

ADEQUATE YEARLY PROGRESS, SPECIAL EDUCATION,
AND STUDENT SUCCESS: CAN THEY ALL CO-EXIST?

by

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ABSTRACT

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This study investigated the ways that the disaggregation of Illinois State Achievement Test (ISAT) scores has impacted the progress and performance of students with disabilities within two central Illinois counties, discovered the interventions taken with this subgroup, and explored the ethical implications of these interventions. The participants were middle school special education and general education teachers, administrators, and support staff. A mixed-methods format with a predominant qualitative approach was used. The needs of students with disabilities were addressed by implementing co-teaching, inclusion, and collaboration between special education and general education teachers. Schools with successful subgroups of students with disabilities also used data-driven instruction, taught test-taking skills, and embedded ISAT practice in daily instruction. Most respondents had no ethical concerns.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The United States has always valued education and to varying degrees, has valued accountability within the educational system. In early America, schools were an integral part of a community and often dictated the economic status of the area (Morris, 1971). Communities carefully watched the teaching and student learning in their schools. This led to the educational accountability movement which can be traced back to the late 1800s (Hansen, 1993). The first official federal agency to deal with the education of the nation's children and provide greater accountability of the schools was the Department of Education created in 1867. This department later became the U.S. Office of Education (Hansen; Wynne, 1972).

Partly due to the federal government's involvement in education, the organization and operation of schools during the early 1900s had a great emphasis on practical and immediately useful education (Callahan, 1962). Joseph Rice developed an assessment instrument that served as a catalyst for future testing instruments. Schools began to look at measurable 'scientific' data and standardized testing soon appeared. This testing served to measure, identify, and sort students. World War I reinforced the concept of testing and sorting when the army used standardized tests to identify individual talents (Wynne, 1972).

As change continued throughout the century, the 1970s witnessed a time of great change for assessment and accountability as well as education in general. Wide-spread

testing models with “complex technical accounting systems” (Hansen, 1993, historical context, ¶ 1) developed. The California Achievement Test, Iowa Tests of Basic Skills, American College Testing (ACT), and Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) became common occurrences in the American public education system. But, not all students were included in the testing models. Students who were part of the special education system were excluded from standardized assessments due to the special laws governing students with disabilities.

With the passage of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (PL 94-142) in 1975, special education flourished. The PL 94-142 had, in effect, created a separate educational system for students with disabilities, complete with separate classes, separate teachers, and separate assessment and accountability measures. Through continual revision, reauthorization, and expansion of PL 94-142, new legislation, known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), became the cornerstone of special education policy (Vaughn, Bos, & Schumm, 2006). The revision of IDEA in 2004 expanded the concept of students with disabilities participation in the general education curriculum and their participation in state and local assessments. While IDEA 2004 focused on students with disabilities, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 focused on overall school accountability and adequate yearly progress (AYP, Elliot & Thurlow, 2006). NCLB required that schools be held accountable for overall student progress and held accountable for each student subgroup’s progress. Subgroups include ethnic, racial, economic, and ability groups including students with disabilities (Northern Illinois University, 2006).

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to investigate the ways that the disaggregation of ISAT scores has impacted the progress and performance of students with disabilities within two counties in central Illinois, discover the actions or interventions and the effects of those actions currently in place or being considered with this student subgroup, and to explore the ethical implications of these actions and interventions. Many schools in Illinois have been classified as poor performing schools which leads to increased public scrutiny and increased state and federal sanctions. Many times the schools' classification is due to continual poor performance on the Illinois State Achievement Test (ISAT) by one or more subgroups within their schools. One of the major poor performing subgroups is the group of students with disabilities.

