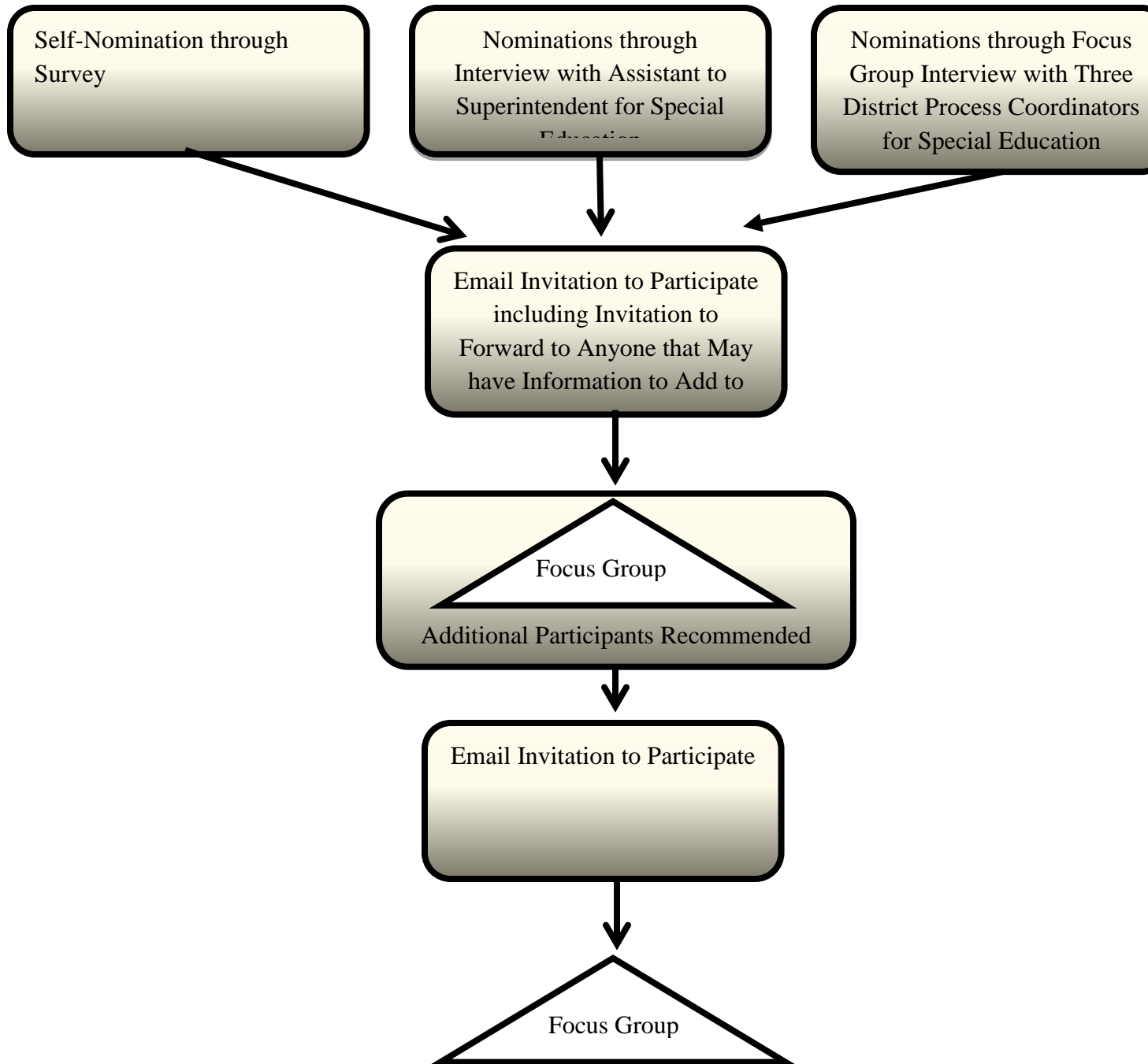


Table 3.4. Number of Individuals Nominated/Interviewed

| School | Number of Individuals Nominated | Number of Individuals Interviewed |
|--------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| B Elementary | 3 | 1 |
| C Elementary | 2 | 2 |
| D Elementary | 2 | 2 |
| H Elementary | 1 | 0 |
| TOTAL | 8 | 5 |

The first focus group was held at D Elementary with the special education department chair and one of the special education teachers. D Elementary’s special education department chair nominated herself when she participated in the survey. She has experience as a special education teacher, regular education teacher, and as a special education department chair. Her experience teaching special education was with students in therapeutic settings separate from the public school and with students in resource settings. Her experience with students with moderate to severe disabilities was with students while she was a special education department chair. She is in her fifties and has a total of about 25 years of experience in education.

The special education teacher participating from D Elementary was nominated during the focus group interview with special education process coordinators. She is in her thirties and has taught special education for about ten years. Her experience has been in both resource and self-contained settings including teaching students with moderate to severe disabilities.

The second focus group was held at C Elementary with the special education department chair and one of the building’s special education teachers. The special

education department chair for C Elementary was nominated through the first focus group interview. She is in her fifties and has worked in special education for over 30 years. Her initial teaching certification is with mentally handicapped, emotionally disturbed, and learning disabled. She has experience working on evaluation teams to look at particular academic deficits and Other Health Impaired. She is currently doing autism evaluations along with her position as special education department chair. Her positions have involved students across the spectrum of mild to moderate to severe to profound.

The special education teacher from C Elementary was nominated through the focus group interview with the district process coordinators for special education. She is in her thirties and has taught for 15 years. She has worked in a private group home, in a self-contained setting, in a facility for individual's with profound disabilities, and currently has a caseload of students with disabilities ranging from mild to severe. She stated the last couple of years she has had a few students each year with disabilities in the moderate to severe range.

The third and final interview was with a special education teacher for B Elementary. She was nominated through the focus group interview with the special education process coordinators. She is in her thirties and has taught about 15 years. Her students have ranged from mild to severe with a few students each year having a moderate to severe disability.

Data Analysis

Quantitative and qualitative data collected were analyzed using varying methods. Quantitative data was analyzed and correlated using mean and median, (Field, 2005). Because the composition of the multidisciplinary staffing teams changes from year to

year allowances for this frequent transformation of major variables was accounted for in analyzing the quantitative information. This allowance reinforced the need for participants from many schools in order to show a strong development of a theory.

The qualitative data was analyzed using additional methods. Interviews, both individual and in group format, were digitally recorded. Weiss (1994) felt a recording serves the purpose of getting the information exact. He stated, “notes never capture exactly what was said.” (p. 54). All interviews were then transcribed verbatim, again, following the advice of Weiss. He said, “transcribe everything and use the transcripts as a set of materials to be mined, accepting that a good deal will be dross.” (p. 55).

In order to provide for rigor, the transcribed interviews were sent to participants giving them the opportunity to provide additions and corrections. Weiss (1994) stated research participants can be assumed to tell the truth. They can, however, fail to tell the whole truth or the precise truth. This opportunity to review the interview transcription can increase the trustworthiness of the information.

The transcribed document and field notes taken during interviews were coded. Merriam (1998) tells us coding is “nothing more than assigning some sort of shorthand designation to various aspects of your data so that you can easily retrieve specific pieces of data” (p. 164). The data was coded for themes using the research questions as a guide for organization.

The data collected through the quantitative and qualitative portions of research was weighted equally when analyzed. The mixed methods used to collect data were used sequentially to triangulate data to provide for a rigorous theoretical base (Creswell, 2003).

Summary

As local education teams set out to implement the high-stakes provisions of federal legislation for students with moderate to severe disabilities, they must pull from a variety of past training in order to make decisions in the best interest of their students. Once these decisions are made, the results of student's testing can be used to make daily instructional decisions. These decision-making processes were the focus of this mixed method research using a self-administered questionnaire, focus group interviews, and individual interviews to gather data. The following chapter details the analysis of data. Chapter 5 concludes the study with explanations of findings, conclusions, and implications.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Overview

The No Child Left Behind Legislation requires 98% of students in the United States to be assessed annually to determine achievement levels in the area of communication arts and mathematics during grades three, four, and five (NCLB, 200). Students are also to be assessed in the area of science once during the elementary grade cluster. The State of Missouri uses the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) to assess students as required by federal legislation during the spring of each year. Certain accommodations to administration, setting, timing, and response can be provided to students with documented disabilities.

No Child Left Behind along with the Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Act allow for the most profoundly disabled two to three percent of students in each school district to be assessed in an alternative fashion (NCLB, 2001; IDEIA, 2004). The State of Missouri uses the MAP-A to assess students that qualify for an alternative assessment. Whether a student qualifies for accommodations or an alternative assessment, the decision, made by a team comprised of the student's parents and educators, is documented in their Individualized Education Plan.

Students challenged by a disability moderately to severely affecting their learning may be the most impacted by the requirements of federal and state government to be assessed annually. Likewise, the team making the decision for accommodations or alternative assessment, may be similarly challenged to make a decision for a testing route that provides the most even playing field possible for the student. The research gathered

for this study attempted to determine how the decision-making teams in a large suburban midwest school district made decisions about assessment for its third, fourth, and fifth graders challenged with moderate to severe disabilities.

Organization of Data Analysis

In order to answer the research questions of this study, data collection was broken into two components. The first component was using quantitative methods through surveys. A mass electronic mail message was sent to the staff of each of the six schools targeted for research in the midwest school district. The message contained information explaining the study and the need for research. The message also contained a link to the survey to be taken anonymously through an electronic survey company. The first portion of the 23 question survey is designed to find respondents that meet the qualifications of the study: those that taught in the school district during the 2009-10 school year, were assigned to teach students in grades three, four or five as a principal, counselor, special education department chair, grade level teacher or special education teacher, and those who had made IEP decisions for students with moderate to severe disabilities. The survey asked questions pertaining to these criteria. If the answer eliminated the respondent, the person was taken to a section thanking them for their participation and ending the survey. By using these elimination questions, confidentiality can be maintained while making the pool of participants narrow to suit the purpose of the study.

The second component of the study was using qualitative methods. A series of individual interviews and focus interviews were completed in an attempt to gather information to triangulate the information from the quantitative portion. The qualitative portion also attempts to gather deeper, richer information.

Research Question One is:

What training have IEP team members experienced to assist in making decisions for a testing route for learners affected with moderate to severe disabilities?

Research Question Two is:

What knowledge about the federal, state, and local mandates for assessment do IEP team members have to assist in making decisions for a testing route for learners affected with moderate to severe disabilities?

Research Question Three is:

What are the procedures for decision making and identification processes for selecting high stakes testing instruments and accommodations for learners affected with moderate to severe disabilities and how effective are these processes for accessing general education curriculum in order to measure instructional practice?

Participants' Training Experiences

The first research question, “What training have IEP team members experienced to assist in making decisions for a testing route for learners affected with moderate to severe disabilities?” was explored using two methods. The first method, quantitative, was completed using a survey instrument. The second method, qualitative, was completed using interviews and focus group interviews.

Data Regarding Training Collected through the Use of Survey

The first research question was answered by 33 out of a possible 125 participants through the survey instrument. Participants were asked about the training they received at the university, state, district, and building levels.

Most participants felt they were prepared by their universities to make decisions for assessment for students with moderate to severe disabilities. The participants

attributed such institutions for their training as Webster University, University of Missouri, Missouri Baptist University, University of Missouri-St. Louis, Lindenwood University, Eastern Illinois University, Southern Illinois University-Carbondale, St. Charles Community College, and Southeast Missouri State University. Some participants specifically listed their certification in Severe and Developmental Disabilities program and methods classes focusing on specific disabilities such as intellectually disabled autism and emotional disturbance. Other methods participants used to provide training to make decisions for assessment were undergraduate classes focused on state assessment, coursework during graduate school, and training opportunities during clinical practicum opportunities. Others participants failed to receive training from their university-level experiences.

While a few participants accessed training opportunities provided at the state level, most indicated they had not received state level training. Thirty-three out of a possible 125 participants provided further explanation on the training they received for making decisions for assessment for students with moderate to severe disabilities. Four participants indicated they had received training sponsored by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Five participants reiterated their training through university coursework. The majority indicated they had not participated in training provided by the state.

Some people that responded to the survey had no opportunities to participate in training for decision making for assessment for students with moderate to severe disabilities. Others had a variety of experiences. The highest number of people had no training in the area of alternative assessment. Five people had participated in professional

development activities at the district level specifically about MAP-A. For four more participants, their training came while on the job through informal conversations with a colleague special education teacher. Two other participants indicated they had participated in an annual training sponsored and led by the school district. Department chair meetings are typically held at the building level on a monthly basis. Two participants indicated they had received training during one of those monthly meetings. Additional methods of training in which participants had received training were by having informal discussions with central office staff, by being trained by building LEAs (Local Education Agency representative usually building administrator, counselor, or special education department chair), or during a general, not specific assessment, training for special education teachers.

Further, a few participants indicated they had received district-level training in surprising ways. One participant received training from a previous school district through professional development activities, but not through the current district. Another participant received training for decision-making for assessment at disability-specific trainings such as autism training or trainings for other disabilities. Finally, a last participant indicated training was provided during an IEP meeting.

Most participants did not seek out any additional training on their own. However, some participants indicated university coursework past a degree provided training. A few participants sought training by attending a workshop on their own. Others indicated the use of the internet and the DESE website helped provide training. Yet others used professional literature in the form of books or articles to provided training. Combined

with these trainings, participants had informal discussions with special education professional in their buildings.

Data Regarding Training Collected through the Use of Interviews

Information was gathered regarding training in the area of decision-making for assessment for students with moderate to severe disabilities through interviews with the Assistant to the Superintendent for Special Services, through focus group interviews with Special Education Process Coordinators, special education teachers and special education department chairs from two different elementary school and an individual interview with a special education teacher from a third elementary school. Individuals that participated in the focus group and individual interviews answered questions to share the experiences they had regarding training to make decisions for assessment for students with moderate to severe disabilities. These individuals participated in a variety of training.

The Assistant to the Superintendent for Special Education felt although she had received training at the university level, she was not really involved. She does not participate directly in training at any level. This differed with the special education process coordinators in the district. “I’m not really involved. The three process coordinators take that on. They go to the training at the state level. They then do the training here” (personal communication, December 15, 2010). She continued speaking of training needs, “each year the parameters change for what we are told we have to do. So as they (the process coordinators) see what people get or don’t get, they adjust what they do. If the process coordinators feel there is a need for something else, they are responsible for bringing it altogether,” (personal communication, December 15, 2010).

Table 4.1. Training Completed by Survey Participants

| University Level | | State Level | | Local Level | |
|---|----|-------------------------------------|----|---|----|
| University- -Webster University -University of Missouri -Missouri Baptist University -University of Missouri-St. Louis -Lindenwood University -Eastern Illinois University- Carbondale -St. Charles Community College -Southeast Missouri State University | 8 | Training Sponsored by DESE | 4 | MAP-A Training | 5 |
| Specific Programs- -Certification in Severe and Developmental Disabilities -Methods Classes- ID/Autism/Emotional Disturbance | 3 | Reiterated University Coursework | 5 | On the job including conversations with special education colleagues | 4 |
| General Undergraduate Coursework | 1 | | | Annual training sponsored by school district | 2 |
| General Graduate Coursework | 1 | | | Training with Special Education Department Chair | 2 |
| Training Opportunities during Clinical Practicum | 1 | | | Informal Discussions with Central Office Staff | 1 |
| | | | | Trained by Building LEA | 1 |
| | | | | General Training for Special Education Teachers (not specific to MAP) | 1 |
| | | | | Previous School District | 1 |
| | | | | Disability Specific Training such as Autism | 1 |
| | | | | During an IEP meeting | 1 |
| No Training | 19 | | 24 | | 14 |
| Total | 33 | | 33 | | 33 |

The Process Coordinators shared they had not received university training to make decisions for assessment for students with moderate to severe disabilities. They do attend a state level training annually. They then lead trainings in the school district for teachers in the special education department as well as school district administrators.

The Special Education Department Chairs interviewed had not participated in training at the university level. They attribute the policies for assessment changing since the time they received their degrees. The Department Chair for D Elementary has attended a state level training. However, she felt even that training did not prepare her to make decisions for assessment for students in her building. “The district has offered some professional development where we work on MAP-A. It wasn’t necessarily training,” (personal communication, January 17, 2011).

The Special Education Department Chair for C Elementary has also attended the statewide conference as well as some district workshops. Although she felt the state conference was valuable, it was limited in training practitioners to make decisions. Referring to the state conference, she stated, “It really covers the gambit from identifying activities to how to write them, the APIs, to whether your activity is application” (personal communication, January 19, 2011). The workshops offered by the district were helpful as well to actually complete assessments. The training just was not helpful to prepare its employees to make decisions. “All of the people who were giving MAP-As met as a group. We met together. We looked at one another’s APIs. We looked at activities that were developed so that we could compare,” (personal communication, January 19, 2011).

None of the three special education teachers interviewed had participated in training at the university level to help them make decisions for assessment for students with moderate to severe disabilities. All three had been to the day long conference sponsored by the state. The special education teacher for C Elementary stated, “It really helped writing at the conference. There wasn’t much discussed about how to qualify and make decisions, though” (personal communication, January 19, 2011).

The special education teacher for D Elementary has participated in a variety of trainings. I have participated in the training at UMSL and taken classes for my masters plus thirty. Those helped me with running records and knowing where my kids are functioning. There was also a PD day that helped us with MAP-A portfolios. But, none of it helped me with background information. They were all collaborations. I did not perceive them as trainings (personal communication, January 17, 2011).

The special education teacher for B Elementary reinforced the experiences of the other special education teachers. She felt there had not been formal training to help her make decisions for her students. She shared with me a memo she received from the Special Education Process Coordinators providing information. However, she felt it was more of a directive than training.

Knowledge of Participants to Make Decisions for Assessment

The second research question, “What knowledge about the federal, state, and local mandates for assessment do IEP team members have to assist in making decisions for a testing route for learners affected with moderate to severe disabilities?” was also answered using multiple methods. The first method, quantitative, was completed using a

survey instrument. The second method, qualitative, was completed using interviews and focus group interviews.

Data Regarding Knowledge Collected through the Use of Surveys

The knowledge regarding decision-making for assessment for students with moderate to severe disabilities was explored using quantitative methods. When asked using the survey instrument if participants were aware of the criteria to be considered when deciding which testing route is the most appropriate for a student with a disability, the majority, 69%, indicated they did know. The remaining percentage 31% of participants indicated they did not know the criteria to be considered when making decisions for assessment for students with moderate to severe disabilities.

Data Regarding Knowledge Collected through the Use of Interviews

Information was gathered regarding knowledge in the area of decision-making for assessment for students with moderate to severe disabilities through interviews with the Assistant to the Superintendent for Special Services, through focus group interviews with special education teachers and department chairs from two different elementary school and a special education teacher from a third elementary school. Regarding the knowledge teachers have regarding the criteria for assessment for students with special needs, the Assistant to the Superintendent for Special Services stated she did not feel there was much. “Most of the time teachers present with very little knowledge to help them make these decisions.” (personal communication, December 15, 2010)

The knowledge ultimately comes from the State Department. A special education teacher from D Elementary School shared, “The state tells us what to do” (personal

communication, January 17, 2011). The special education department chair for the same building reinforced,

The state tells us about a certain cognitive level and a certain functional level. I think we look at the kids. We realize that the test would be just too hard for the. They probably wouldn't even be able to do the test. (personal communication, January 17, 2011)

The federal requirement of only the most profoundly disabled be allowed to be assessed in an alternative fashion is followed in the targeted school district. The Assistant to the Superintendent for Special Services spoke of the contradiction in requirements.

There is a certain percentage you must follow. If you make decisions, and then go over that percentage, you are penalized. This is a contradiction. The state gives these pages and pages of guidelines. If you are supposed to make a decision based upon these guidelines and the data before you, then why would they put a cap on it? If you have two kids or two hundred (that qualify for MAP-A) then that is what you have. (personal communication, December 15, 2010)

Several criteria must be met in order to be assessed in an alternative fashion. One of those criteria is the student must have a significant cognitive impairment (DESE, 2009). The Special Education Department Chair for C Elementary displayed knowledge of this criterion, "Well, you know, when we make decisions, we talk about their functioning. We talk about..." (personal communication, January 19, 2011). Finishing her statement, the special education teacher for C Elementary continued, "...their cognitive ability" (personal communication, January 19, 2011). The Special Education Department Chair for D Elementary also displayed knowledge of this criterion.

If they have an ID (Intellectual Disability) diagnosis, we can make that determination. We have just functionally chosen to just look at that cognitive level. That is one of the criteria-the cognitive level. We also realize we will get nothing out of their scores. If they take the regular MAP, we know we will get nothing out of their scores. (personal communication, January 17, 2011)

The special education teacher for building D also recalled, “At one time we had talked about maybe a kid that was language (disordered) that was really low. But then we pulled out because he didn’t have the ID diagnosis. We only have a few kids. They are all ID,” (personal communication, January 17, 2011).

Another criterion for the qualification for participation in alternative assessment states, “The student’s education priorities primarily address essential skills that will be used in adult daily living” (DESE, 2009, p.12). The special education teacher for D Elementary commented on this requirement,

There is a criterion that talks about their functional skills. Some of our ID kids don’t yet function like that yet. So there’s that. But we know that eventually they will. At second or third grade, they are still working on some sight words. They are still doing some academic stuff. (personal communication, January 17, 2011)

The special education teacher for C Elementary concurred, “We talk a lot about what their program looks like” (personal communication, January 19, 2011). The same building’s special education department chair reinforced this statement,

You have to be able to say they aren’t really functioning at the same level (as their peers). They are far, far below. You have to be able to say that they will not be

able to access that same curriculum as they get older. (personal communication, January 19, 2011)

The Director of Special Education also commented on specialized curriculum in light of the criteria of essential skills used in adult daily living be taught daily to students who qualify for alternative assessment.