Background

Assessment and accountability are common words in today's educational system (Kowalski, 2005; Shriner & Ganguly, 2007; Stuart, Keene, & Karidis, 2007; Yell, Katsiyannas, & Shiner, 2006). The California Achievement Test, Iowa Tests of Basic Skills, ACT, SAT, state achievement tests, local achievement tests, content knowledge tests, and progress monitoring tests all contribute to the assessment and accountability of today's schools. Many school districts devote more than two months toward the preparation and then administration of state and local assessments (Santman, 2002). While many students demonstrate successful acquisition of academic skills through the standardized testing process (Defur, 2002), many do not (Johnson, 2005). When the unsuccessful students have been previously classified as students with disabilities, their failure creates an added dilemma (Bruins, 2005; Simpson, Gong, & Marion, 2006;

Wakeman, Browder, Meier, & McColl, 2007; Yell et al.). Their failure to demonstrate learning on the federally mandated state standardized tests can cause their school to be classified and reported as failing (Illinois State Board of Education, 2008b).

The current accountability movement through the enactment of the NCLB Act has called for *all* children to be proficient readers and mathematicians by 2014 (NCLB, 2002). The NCLB Act has not clearly defined the term ‘proficient’ (Hoff, 2007; Linn, 2005), nor has it clearly stated how *all* children will be held to the same standards when *all* children do not have the same capabilities (Bruins, 2005; Defur, 2002; Gamble-Risley, 2006; Linn).

Also, as the states’ benchmark goals increase toward the 100% proficiency level, many schools, especially those with significantly reliable students with disabilities subgroups, were classified as failing. Yearly increasing benchmark goals, or AYP, must be reached each year (Linn 2005; Porter, Linn, & Trimble, 2005; Yell et al., 2006). AYP is reported for each district, school, and each statistically reliable subgroup within the schools. If a statistically reliable subgroup does not meet the benchmark goal, the school is reported as not meeting AYP. This leads to a publicized classification as a failing school.

Based on the ISAT scores, many schools in Illinois have a majority of students who meet or exceed the state standards for academic achievement. Some schools have a statistically reliable subgroup of students with disabilities who have met the state standards and some do not (Northern Illinois University, 2006). Due to low achieving subgroups of students with disabilities, many schools did not achieve AYP and were classified as failing schools.

As schools scrutinize all aspects of their organizational structure, administration and teaching, ethical standards begin to blur (Booher-Jennings, 2006; Foley, 2006; Richardson, Wheelless, & Cunningham, 2008). Some schools have segregated students with disabilities from the general educational environment (Kowalski, 2005). Many times principals are faced with difficult and ethical decisions when trying to meet AYP targets (Sorrentino & Zirkel, 2004). Some schools have met AYP standards without having to report the students with disabilities subgroup due to low subgroup size. Because establishing the subgroup sizes is a state responsibility, Olson (2005) found that a wide range of subgroup size exists in the United States. This adds to the national confusion surrounding the reporting of student scores. The ethical issues surrounding accountability and the reporting of achievement data abound.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. In what ways has the disaggregation of ISAT scores impacted the progress and performance of students with disabilities?
2. What actions or interventions related to students with disabilities are currently in place or being considered to maintain or improve AYP by schools in two counties in central Illinois and what are the effects of these actions or interventions?
3. What are the ethical implications of the actions or interventions currently in place or being considered for the students with disabilities subgroup?

Description of Terms

Academic early warning. Schools placed on Academic Early Warning are those that do not make AYP for two consecutive years; Illinois requires a revised school

improvement plan and will assign an external support team to work with educators and assist with school and district analysis; extended day and year programs are optional.

Academic watch. Schools placed on Academic Watch are those that have failed to make AYP for two consecutive years after being placed on Academic Early Warning (or four annual calculations of missing AYP); Illinois requires a revised school improvement plan and will assign an external support team to work with educators and assist with school and district analysis; extended day and year programs are optional; the State Superintendent will appoint a School Improvement Panel for each school in this status.

Accountability. A policy of holding schools and teachers accountable for students' academic progress by linking such progress with funding for salaries, maintenance, etc.