The other thing is there is not supposed to be a specialized curriculum. You are supposed to teach kids life skills, but at the same time make it match up with the regular curriculum. It all has to do with making sure we have high expectations for kids through No Child Left Behind. We have to have high expectations for all kids. They are making assumptions that educators don't have high expectations for all kids. But that is wrong. (personal communication, December 15, 2010)

She continued,

I think for a long time I was really frustrated about the MAP and some of the guidelines set forth by No Child Left Behind. I think in the end, it really has raised the standards. However, in the end, there just haven't been enough changes to really make it equitable. (personal communication, December 15, 2010)

Procedures Used to Make Decisions for Assessment

The third research questions, "What are the procedures for decision making and identification processes for selecting high stakes testing instruments and accommodations for learners affected with moderate to severe disabilities and how effective are these processes for accessing general education curriculum in order to measure instructional practice?" was also answered using multiple methods. The first method, quantitative, was

completed using a survey instrument. The second method, qualitative, was completed using interviews and focus group interviews.

Data Regarding Procedures Collected through the Use of Surveys

The procedures regarding decision-making for assessment for students with moderate to severe disabilities was explored using quantitative methods. Twenty-nine individuals surveyed provided input on the procedures used in their experiences. A few individuals were not aware of the process and how the decisions were made. Another individual indicated he was not a participant in the decision-making process. Others felt in their experiences the decisions were made by individuals such as the counselor, case manager, or special education teacher. One individual commented, “The case manager really pushed what they believed and not much choices were given” (personal communication, December 15, 2010).

Many of the survey participants experienced some sort of discussion using some criterion to base their decisions. One criterion was the student’s disability. Another criterion was the accommodations allowed by the state. Yet another criterion was looking at the accommodations the student uses on a daily basis.

When looking at the student’s disability as a criterion, there appeared to be some conflict in the interpretation. One individual commented his team examined, “evaluation results, cognitive level, types of goals, and academic achievement level” (personal communication, December 17, 2010) to help make their decision. Another individual stated his team, “discussed overall academic, physical and emotional ability, strengths, weaknesses, and stamina” (personal communication, December 20, 2010) to make their decision. Another participant described his team’s procedure as, “we checked the

diagnosis of the students and made accommodations as needed. If they struggle with reading, the math test would be read to them in a small group, etc.” (personal communication, December 22, 2010). One respondent did not necessarily consider the disability label, but, “took into consideration cognitive functioning, previous MAP results and eligibility,” (personal communication, December 17, 2010) to make a decision. Another individual’s comment regarding disability was, “decisions were made based on a student’s current functioning level, academic achievement, disability and its effect on access to general education curriculum, regular classroom participation, language and communicative methods and ability,” (personal communication, December 22, 2010).

When looking at the accommodations allowable as a criterion, some participants commented this was the primary means for which their decision was made. One participant commented, “Whether the accommodation gave the student the ability to give information they knew or whether the accommodation gave them answers they did not know” (personal communication, December 17, 2010) was a deciding factor. Other teams simply allowed the test to be read to the student in a small group setting or allowed scribe. These teams felt consenting to these accommodations would allow the students to take the regular MAP test.

Many teams compared how students tested throughout the year on a daily basis with their needs due to their disability to determine testing requirements for statewide assessment. One participant stated, “For one of my students, we decided to have him participate in the MAP with accommodations based on the success we were seeing on classroom and special education assessments so far with provided accommodations. We

felt keeping those in place for the MAP would be sufficient,” (personal communication, December 17, 2010).

Six other participants made decisions based on similar information. “The decision was based on how the students test on other subjects in the regular classroom setting” (personal communication, December 19, 2010). An additional respondent reinforced, “The decision was based on the accommodations necessary for the child to succeed on a daily basis” (personal communication, December 17, 2010). Another respondent stated, “The decision was based on his ability (physical and cognitive) to participate in a traditional assessment. In addition, how tests are currently administered to the student in the classroom on a daily basis,” (personal communication, December 22, 2010). A fourth participant stated, “We looked at what modifications were allowed by the state and also what modifications would be best for the student. The modifications made for the MAP test had to be the same modifications we made for the student for other tests throughout the school year,” (personal communication, December 22, 2010). A fifth respondent felt their decision was made by, “thinking about what the student can do on a daily basis” (personal communication, December 17, 2010). The sixth participant stated, “We looked at how the student performs throughout the school year and what would make sense for each particular student” (personal communication, December 19, 2010).

Two participants explained very specifically the procedure their teams followed to make a decision for the student. “First, we discussed MAP and the possible accommodations to the student. We determined that even with all accommodations available to the student, he would still not be able to complete the assessment. The team then reviewed the five state criteria for MAP-A and then discussed if the child met the

criteria. As a team we agreed that MAP-A was an appropriate decision,” (personal communication, December 17, 2010). Similarly, another respondent commented, “It is a team decision as to which test a student qualifies for. In order for a child to qualify for the MAP-A, five criteria must be met by the student. They have to meet all five in order to participate in the MAP-A assessment. These five criteria are discussed amongst the IEP team and if they meet all five criteria, then the team chose the MAP-A assessment on the IEP” (personal communication, December 22, 2010).

The survey participants were asked to make recommendations to their district or state to improve the testing process for students with moderate to severe disabilities. Many respondents felt the students with moderate to severe disabilities should not be tested at all or that their scores should not count. Others felt they needed more training on the criteria for choosing a test. Yet others felt the students should either be tested on their individual level “There is no need to upset these children. They are being set up for failure. It is obvious that they will not be able to pass the test if their independent level is much lower than the grade level they are currently in,” (personal communication, December 17, 2010). Others felt a third testing option should be used for the students functioning in the middle ranges. “If DESE would not look at how a school meets specific benchmarks, but instead look at growth, special kids can and do grow and it will show up on the progress they make” (personal communication, December 17, 2011).

Looking at accommodations, two respondents felt the students should be able to have the same accommodations for MAP testing that they receive all year. “The accommodations that are used throughout the year should carry over to testing,” (personal communication, December 17, 2010).

Data Regarding Procedures Collected through the Use of Interviews

Information was gathered regarding procedures in the area of decision-making for assessment for students with moderate to severe disabilities through interviews with the Assistant to the Superintendent for Special Services, through focus group interviews with special education teachers and department chairs from two different elementary school and a special education teachers from a third elementary school.

The Assistant to the Superintendent for Special Services feels the decision for assessment for moderate to severe disabilities is quite difficult.

I think there is a group of kids that qualify for MAP-A. Then there is a group of kids that can handle the MAP. Then there is a group of kids that...it's terribly cruel. That's where the gap is. It's not training people to make decisions. I mean, if we are going to stick with MAP there needs to be another test. (personal communication, December 15, 2010)

All groups agreed the decision for a testing route was made by the IEP team. The Department Chair for C Elementary stated,

It has to be an IEP team decision. Certainly a big part of that responsibility falls back on the case manager. That person is the key person for making that decision. They know that child the best. It certainly should be in conjunction with the regular education teacher because the regular education teacher knows the curriculum. The case manager knows the child and where the child is. (personal communication, January 17, 2011)

The Special Education Teachers for the same building added,

Language people are also part of the decision-making. It is definitely an IEP team decision. The case manager does have a big part in making that decision. When we go to the IEPs, I always listen to all of the professionals that work with them. Sometimes there is more than one special education teacher that works with these kids...I definitely think it is the whole team making the decision. (personal communication, January 17, 2011)

The Special Education Department Chair for D Elementary felt there should be some sort of support system, "I personally don't think the district is helping us. There is a criterion the state gives us. It is kind of vague," (personal communication, January 17, 2011). She then added,

I guess I look at the needs of the kids. The IEP team is the best to make that determination. However, if we want consistency in the district, I think there should be some advisory board or maybe the process coordinators to provide us with some guidance. It could be sort of like the retention committee. They gather all of the information and then sit down and make a determination. Like, should this child be retained or not? It (the committee) is outside people that don't work with the student. It would be good to have some consistency so that some schools don't have ten people while others have just a few MAP-A just to make their scores look better. They think, 'Ok, this one is kind of close. Let's go ahead and put him on the MAP-A.' I think every one has different criteria. (personal communication, January 17, 2011).

Support is especially important when an IEP team is led by a new special education teacher. The Special Education Department Chair for D Elementary spoke about the need for support especially when the decision involves a newer teacher.

“We need more consistency. I think (Special Education Teacher, D Elementary) has wonderful experience. However, if you are looking at a person that is a first or second year teacher, they would be like, well, I think I’ll put this kid on MAP-A. They don’t know. I would like to think that I would help. However, I didn’t know my first year. A lot of building should bring in the process coordinator. That’s one of the reasons (student name) ended up not doing it. We were all new. We just didn’t know. (personal communication, January 17, 2011)

One of the strictest standards is the criteria for cognitive level (DESE, 2009). “It’s hard to make kids fit into MAP or MAP-A especially based upon the cognitive level,” stated the Special Education Department Chair for C Elementary.

You can’t fudge on that. They have to qualify there. Teachers do whatever they can to help them qualify for MAP-A so they don’t have to go through the horrific experience of taking the MAP. It’s not based upon AYP or anything else. It’s simply based upon the experience of what it puts kids through. If there are decisions one way or another, I think it has to do with how it impacts those kids and the whole experience of it. (personal communication, January 19, 2011)

The special education teacher for B Elementary stated,

We are very reserved in giving the MAP-A. We put kids in MAP-A because we made that decision because they (the students) were severe enough that we felt

they could not answer questions even if they were given orally. It's that kind of decision. (personal communication, January 24, 2011)

“The special education teachers try to do everything they can to get the kids qualified for MAP-A if possible so they can avoid the horrible experience of taking the MAP test,” (personal communication, December 15, 2010) explained the Assistant to the Superintendent for Special Services. Although the state provides criteria, it can be difficult for IEP teams to make that decision for individuals. The Special Education Department Chair for C Elementary advised,

If a student met most of the criteria, and we weren't really sure about this one, we might look at what their IEP goals have been up until this point. We are talking about kids that are in third grade. We might look at the child's anxiety level with testing. That might be something that might push us one way or the other. Their overall language abilities (would be considered) because it is such a language based test. (personal communication, January 17, 2011)

It is often difficult to make a decision for a student who does not quite fit the criteria to participate in MAP-A, but at the same time would have great difficulty taking the regular MAP test. “We still have a significant population for whom the MAP test is not an appropriate tool for assessing progress,” the Special Education Department Chair for C Elementary shared,

We have kids that are on the fringes. We look at what kinds of accommodations are allowed. Then we do that to the fullest extent. We do more one on ones especially as we have gotten this more severe language and autism population coming through. We do more one on one testing than small group testing. That is

one way you can take a child that just simple accommodations don't work, but that don't qualify for MAP-A. So we take the accommodations to the fullest extent that we can. (personal communication, January 19, 2011)

The special education teacher from B Elementary shared a story of her student fitting the description,

Right now I have this kid who has so much anxiety about his tests. Even his regular test, we don't tell him it is a test. He doesn't sleep. He makes himself sick the night before. His mom says he vomits when he knows he has to take a test. And yet he is functioning near grade level academically. We have to give him the MAP test. It is horrible! We give it to him one on one over a long period time. (personal communication, January 24, 2011)

The State of Missouri only allows certain accommodations to be provided while taking the MAP test and still have the test results be considered a valid display of the student's knowledge and skills (DESE, 2010). The accommodations for these students taking the MAP test are very individualized, "We do very small sections. We can do extended time and more than allotted sessions. We use the whole testing window. We start before the rest of the school has started testing," shared the Special Education Teacher from C Elementary (personal communication, January 19, 2011). The Department Chair for C Elementary shared,

My philosophy as a Department Chair is that we reduce the anxiety as best we can. We use all of the accommodations to the fullest extent we can. We don't feel it is a true reflection, but there is really nothing we can do (personal communication, January 19, 2011).

The Process Coordinator B felt the most important rule to follow when determining accommodations is to think about what the child uses everyday. “If you aren’t using it everyday, then you automatically can’t use it for the MAP. These discussions are often harder with parents of elementary students. Parents get that a little more as they (the students) get older,” (personal communication, December 20, 2010).

Even with administering all accommodations allowable, teachers often find the results are not what they would have hoped. The Special Education Teacher from C Elementary passionately shared this problem.

I will have to say that it is not an accurate reflection of what he, these students, have learned. We are giving them the same material that is given in the classroom. They are able to do grade level work and function in the classroom. Yet, it comes back as a below basic (score). His regular education teacher said, ‘I am amazed! You know he has autism. He can do everything everyone else can do even above grade level on some things.’ When we allow him to do it, he does things orally. He sings songs. He makes PowerPoint presentations to let you know he has learned something. But on the MAP test, he has to take the MAP test. He has to read the thing. (personal communication, January 19, 2011).

The allowable accommodations may not be enough to even the playing field for students with moderate to severe disabilities. The Special Education Department Chair for C Elementary spoke about this issue.

Every building probably has kids whether they are autistic or emotionally disturbed or have anxiety. We have other issues, too. We have kids that are severely language impaired that on a daily basis have the accommodation of

rephrasing or giving instructions in a variety of ways. We can't do that on the MAP test without making it invalid. That is another population that I don't feel is really accurately represented. Because, you know, in real life if you don't understand something, you say, 'What do you mean?' and the person will then give it to you in a different way. I think that population is most definitely penalized because of the limitations that the test puts on us in terms of how we can ask questions. (personal communication, January 19, 2011)

The Special Education Teacher from the same building concurred with the need for additional allowable accommodations,

I have a kid now that reads just multiple grade levels behind. I think we need to be able to look at the kids individually. We have so many! I mean, I would be willing to write a paragraph about my student and explain this is how I did the accommodations. If we did that, I think we would see some more accurate results. We're so limited. There are only so many things we can do. You know, we can scribe for some kids, but they don't want it. They just go. I use computers in here a lot. If they are told to write on a piece of paper, forget it! I think there is a big problem with the way our test is set up that we don't allow for individual differences. It's very, 'you're here' or 'you're here'. There's no in between. There is no black and white. That's not how our kids are. They are all very different. (personal communication, January 19, 2011)

The Department Chair then added,

Sometimes I feel that there aren't quite enough accommodations. I would say to the state that if we have a kid who uses some of the programs that she uses, they

are able to make more complete sentences when they type rather than when they write or when they respond to you orally, then should be able to use those programs. (personal communication, January 19, 2011)

The Special Education Teachers from B Elementary felt the MAP-A is nothing more than fulfilling the state's requirement. "If I do a good job of choosing APIs and collect data right, my students should get a great score. That doesn't teach me anything new about them. It is testing my abilities to gather information," (personal communication, January 24, 2011). Contradictory to others' opinions about the usefulness of the alternative assessment, the special education teacher from C Elementary shares,

It (the MAP-A test) makes you focus programming, though. I feel like it is good to be able to say, 'This week we are working on...' Especially when you are working with a kid that has severe disabilities, it is good to be able to communicate with all of them. There is always someone following them around. To be able to say, 'Don't forget...' I think that is good, you know, because sometimes I think we get complacent. (personal communication, January 19, 2011)

The Special Education Department Chair from the same school added, "We have a focus. It makes us have a focus with those kids" (personal communication, January 19, 2011).

The Special Education Teachers from B Elementary agreed,

The MAP-A is totally different. We have IEP goals designed for them. These are the goals we hope to attain. We can build a program and take data on these goals and report them through MAP-A. For those kids, it does work if done correctly. It

does require a great deal of work on the part of the teacher. (personal communication, January 24, 2011)

The Special Education professionals were asked to provide recommendations to make their job providing statewide assessment for students with moderate to severe disabilities easier. Process Coordinator A feels the timing of the MAP test impacts the results and the ability for teachers and students to be able to make meaning from the results.

The MAP test is usually held in the month of April. Kids would rather be outside then. In addition, the scores don't come in until the following fall. The students and teachers have to wait too long for feedback. It would be better to have assessments in February or March or spread them out throughout the year.

(personal communication, December 20, 2010)

The Special Education Teacher from C Elementary responded,

I think you would get more accurate results if we could give them something on their level. As a special education case manager, I would be willing to write a summary of this child and say, 'this is this child's disability'. 'This is what they struggle with.' I feel like they (DESE officials) get the test and see the little bubbles (indicating disability and accommodations provided), but that doesn't tell you anything about my kid. You would not know that this kid is vomiting and not sleeping for weeks because he is so nervous. I just look at each kid and I feel like we lose the kid in the book, in the test. We lose the individuality of the kid. We lose what that kid needs because we are so limited. You might see that this kid

has autism and they need extended time and they are tested individually. But that doesn't really tell you enough. (personal communication, January 17, 2011)

The Special Education Teacher from B Elementary shared her recommendations to the State,

Alternative formats should be allowed. But, it shouldn't just be all or nothing. I have this kid who can read a story. He barely talks. But if he is able to retell the story using a PowerPoint presentation, there is not a shadow of a doubt that he understood the story. He will also get up in front of the class and explain it. That is huge! That is when his teacher really started to see how much he really gets. If I asked him to write it, or bubble it, or even to tell me, he might hide under the table. If I told him to email it, then he would have no problem. The way it is now, his score would come back as below basic. With these accommodations, he would really have a chance to show what he can do. I understand there would be some security issues, but that would meet his needs so much better. (personal communication, January 24, 2011)

To sum up her feelings on the needs of assessment for students with moderate to severe disabilities, the Special Education Teacher from C Elementary indicated,

These kids should be assessed in a different way. I think there would be even less kids fitting this category than the kids that fit into the MAP-A category. I mean, the test is really hard. We are not able to use the information to drive instruction. It comes back as, 'These sped kids just aren't making progress.' It is just so... I mean these kids' parents want them to do well. They want to do well. They take that to heart. Right now we do the best we can, but our hands are tied. It just think

it isn't a true reflection of what they can do. (personal communication, January 19, 2011)

Summary

This study attempted to gather information on the local implementation of the federal policies for assessment of students specifically challenged with moderate to severe disabilities under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004. Information surrounding three research questions was gathered using multiple methods.

The first method of gathering information, quantitative, used confidential surveys to gather information. An invitation to participate was sent to the certified staff of six elementary schools in one Midwestern district. Those willing to participate followed a link to take the online survey. Although a few questions in the survey may have provided some clues to the identity of the participants, the survey was designed to keep each participant confidential if not anonymous. During the interviews one of the Special Education Department Chairs expressed interest in participating in the qualitative portion of the research.

The second method of gathering information, qualitative, was through the use of interviewing procedures. A series of five interviews, both individual and in groups, were held. The Assistant to the Superintendent of Special Services was first interviewed. Then the three school district's Special Education Process Coordinators were interviewed together. These interviews led to nomination of several special education teachers in the district who they thought may have information to share on the topic of assessment of students with moderate to severe disabilities.

A focus group interview was then held with the Special Education Department Chair who nominated herself and a special education teacher from D Elementary. This process led to the nomination of a second Special Education Department Chair. A second focus group interview was held with the Special Education Department Chair and a special education teacher from C Elementary. Lastly, an individual interview was held with a special education teacher from B Elementary.

The following chapter, Chapter Five, consists of Findings, Conclusions, and Implications.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This chapter is organized into six sections. This section is followed by the portion in which a summary of the study is done. The summary of the study includes a review of the purpose of the study and an appraisal on the type of information collected. Also included in this section is a condensed review of literature and of the population sample. The second section describes the findings. The third section presents the conclusions based on each research question. The fourth section addresses the implications that were raised within the study. The fifth section suggests areas where further research is needed. The final section offers a summary of the purpose, findings, and conclusions of the study.

Summary of the Study

The following Summary of the Study includes the Review of the Problem, Research Questions, Condensed Review of Literature, and Populations Sample.

Review of the Problem

New complicated laws (IDEIA, 2002; NCLB, 2001) may leave local implementers with inadequate tools to confidently make decisions for the assessment of students with moderate to severe disabilities. These decision-making teams are charged with making decisions that are both in compliance with federal NCLB policy, but also are in the best interest of their students' achievement. NCLB essentially sets the standard that regardless of any language, income, or disability a child may find themselves facing, that child should be able to make progress on the grade level curriculum (NCLB, 2001). This challenge is further complicated by a local school's need to also protect its students' rights under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA).

When the student is challenged by a more severe disability, the decisions made by local educators can be that much more difficult.

The study was conducted to determine if the federal, state, and local policies were in compliance with the federal laws while at the same time taking into account the individuals' academic best interest. The overall purpose of this study is to examine the training, knowledge, and procedures in determining the testing route for learners functioning in the moderate to severe range of disability. Does the training, knowledge, and procedures for decision-making come together resulting in an effective process for a decision that is both in compliance with state and federal laws and a sound educational practice for the individual student?

Research Questions

The study focused on the decision-making process at the local level for fulfilling the policies of the federal policies under No Child Left Behind, 2001 and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, 2004. The following research questions were answered:

1. What training have IEP team members experienced to assist in making decisions for a testing route for learners affected with moderate to severe disabilities?
2. What knowledge about the federal, state, and local mandates for assessment do IEP team members have to assist in making decisions for a testing route for learners affected with moderate to severe disabilities?
3. What are the procedures for decision making and identification processes for selecting high stakes testing instruments and accommodations for learners affected with moderate to severe disabilities and how effective are these processes

for accessing general education curriculum in order to measure instructional practice?

Condensed Review of Literature

This study examined the literature related to the history of assessment at the federal level leading to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2001 and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2004 and the history of assessment at the state level in Missouri as a result of federal laws. The study also examined the literature related to the definitions for students challenged with moderate to severe disabilities. Finally, the study examined the literature associated to the characteristics linked to success on high-stakes tests.

In relation to federal testing policies, the first concern about the standards of American schools was first raised following the launch of Sputnik by the Russians in 1957. The American people rationalized something was wrong with American schools since the American government was not the first into space (Amrein & Berliner, 2002). This concern led to many changes including the use of performance data to evaluate the effectiveness of programs (Glasser & Silver, 1994), and establishment of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (Homb, 2003). These changes during the 1960s culminated with the passage of the Elementary/Secondary Education Act in 1965 by Congress.

The changes continued during the decades of the 1970s and 1980s. During this time, testing of the knowledge of content was seen as an indicator of student accomplishment (Etsey, 1997). As a result of a commission by President Ronald Reagan, *A Nation at Risk* was published in 1983. This work was believed to be the catalyst for the

standards movement and high stakes testing era (Vogler & Virtue, 2007). This report focused on the results of schools.

The decade of the 1990s continued the trend of changes in accountability through assessment. In 1994, Congress passed the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA) to encourage states to establish challenging curriculum, measure student performance against standards, and make school systems accountable for learning for all students (Goertz, 2005). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was reauthorized in 1997. One of the changes to this legislation was to mandate assessment for all students with disabilities alongside typically developing peers (Thompson et.al, 2001; Joles, 2003). IDEA also authorized the use of alternative assessments for the most profound two percent of students in place of traditional testing.

The current mandate under the federal law for high-stakes widespread testing falls under the policy of No Child Left Behind (NCLB). NCLB was passed by Congress and signed by President George W. Bush in 2004. This legislation was an update of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The 2004 version mandated testing in reading, math, and science for 95% of students in low achieving categories including those with disabilities. The state governments were required to comply with these policies.

In relation to state testing policies, the State of Missouri first authorized widespread testing through the Missouri Mastery Achievement Test (MMAT) in 1985. It tested the core competencies and key skills defined as a part of the law (Osterlind, n.d.). The State of Missouri then changed mandated testing to the Missouri Assessment Program through the passage of the Outstanding Schools Act of 1993 signed by Governor Mel Carnahan. This Missouri policy required testing in communications arts, math,

science, and social studies each to be tested once per grade span (Missouri Assessment, 2006).

Some of Missouri's policies were as a direct result of new federal policies. Following the enactment of No Child Left Behind, Missouri followed suit in 2006 by testing students every year in communication arts and mathematics beginning in third grade. The MAP-Alternative was first piloted in 2005 to comply with the alternative assessment of students with severe to profound disabilities as required by IDEIA and NCLB. These Missouri policies all affect the student challenged with moderate to severe disabilities.

In relation to students challenged with moderate to severe disabilities, the State of Missouri currently offers two teaching certificates to enable educators to teach students with moderate to severe disabilities. These teaching certificates are Mild/Moderate Cross Categorical and Severely Developmentally Delayed (DESE, 2011). The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education mandates portions of the curriculum leading to each of these certifications include the identification of appropriate assessment.

One manner in which people typically categorize students into an assessment route is by their level of intelligence. The term "significantly cognitively delayed" is one of the characteristics that define the ability to participate in alternative assessment. This term is not specifically defined in the law. It is inferred as equating to the disability label of Intellectual Disability. Overall, 60% of students participating in alternative testing in the State of Missouri have the disability label of Intellectual Disability. Fifteen percent have the disability label of Autism and 12% have the disability label of Multiple Disability. The remaining eight percent have a variety of other disability labels (DESE,

2009). The term “moderate to severe disability” also is not defined in the law. However, it is most often equated to a person with Intellectual Disability, Developmental Disability, or Autism (Hamill & Everington, 2002). These students with moderate to severe disabilities are challenged by similar qualities that make it difficult to be successful at high-stakes testing.

High-stakes tests require knowledge of grade level reading and math, but also higher order thinking. Students with moderate to severe disabilities may have difficulty due to particular challenges such as:

- learn slowly (Gaylord-Ross & Holvoet, 1985);
- have difficulty maintaining skills and knowledge they have acquired (Horner, Dunlap & Koegel, 1988);
- have difficulty generalizing (Haring, 1988; Stokes & Baier, 1977);
- have difficulty combining skills (Westling & Fox, 2008);
- respond in trial and error fashion (Zeaman & House, 1963) and
- take longer to focus on relevant stimulus dimensions of a task and find the solution (Westling & Fox, 2008)

These characteristics all make it difficult to keep up with grade level standards.

Population Sample

The population in this study was all education professionals employed by a Midwestern school district during the 2009-10 school year in one of six targeted elementary schools. These participants were either regular education teachers, special education teachers, or local education agency representatives that served on an IEP team that made decisions for a student with a moderate to severe disability. Additional

participants were the school district's Assistant to the Superintendent and three Process Coordinators for Special Education.

A multiple method approach to gathering data was used. For the quantitative portion, 125 surveys were completed. Respondents varied in age. Participants age 20 to 25 numbered three percent. Participants age 25-30 numbered 19%. Participants age 30-40 numbered 48%. Participants age 40-50 numbered 22%. Participants age 50 or more numbered 8 percent. The median age of participants was in the 30-40 years of age category.

Respondents varied in years of experience. Nineteen percent had been employed in the field of education for 0-5 years. Thirty-five percent had been employed for 5-10 years. Thirty-three percent had been employed for 10-20 years. Ten percent had been employed for 20-30 years. Three percent had been employed for thirty or more years. The median age of participants was in the 5-10 years and 10-20 years categories.

For the qualitative portion, five interviews were completed. The participants in interviews included the Assistant to the Superintendent for Special Services, three Process Coordinators for Special Education, two Department Chairs for Special Education, and three Special Education Teachers. The median age of those interviewed was in her thirties. The median years of experience of those interviewed were fifteen years.

Discussion

Several relevant findings emerged from the analysis of the data sets from the quantitative section and the qualitative section. The three research questions were addressed.

Research Question One-Training

Research Question One addressed the training IEP team members had experienced to assist them in making decisions for a testing route for learners affected with moderate to severe disabilities. Data was collected using quantitative methods and qualitative methods.

Data Collected Using Surveys

The participants of the survey answered questions about the training they had received to help them make decisions for assessment of students challenged with disabilities. Training experiences were explored from the university level, state level, the local level, and on their own.

Most participants stated they had received training from their universities. A total of nine different universities were listed as offering training in this area. Some participants attributed particular programs or classes as training opportunities. These programs or classes were a certification in Severe and Developmental Disabilities and methods classes in individual disabilities such as intellectual disability, autism, and emotional disturbance. One participant credited an undergraduate class in state assessment as providing training. Finally, a participant received training during a clinical practicum.

A few participants completed training at the state level. Four people attended training at a conference provided by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Most had not been trained at the state level.

While the majority of participants had not completed training at the local level, some did share their local training experiences. Five participants expressed their

participation in a training provided by their school district specifically in the area of MAP-A. This training included a component in decision-making for assessment. Four participants had received on the job training. Two participants stated they had attended an annual mandated training geared specifically toward decision-making for assessment.

Other training methods were provided. A training method cited was informal conversations with special education colleagues. Attending a training sponsored by another school district was given as a training method. A participant received training during an IEP meeting. Some others received trainings on their own through the internet using the state's website or by reading books or professional literature.

Of those participating in the survey, only some indicated they had received training. For the group that did participate in trainings, they did not take place consistently across settings or participants.

Data Collected Using Interviews

The individuals interviewed have participated in training at various levels. None of the individuals interviewed had received training at the university level to help make decisions for assessment for students with disabilities. All of the participants had attended a conference sponsored by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education for alternative assessment. However, none of the participants found it helpful to help them make decisions for assessment. All special education teachers in the district serving as proctors for alternative assessment are required to attend an annual training provided by the district process coordinators. All of the department chairs and special education teachers had attended this meeting. Likewise, none of them felt this meeting was helpful in providing training for decision making for assessment.

Comparison of Data from Both Surveys and Interviews

The training received by participants of both methods of research varied. The State of Missouri requires certification candidates in the area of Mild/Moderate Cross Categorical Disabilities, Severely Developmentally Delayed, and to a certain extent Counselors to complete training in assessment selection as a part of their university coursework (MO DESE, 2004b; DESE, 2011). However, this type of training is not a part of the coursework for building administrators or elementary teachers.

The participants of the survey portion listed several universities in which they had received training. None of the participants in the qualitative portion had received training from their university programs. Comparing this information to the age and years of experience of the participants, it appears this may be due to the timeframe in which participants did their university training. If this training took place after the era of more frequent widespread testing, it is more likely they had been trained to make choices regarding assessment for students with disabilities.

Some participants indicated they received formal training at the state level by attending a day long meeting sponsored by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. This training is not required of school district personnel. However, it is an encouraged training for special education supervisors and special education teachers that administer alternative assessment (MO DESE, 2009b). In addition, this day long training only assigns a small portion of its training to making decisions for students' assessment (MO DESE, 2009a). As a result, special education teachers not administering alternative assessment, regular education teachers, counselors and principals would likely not receive training from the State of Missouri.

Participants of both data collection methods provided a variety of experiences in which they received training. The majority of these methods were sought on their own, limited and informal. These circumstances likely led to further confusion and inconsistency across the state and district's IEP decision-making teams.

Research Question Two-Knowledge

Research Question Two addressed the knowledge about the federal, state, and local mandates for assessment IEP team members had to assist in making decisions for a testing route for learners affected with moderate to severe disabilities. Data was collected using surveys and interviews.

Data Collected Using Surveys

Participants answered a question about their knowledge of the criteria for determining a testing route for learners with a disability. Sixty-nine percent indicated they did know the criteria for making that decision. The remaining 31% indicated they did not know the criteria.

Data Collected Using Interviews

The Assistant to the Superintendent for Special Services expressed that overall people do not have an understanding of the criteria for making a decision for assessment. "Most of the time teachers present with very little knowledge to help them make these decisions" (personal communication, December 15, 2010).

However, the special education department chairs and Special Education Teachers were all veteran educators with decades of experience. These ladies all appeared to have knowledge of the criteria. "The state tells us what to do," stated the Special Education Teachers from Elementary D (personal communication, January 17, 2011). Referring the

criterion of “significant cognitive impairment” and the seven additional criteria (MO DESE, 2009b) the special education department chairs and special education teachers shared concern on two particular points.. The Department Chair from Elementary D reinforced, “The state tells us about a certain cognitive level and a certain functional level,” (personal communication, January 17, 2011).

The requirement of a significant cognitive delay was the first concern. Those interviewed felt the term significant cognitive delay was confusing. Literature from a variety of sources provide varying definitions (Luckasson et al, 1992; Schalock, et al, 1994) In addition, any definition documented in the law (U.S. Department of Education, 2003) were later dropped. As a result of this lack of definition the teams in this data sample spoke of decisions made strictly to allow only students with a label of Intellectual Disability to participate in alternative assessment. The IEP teams in their experience were nervous to allow students with other disability labels such as language impairment or autism to participate in alternative assessment.

The other criterion discussed during interviews was the criteria that a student must be participating in a program addressing essential skills if they are to be able to participate in alternative assessment (MO DESE, 2009b). The participants felt this criterion was difficult at the elementary level because often these students may not be strictly working on essential skills but instead be still working on academics. It was also felt that requiring a separate curriculum was a contradiction because there is not supposed to be a separate curriculum. Under the No Child Left Behind legislation, all students are to be taught the same curriculum (U.S. Department of Education, 2004, 2005).

Comparison of Data Collected Using Both Surveys and Interviews

The knowledge of the participants in the study regarding the criteria for making a decision for a testing route for widespread testing varied. While 69% of the participants in the survey said they knew the criteria, an interview with the Assistant to the Superintendent for Special Services contradicted this information by stating that teachers present with very little knowledge in this area.

The participants in the qualitative portion, who all were veteran teachers, had a very good knowledge base for the requirements for each of the two different testing routes. They did relate their feelings about the confusion of two parts of the requirement. They felt the term “significant cognitive delay” needed further clarification. While most people in practice generally equated this term with a student labeled with an Intellectual Disability, they felt this assumption led to more questions on the part of decision making teams when students did not clearly fit this description yet experienced challenges due to their severe disability.

The other area the participants conveyed concern about was the requirement that a student be participating in an essential skills program. The age of the student with a disability may make it difficult to be categorized as a participant in the required type of program. The decision to place a student in an essential skills program is an individual decision based on that particular student’s needs. As a result, this could take place after the time in which the decision for assessment is made.

Research Question Three-Procedures

Research Question Three addressed the procedures for decision making and identification processes for selecting high stakes testing instruments and accommodations for learners affected with moderate to severe disabilities and how effective these

processes were for accessing general education curriculum in order to measure instructional practice. Data was collected using surveys and interviews.

Data Collected Using Surveys

Using a survey, information was collected regarding the procedures used to make decisions for learners challenged with moderate to severe disabilities. The decisions made for assessment are documented on the individual child's IEP document by a team consisting of a special education teacher, regular education teacher, and local education agency representative usually a counselor, principal, or building level special education supervisor (Elliot et al, 1997; Friend & Bursuck, 2009; Hamill & Everington, 2002; IDEIA, 2004; McDermott & McDermott, 2002). There were incidences when the decision was made by an individual such as the counselor or the case manager. For the most part, decisions were made during IEP meetings as a team through discussion.

The IEP teams made decisions after having discussed data available. Comparing that data to the criteria provided in the Missouri Assessment Program-Alternate (MAP-A) Instructors' Guide and Implementation Manual (2009b), the teams looked at a variety of factors such as the evaluation report. Included on this evaluation report were the diagnostic results and cognitive level. The prior IEP was also used to help make the decision. This document was examined for types of goals, academic achievement levels, and the disability's effect on access to the general education curriculum. Other pieces of data to be considered were previous MAP results and personal characteristics such as the student's physical abilities, emotional abilities, and stamina.

As the IEP teams made decisions, a primary means for making decisions for assessment was by considering what accommodations were available for the student. This

was compared to what accommodations were actually used on a daily basis. One participant explained the process used in her building, “First, we discussed MAP and the possible accommodations. We determined that even with all accommodations available to the student, he would not be able to complete the assessment. The team reviewed the five state criteria for MAP-A and then discussed if the child met the criteria. As a team we agreed that MAP-A was an appropriate decision” (personal communication, December 17, 2010).

Data Collected Using Interviews

Participants were asked about the procedures used to make decisions for learners challenged with moderate to severe disabilities. Participants agreed the decision is quite difficult. The Assistant Superintendent for Special Services explained, “I think there is a group of kids that qualify for MAP-A. Then there is a group of kids that can handle the MAP. Then there is a group of kids that it’s terribly cruel. That’s where the gap is” (personal communication, December 15, 2010).

The decisions for assessment were made by the IEP team guided by the case manager. Those interviewed did feel there needed to be more support. They did not feel there was a lot of support from the school district. They felt there needed to be some sort of committee led by school district personnel that assist when the decision is difficult such as when it involves a children in the moderate to severe areas of functioning. Those interviewed also felt teams led by a newer special education teacher needed more support.

Participants related their experiences when students with moderate to severe disabilities did not qualify for alternative assessment. The team in those cases used the

accommodations to the fullest extent allowable. Some examples of practices were using one on one individual testing, testing very small sections at a time, using extended time, and more than allotted sessions. Process Coordinator B advised to think about what the child uses everyday. “If you aren’t using it everyday, then you automatically can’t use it for the MAP” (personal communication, December 20, 2010).

The State of Missouri allows only certain accommodations to be used when administering the statewide MAP test. These accommodations include oral reading on mathematics and science portions, extended time, administer in more than allotted sessions, use of scribe, and small group and individual presentation (MO DESE, 2010). Sadly, the survey participants conveyed that all allowable accommodations do not provide a true reflection that can be used to guide instruction. Participants, however, did feel MAP-A provided focus to their programs. The Department Chair for C elementary stated, “It makes us have a focus with those kids” (personal communication, January 19, 2011).

The data from all three research questions was collected using surveys and interviews. Both data sets were then compared to draw conclusions. These conclusions will be related in the next section.

Comparison of Data Collected from Both Surveys and Interviews

All participants agreed the procedure followed to make a decision for assessment for a student with a moderate to severe disability took place through discussion during an IEP meeting. The information gathered from both types of methods conveyed the process followed the criteria presented by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2010).

The participants of the qualitative methods shared how their decisions for assessment affected their teaching practices. This information was not conveyed through the survey. When it was decided that a student qualified for an alternative assessment, practitioners felt the assessment process actually helped them guide instruction. However, for a student with a moderate to severe disability that participated in the regular MAP test, the qualitative participants did not feel the information was helpful. They felt that often students exhibited a higher level of skill on a day to day basis than was indicated on the final score following assessment.

Qualitative participants suggested changes to the guidelines for assessment accommodations. They felt allowing more accommodations would provide a truer picture of the student's progress. Participants suggested allowing accommodations similar to what students used everyday in their classrooms. Specific suggestions were the use of computer programs and allowing paraphrasing of questions and directions during the test.

Conclusion

The training received by participants in the targeted school district was varied. While some had received training at the university level, state level, local level, or on their own, many others had not participated in training at all. For those that did participate in training, the source of this training was inconsistent from person to person. The trainings participants did receive were felt to not be helpful when decisions needed to be made for assessment for students with moderate to severe disabilities.

Only a little more than two thirds of participants surveyed indicated they had knowledge of the criteria to make a decision for assessment for students challenged with disabilities. The remaining third indicated they did not know the criteria. However, this

information was contradicted by information received through interviews. The impression from interviews was that very few educators possessed knowledge in the area of the criteria for assessment of students with disabilities.

Those interviewed did seem have knowledge of the criteria, but felt certain areas were confusing or unclear. One confusing criteria was that of having a “significant cognitive delay”. This term is not clearly defined as a specific disability label nor given a certain range or level that can be related to the results of an intelligence test. Those interviewed experienced IEP teams making decisions in a safe manner only allowing alternative assessment for those students with a disability label of Intellectual Disability (ID). Many other students may meet the other criteria but because their disability label is not ID, they had to take the regular MAP test.

The other criterion discussed as being confusing was the requirement that the student be participating in a program addressing essential skills. The nature of the special education requires that each student’s program is individualized (IDEIA, 2004). Each child is different. Many students at the elementary level may still be participating in academic skills such as reading and mathematics skills through the use of differentiated instruction. The IEP team is charged with making the determination that a child needs to be in a program focusing on essential skills. For students with a more severe disability, this could take place at a variety of times depending on the child’s individual disability, needs, and priorities for learning set by their IEP team. This determination is often past the elementary grade years.

Some participants in the interviews also felt requiring a student to be participating in a different curriculum was actually a contradiction to the guidelines of the No Child

Left Behind Legislation itself. NCLB requires school districts to hold all kids to certain grade level standards. The kids should all be exposed to the same curriculum. Then, the students should be assessed to see if they are reaching the standards of their grade level expectations. In requiring a student to participate in a different curriculum, the standards are acknowledging a student is behind.

Although the participants in both data collection methods felt it was unfair for students with moderate to severe disabilities to have to participate in statewide assessment or that their scores should not count towards building and district AYP, decisions were made by the IEP team through discussion. They did feel there needed to be more support provided in the process of making decisions.

The participants had ideas on how to make testing more fair for kids with more significant disabilities that take the regular MAP test. They felt that additional accommodations should be allowed such as rephrasing, instructions provided in a variety of ways, and to allow the use of a computer so answers could be typed instead of written or spoken. If teachers are to be able to use this information, there should be quicker turn around on the scores. The Special Education Teacher for C Elementary summed up her feelings regarding the assessment of students with moderate to severe disabilities,

These kids should be assessed in a different way. I think there would be even less kids fitting this category than the kids that fit into the MAP-A category. I mean, the test is really hard. We are not able to use the information to drive instruction. It comes back as, 'Those sped kids just aren't making progress.' It is just so...I mean these kids' parents want them to do well. They want to do well. They take that to heart. Right now we do the best we can, but our hands are tied. I just think

it isn't a true reflection of what they can do (personal communication, January 19, 2011).

The next section discusses implications for training, knowledge and procedures concerning the decision-making for assessment for students with moderate to severe disabilities.

Implications

This study examined the training, knowledge, and procedures at the local level used to implement decision-making for federally mandated assessment policies for learners challenged with moderate to severe disabilities. The information provided in this study has led to recommendations for changes to guidelines and procedures in fulfilling these federal policies to allow decisions for assessment to be made more consistently and for the information obtained from testing to be used more readily to guide instruction.

In the area of training, a more effective and consistent training needs to happen for the people that are required to help make the decisions for these students' programs. While this could take place at any level, ensuring consistency would be difficult at the university level because people are at varying places in their need to participate in college classes. Providing this information for all students as a part of teacher and administrator preparation courses would be helpful, but only addresses new teachers and administrators. Veteran teachers and administrators would need to be provided this training at another level.

Providing this training at the state level could take place through live conferences held regionally. This option, because of the number of people needing to be trained across the state, would be difficult due to time and cost. Another option would be to use

current technology. The IEP team members needing training could be required to read a particular article, to view a PowerPoint presentation, or to participate in a webinar. The disadvantage to this type of training is it limits the amount of interaction participants are able to have with the trainer. Concepts may remain unclear possibly leading to further confusion in the teams' ability to make decisions for assessment for its students with disabilities.

Training for decision making could logistically take place at the local level. A PowerPoint presentation or webinar designed at the state level for consistency could be presented to the staff of schools. District representatives such as the district process coordinators for special education could be present to address questions. Verification of participation of individuals in training could be sent to the state to document certification to be able to make decisions for assessment.

To ensure that the members of IEP teams have the knowledge to be able to make decisions for assessment for students with disabilities, the team members would be required to have consistent training with this information. Currently, there are required trainings. However, the information may not be clear or adequately conveyed in the area of decision-making for assessment. The criteria for the making assessment decisions should be a larger part of training at all levels.

The criteria for making assessment decisions should be made clearer. The literature review failed to find a definition for the term "significant cognitive delay". This was mirrored by the participants in the interviews. These participants indicated their experiences erred on the safe side by only allowing those with the label of Intellectual Disability to participate in alternative assessment. This rule then disallowed those with

other disabilities such as language disorders and autism to have to take the regular MAP test when perhaps they were challenged just as much by their disabilities as their classmates with ID.

One option to remedy this confusion would be to amend the law or criteria. The criteria would need to actually define what a “significant cognitive delay” is related to a diagnostic testing instrument. Perhaps, having an IQ more than two standard deviations below the mean on an individual intelligence could serve as the guideline. This may, however, contradict the stipulation for the number of students that are able to participate in alternative assessment according to NCLB and IDEIA.

The federal law does provide guidelines allowing the lowest two percent to participate in alternative assessment (NCLB, 2001; IDEIA, 2004). Perhaps this guideline could be used to help school districts determine the students eligible for alternative assessment. Since there is no concrete determination such as an actual IQ score, school districts could prioritize their students. IEP teams could send a list of possible candidates for participation in alternative assessment. The list for the school or school district could be put in order of functioning levels. The lowest two percent of students regardless of disability label would then be eligible for participation. The remaining students would then take the regular MAP test. This would allow students with a variety of disabilities to participate in alternative assessment.

As a procedure supporting IEP teams making decisions, an advisory board could be formed. Members of this advisory board would be considered experts in the criteria and process for making this important decision. If an IEP team felt the decision would be difficult, someone from the advisory board could attend the meeting to facilitate a

decision consistent with the expectations of the federal and state polices and with the implementation in the local school district.

Currently alternative assessment is limited only to students that can be described as having a “significant cognitive delay”. Students with severe language or severe social/emotional/behavioral deficits should be considered among the lowest two percent to be a part of the pool of participants in alternative assessment. This would have to be a change or clarification in the standards set by the State of Missouri.

It would also be a recommendation to explore other testing options. A third testing option could be provided at the functioning academic level of the student each year to measure growth. In addition, the types of accommodations allowed could be broadened. Having students take advantage of the accommodations they use on a daily basis could be explored. Examples would be using rephrasing, more oral reading, providing instructions in a variety of ways, and using computer software so the student does not have to write or speak. These accommodations are currently not allowable to provide valid testing results. In order to make these accommodation options valid, the testing manual could provide choices of responses for acceptable rephrasing or instruction options. Also, supervision from the State of Missouri could be provided when students require unusual testing accommodations.

Recommendations for future research follow in the next section.

Future Research

Based on the research and the analysis and interpretation of the data, there are several areas where future research is needed. The following recommendations are submitted. A replication of this study should include a larger sample group especially using the qualitative methods. It was unanticipated the few number of special education

professionals that actually are assigned to make decisions for students with moderate to severe disabilities. The low number of students with moderate to severe disabilities makes it even more challenging to research the practices surrounding the decision-making for assessment for this population of students with disabilities.

This study could be replicated to include a broader range of teaching experiences on the part of the special education professions. While the quantitative portion provided a range of experiences, the qualitative portion was exclusively those participants in the range of 15, 25, and 30 years experience. The viewpoints and experiences of new special education professionals would be valuable to include with that of the veterans.

This study could be replicated to include representation from all targeted district buildings. Although all buildings were represented in the quantitative portion, only three buildings were represented in the qualitative portion. Including the viewpoints of representatives from all buildings would broaden the database to help pinpoint findings.

This study could be replicated to include the exact same type of members in both the quantitative and qualitative portions of information collection. Although the quantitative portion included Special Education Teachers, Regular Education Teachers, Special Education Department Chairs, and building LEAs (Local Education Agency Representatives) such as counselors and principals, the qualitative portion only focused on the information gathered from Special Education Teachers and Special Education Department Chairs. The information and experiences from Regular Education Teachers and building LEAs was not explored using qualitative methods. Seeking members from these groups to participate might prove to deepen the data leading to greater understanding.

Looking outside the boundaries of this study, it would also be helpful to observe the decision-making process during actual IEP meeting for students with moderate to severe disabilities. It would be interesting to examine the practices in other school districts, states, and countries as to the practices of decision-making and testing options for its students with disabilities.

Summary

This study focused on the decision-making process at the local level for students with moderate to severe disabilities for assessment as mandated by the federal provision on the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Information was gathered through surveys distributed to the teachers and administrators contracted during the 2009-10 school year in one of six elementary schools in a targeted school district. Information was also gathered by interviewing people working in these same buildings in the area of special education. The information gathered was then compared to draw conclusions. The results of this study brought about both predicted and surprising results. The amount of participants responding to the survey who stated they had participated in making a decision for assessment for a student with a moderate to severe disability was surprisingly low. This made the sample lower than anticipated.

In the area of training, the involvement among participants was varied, inconsistent and not helpful. This information, while not surprising, reinforced the need for the State of Missouri to put increased and consistent training opportunities into place to train teachers and officials.

In the area of knowledge, only a little more than two thirds of participants knew the criteria for making decisions for testing routes. While this data was reassuring, it was

contradicted by the statements of school officials who felt very few educators had enough knowledge to make decisions for assessment for students with disabilities.

Participants of the student found two of the criteria were confusing. The first is the criterion that allows a student with a significant cognitive delay to participate in MAP Alternative. This criterion was said to be confusing and led to further confusion. Local officials need clearer guidelines from the State of Missouri and the federal government to define the term significant cognitive delay.

In the area of procedures, decisions for assessment were made through discussion by the IEP team. When a decision for alternative assessment could be made, the process was valuable in that it guided instruction. When a decision for regular MAP testing was made, the results were not able to be used to guide instruction. Many times, even with the use of all allowable accommodations, the students could not even complete the test. The participants recommended expanding testing opportunities, making criteria clearer, and expanding allowable accommodations to mirror what students use on a daily basis.

APPENDIX A

Written Consent Form

IMPLEMENTING THE FEDERAL NCLB POLICY AT THE LOCAL LEVEL FOR LEARNERS AFFECTED WITH MODERATE TO SEVERE DISABILITIES: AN ANALYSIS OF EDUCATORS' DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

Thank you for your consideration to participate in this research study. The purpose of this study is to examine the decision making process for the implementation of the federal No Child Left Behind assessment policy at the local level for learners affected with moderate to severe disabilities. This project is being conducted as part of my dissertation for my Doctorate in Education at the University of Missouri.

Data for this study will be collected in two ways. This first will be through anonymous surveys, which will be conducted through third party electronic survey service (i.e. Survey Monkey). The advantage of using this third party is its anonymous response component. This survey will consist of approximately twenty questions, including demographic-type responses, as well as, open ended questions about the participant's experiences with decision-making in their district.

The second method of data collection will be through individual and focus group interviews. Participants will be selected through recommendations via snowball effect and/ or volunteer participation as communicated through the survey (open-ended option for self-nomination). The interviews will last approximately 30-60 minutes no more than fifteen question. Interviews will be audio taped to ensure accurate and consistent data collection and to assist in data analysis. The information I acquire through surveys and interviews will be organized and collected so I can make meaning of the decision-making process for assessment of students with moderate to severe disabilities in the targeted local school district. The names of interview participants will not be shared at anytime. Your participation in this research project is voluntary. There are no foreseeable risks to participants. Your involvement will in no way affect the assessment of your performance in this district. Your willingness to volunteer is entirely up to you. If you wish to stop your participation at any time, you may do so. Your identity will be protected in the reporting of my findings. On the tape and tape transcripts only a number will identify you. All collected data will be kept confidential and will be stored in a locked secure location.

Please do not hesitate to ask questions during the process or after the process is completed. If you have any questions or concerns, please call Monica A. Gillespie 314-265-3880, onebdtchr@aol.com. Additionally you can contact Dr. Juanita M. Simmons, Dissertation Supervisor 573-882-4218, simmonsjm@missouri.edu.

You may contact the Campus Institutional Review Board if you have questions about your rights, concerns, complaints or comments as a research participant. You can contact the Campus Institutional Review Board directly by telephone or email to voice or solicit any concerns, questions, input, or complaints about the research study.

483 McReynolds Hall

Columbia, MO 65211

573-882-9585

E-Mail: umcresearchcirb@missouri.edu

Website: <http://www.research.missouri.edu/cirb/indew.htm>

WRITTEN CONSENT-INDIVIDUAL/FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW

I HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO READ THIS CONSENT FORM, AND I AGREE WITH THE CONDITIONS FOR PARTICIPATION. I understand I will be given a copy of this form for my records. Please check the appropriate line to indicate that you have read and understand this letter.

I consent to participate in the interview. I allow information to become a part of the study.

I would like more information before giving consent.

I do not give consent to participate.

Participant's Signature Date

Participant's Printed Name

APPENDIX B

Written Consent without Signature

IMPLEMENTING THE FEDERAL NCLB POLICY AT THE LOCAL LEVEL FOR LEARNERS AFFECTED WITH MODERATE TO SEVERE DISABILITIES: AN ANALYSIS OF EDUCATORS' DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

Thank you for your consideration to participate in this research study. The purpose of this study is to examine the decision making process for the implementation of the federal No Child Left Behind assessment policy at the local level for learners affected with moderate to severe disabilities. This project is being conducted as part of my dissertation for my Doctorate in Education at the University of Missouri.

Data will be collected through surveys which will be conducted through third party electronic survey service (i.e. Survey Monkey). The advantage of using this third party is its anonymous response component. However, some demographic questions on the survey may make it possible for a respondent to be identified. Any information collected will be kept confidential through the use of coding, passwords, and locked cabinets. This survey will consist of approximately twenty questions, including demographic-type responses, as well as, open ended questions about the participant's experiences with decision-making in their district.

The information I acquire through surveys will be organized and collected so I can make meaning of the decision-making process for assessment of students with moderate to severe disabilities in the targeted local school district. The names participants will not be shared at anytime.

Your participation in this research project is voluntary. There are no foreseeable risks to participants. Your involvement will in no way affect the assessment of your performance in this district. Your willingness to volunteer is entirely up to you. If you wish to stop your participation at any time, you may do so. Your identity will be protected in the reporting of my findings. On the tape and tape transcripts only a number will identify you. All collected data will be kept confidential and will be stored in a locked secure location.

Please do not hesitate to ask questions during the process or after the process is completed. If you have any questions or concerns, please call Monica A. Gillespie 314-265-3880, onebdtchr@aol.com. Additionally you can contact Dr. Juanita M. Simmons, Dissertation Supervisor 573-882-4218, simmonsjm@missouri.edu. You may contact the Campus Institutional Review Board if you have questions about your rights, concerns, complaints or comments as a research participant. You can contact the Campus Institutional Review Board directly by telephone or email to voice or solicit any concerns, questions, input, or complaints about the research study.

483 McReynolds Hall
Columbia, MO 65211
573-882-9585

Email: umccresearchcirb@missouri.edu

Website: <http://www.reasearch.missouri.edu/cirb/index.htm>

Due to the anonymity of the quantitative portion of the data collection process, the consent is embedded in the survey and requires no signature.

APPENDIX C

Decision Making for Students with Moderate to Severe Disabilities

1. I agree to participate in this research study. I understand that I am not paid for my participation. I also understand all responses are kept anonymous from the researcher unless self-disclosed. Additionally, all responses are kept confidential and thus respondent is free from recourse.

_____ Yes, I agree to participate.

_____ No, I do not wish to participate.

2. What position did you hold in the Wentzville R-IV School District during the 2009-2010 school year?

_____ District Level Administrator

_____ Principal

_____ Building Level Special Education Department Chair

_____ School Counselor

_____ Grade Level Teacher

_____ Special Education Teacher

_____ Other

_____ I was not employed in the Wentzville R-IV School District during 2009-2010.

Thank you for your participation.

3. Which school were you assigned during 2009-2010?

_____ Boone Trail

_____ Crossroads

_____ Duello

_____ Heritage Primary-Thank you for your participation.

_____ Heritage Intermediate

_____ Green Tree-Thank you for your participation.

- Peine Ridge
- Prairie View

4. During the 2009-2010 school year, did you work with students in grades three, four, or five?

- Yes
- No-Thank you for your participation.

5. As a special education instructor, how did you achieve your certification?

- through college/university coursework
- through Praxis exam
- currently hold provisional certification
- I am not certified or do not work as a special education instructor

6. How many years have you been employed in education?

- 0-5
- 5-10
- 11-20
- 21-30
- 31+

7. What is your age?

- 20-25
- 26-30
- 31-40
- 41-50
- 51+

8. During the 2009-2010 school year, did you participate as a member of an IEP decision making team?

yes
 no-Thank you for your participation.

9. Students with moderate to severe disabilities can carry a variety of disability labels such as Educational Autism, Intellectual Impairment, Learning Disabilities, Language Impairment, and Emotional Disturbance. These disabilities affect the student's ability to acquire, generalize, apply, and make progress on the general education standards for their chronological grade level. Additionally these students also often require significant supports to make this progress.

Did you participate as a member of an IEP decision making team for a student with a moderate to severe disability during 2009-2010?

yes
 no-Thank you for your participation.

10. Students in the state of Missouri are required to participate in MAP assessment in grades three, four, and five. The students are assessed each year in communication arts and math. Additionally, students are assessed in science during grade five. Some students may meet criteria to participate in these assessments using the MAP-A (alternative) assessment.

Thinking about the "moderate to severely" disabled students you helped make decisions for during the 2009-10 school year, those students participated in:

the MAP test
 the MAP-A test
 some students participated in the MAP and some students participated in the MAP-A test

11. Are you aware of the criteria to be considered when deciding which testing route is most appropriate for a student with a disability?

_____ yes
_____ no

12. What college/university training helped you make decisions for the state-wide assessment for a child or children with moderate to severe disabilities?

13. Describe the training you received to make decisions for student (s) with moderate to severe disabilities for state-wide testing at the state level?

14. Describe the training you received to make decisions for student(s) with moderate to severe disabilities for state-wide testing at the district or building level.

15. Describe the training to make decisions for students with moderate to severe disabilities for state-wide testing you sought out on your own.

16. As a part of each student's IEP, a documentation of the decision for a testing route is included. For example, one student may participate in MAP assessment with a package of accommodations while another student may participate in MAP-A assessment.

Thinking about the decisions you made during the 2009-10 school year for students with moderate to severe disabilities. Describe how this decision was made.

Describe the training to make decisions for student(s) with moderate to severe disabilities for state-wide testing at the state level.

17. How did the curriculum for third, fourth, or fifth grade affect your decision for a testing route for a student (s) with a moderate to severe disability during the 2009-10 school year?

18. How did your building's AYP status affect your decision for a testing route for a student (s) with a moderate to severe disability during the 2009-10 school year?

19. Do you feel the testing instruments used for the student(s) in which you helped make decisions during the 2009-10 school year were the best for that student? Why or why not?

20. What suggestions would you make to decision making teams in the future when making decisions for statewide testing for students with moderate to severe disabilities?

21. What suggestions would you make to federal and state legislators regarding the impact of high stakes testing on students with moderate to severe disabilities?

22. What suggestions would you make to the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education regarding the impact of high stakes testing on students with moderate to severe disabilities?

23. If you would like to provide further information or participate in a focus group interview, please provide contact information-phone number or email address-below.

Thank you for your participation in this research. If you have any questions or comments please contact:

Monica Gillespie, doctoral student

Dr. Juanita Simmons, dissertation supervisor

Dept. of Education

Leadership and Policy Analysis Leadership and Policy Analysis

University of Missouri University of Missouri

onebdtchr@aol.com Simmonsjm@missouri.edu

APPENDIX D



Dr. Terry Adams
Superintendent of Schools

Recipient of the "Distinction in Performance" Award
2005, 2007, 2008 and 2009 -

October 18, 2010

Mrs. Monica Gillespie
3505 Lone Hickory
Troy, MO 63379

Dear Mrs. Gillespie:

Please accept this letter as my approval for you to conduct your doctoral research in the Wentzville School District. After reviewing the outline of your research, as well as, the survey instructions and informed consent letter, please proceed in conducting your study titled "Implementing the Federal NCLB Policy at the Local Level for Learners Afflicted with Moderate to Severe Disabilities: An Analysis of Educators' Decision-making Process".

Please do share your results with the Assistant Superintendent of Special Services Cheri Thurman.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Terry Adams".

Dr. Terry Adams
Superintendent of Schools

cc: Cheri Thurman, Assistant Superintendent of Special Services

Wentzville R-IV School District - Administrative Offices
One Campus Drive • Wentzville, MO 63389 • (636)-327-3800 ext. 27022 • FAX (636)-327-5911
<http://www.wentzville.k-12.mo.us>
terry.adams@wentzville.k-12.mo.us

APPENDIX E

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your background. Have you had the opportunity to work with students with moderate to severe disabilities? Tell me about it.
2. Tell me what you know about assessment for students with moderate to severe disabilities.
3. Tell me about your training at the university level with decision-making for assessment for students with moderate to severe disabilities.
4. Tell me about your training at the state level with decision-making for assessment for students with moderate to severe disabilities.
5. Tell me about your training at the district or building level with decision-making for assessment for students with moderate to severe disabilities.
6. What additional training would help you in the future to make decisions about assessment for students with moderate to severe disabilities?
7. Have you had the opportunity to help make a decision about assessment for a student with a moderate to severe disability? Tell me about your experience.
8. Who participated in the decision? Where was the decision made?
9. If you had to make the decision again, would it be the same?
10. If you could make a recommendation to the school or district regarding assessment for students with moderate to severe disabilities, what would it be?
11. If you could make a recommendation to the state government regarding assessment for students with moderate to severe disabilities, what would it be?
12. If you could make a recommendation to the federal government regarding assessment for students with moderate to severe disabilities, what would it be?

13. Is there anyone you would recommend working for the school district that I could speak with that would bring value to be study?

APPENDIX F

IRB Approval Letter



Campus Institutional Review Board ▪
University of Missouri-Columbia ▪

483 McReynolds Hall
Columbia, MO 65211-
1150
PHONE: (573) 882-
9585
FAX: (573) 884-0663

IRB #

1183459

Project Title

Implementing the Federal NCLB Assessment Policy at
the Local Level for Learners Affected with Moderate to
Severe Disabilities: An Analysis of Educators' Decision-
Making Process

Approval Date

Dec 15, 2010

Expiration Date

Dec 15, 2011

Investigators

Gillespie, Monica Antoinette

Project Status

Active - Open to Enrollment

Dear Investigator:

Your research proposal involving human subjects was approved by the Campus IRB. Your project falls under the following Expedited category(s), unless it was reviewed and approved by the convened board:

45 CFR 46.110.a(f)(6)
45 CFR 46.110.a(f)(7)

Your IRB approval for this project will expire on December 15, 2011. If you intend to continue research activities after the expiration date, you must complete and submit a Continuing Review Status Report for review at least 30 days prior to the expiration date. If the project is completed prior to the expiration date, you must complete and submit the Completion/Withdrawal Report.

The Campus IRB Approval is CONTINGENT upon your agreement to:

- (1) Adhere to all University of Missouri IRB Policies.
- (2) MODIFICATIONS: Submit an Amendment Form for any proposed changes to a previously approved project prior to initiation of those changes.
- (3) RECORD INSPECTION: The Campus IRB reserves the right to inspect your records to ensure compliance with federal regulations. You are expected to maintain copies of all pertinent information related to the study, included but not limited to, video and audio tapes, instruments, copies of written informed consent agreements, and any other supportive documents for a period of seven (7) years from the date of completion of your research.
- (4) REPORTING: Promptly report to our office any unanticipated problem, deviation, or noncompliance.
- (5) CONSENT: Use the IRB approved consent document unless the consent process was waived. This can be found in document storage and labeled as approved with the approval date in the footer.

Type of Consent Approved:

Waiver of Documentation
Written Consent

If you have any questions or concerns, you may call the IRB office at 573-882-9585 or e-mail us at umcresearchcirb@missouri.edu.

Thank you,
The Campus Institutional Review Board

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VITA

Monica Antoinette Day Gillespie was born December 24, 1966 in Oxnard, California to Robert “Bob” Eugene Day and Veronica Lopez Day. She attended elementary schools in California before moving to Missouri in the summer of 1975. She grew up in Troy, Missouri with her sister, Melanie attending Claude Brown Elementary School, Troy Middle School, before graduating in 1985 from Buchanan High School. She received a Bachelor of Science in Education in 1988 from Missouri Baptist University. She went on to earn a Master of Arts degree in Special Education from Lindenwood University in 1998 and a Master of Science in Education in Educational Administration in 2005 from Missouri Baptist University. She completed the degree Doctorate in Education in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis from the University of Missouri in May 2011.

Mrs. Gillespie has completed 22 years teaching students with disabilities. Her experiences have allowed her to work with students in all ranges of the spectrum from minimal to moderate to severe. The students have been challenged with emotional disturbance, learning disabilities, language impairments, intellectual disabilities, autism, traumatic brain injury, attentional disabilities, and multiple disabilities. The students attended classes in programs ranging from separate schools for students with disabilities like theirs to full inclusion programs in their local school. She has spent half of her years working with students in elementary grades and half working with students in middle school and high school. She currently works for the Wentzville R-IV School District as an Inclusion Specialist in an elementary school.

In addition, Mrs. Gillespie has had the opportunity to share with adults best practices in working with individuals with disabilities by working as an adjunct instructor for Missouri Baptist University for the past 11 years. During this time she has taught six classes a year for students interested in certification to teach Cross-Categorical Special Education.

Mrs. Gillespie has provided professional development on best practice strategies for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders, ADHD, and behavior challenges as well as service learning as a strategy to help individuals remain engaged in their learning environment. She hopes to continue providing best practice instruction to students with disabilities. In addition, she hopes to provide leadership to others in providing best practice instruction to help make individuals challenged with disabilities the best they can be.

Mrs. Gillespie lives in Troy, Missouri with her four heroes: husband of 22 years, Joe, and three children, Christian, 16, SamiJo, 16, and Myles, 3. She spends her spare time attending her children's sporting events including her son's Trojan football games and wrestling matches and her daughter's Special Olympic basketball games and swimming meets as well as black belt Taekwondo classes and summer league swimming. Her son Myles will join the family's tradition as a sports enthusiast when he meets minimal age requirements. She is an avid Tiger football fan.