Assessment. The act of judging or assessing a person or situation.

Adequate yearly progress. Represents the annual academic performance targets in reading and math that the state, school districts, and schools must reach to be considered on track for 100% proficiency by school year 2013-14.

Benchmarks. A standard by which something can be measured or judged; to measure according to specified standards in order to compare it with and improve one's product.

Ethics. The rules of conduct recognized in respect to a particular class of human actions or a particular group.

ISAT (Illinois Standards Achievement Test). A test that measures individual student achievement relative to the Illinois Learning Standards (ILS).

Safe Harbor. If any subgroup can reduce the performance gap (the difference between the percentage meets and exceeds from the prior year and 100%) by 10%, safe harbor has been reached.

Significantly reliable subgroup. Subgroup of 45 or more students that counts for AYP; to ensure confidentiality in reporting, subgroups of less than 10 are not reported.

Standards-based education. Targets specific goals or requirements for an educational program area that is observable and measurable.

Subgroup. A subordinate group; a division of a group.

Significance of the Study

The NCLB Act has pushed states to reassess their accountability and assessment procedures. Many states are making progress but improvement is still needed (Wanker & Christie, 2005). According to ISAT results, many Illinois schools are not meeting the AYP targets, and therefore, have been placed on the academic warning or academic watch lists. Many schools have been added to the academic warning or watch lists because of their students with disabilities subgroup (Northern Illinois University, 2006). With schools facing increased sanctions and the possibility of decreased federal revenue, ways to improve the performance of all subgroups must be found. Sunderman, Kim, and Orfield (2005) conducted research focused on racial and ethnic subgroups. Towles-Reeves, Kampfer-Bohach, Garrett, Kearns, and Grisham-Brown (2006) researched the impact of NCLB policy with students who are deaf and blind. Wynn (2008) studied the effects of mandated testing on special education teachers' morale. Wilson (2008) investigated the response of high-performing middle schools toward their poor performing subgroup of students with disabilities. Styron and Nyman (2008) researched

high and low-performing middle schools to determine differences in instructional practices. As suggested by Kowalski (2005), more research is needed that focused on the interventions used to improve the performance of students with disabilities.

The ethical standards of education begin to blur when systemic changes occur within organizational structure, teaching, and large scale assessment (Booher-Jennings, 2006; Foley, 2006; Kraft, 2007; Richardson et al., 2008). Actions and interventions with the students with disabilities subgroup are being considered or have been taken, but did school personnel consider the ethical issues associated with those actions and interventions? More research is needed to discover the ethical implications of current actions and interventions.

Process to Accomplish

A mixed method research design was the selected methodology for this study. Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2006) defined mixed method research as one that combines “quantitative and qualitative approaches by essentially mixing both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study” (p. 490). The quantitative and qualitative data were gathered simultaneously through an online survey with open-ended and closed-ended questions. Creswell (2003) defined this research strategy as a concurrent nested strategy. “The concurrent nested model can be identified by its use of one data collection phase, during which both quantitative and qualitative data are collected simultaneously. ... A nested approach has a predominant method that guides the project” (p. 218). The predominant method of this study was the qualitative approach of gathering data, which were gained through descriptive survey questions and interviews. The additional interview phase was conducted and further qualitative data were gathered. The collection

and analysis of quantitative data was given less priority and therefore “embedded, or nested, within the predominant method” (Creswell, p. 218). The integration of both types of data occurred during data collection, data analysis, and interpretation. Creswell described the mixing of data in the collection stage as “combining open-ended questions on a survey with closed-ended questions” (p. 212). He further explained the mixed-method at the data analysis and interpretation stages as “transforming qualitative themes or codes into quantitative numbers and comparing that information with quantitative results in an interpretation section of the study” (p. 212). The advantage of using a concurrent nested strategy is that both quantitative and qualitative data are gathered during one data collection phase and the researcher “can gain perspectives from the different types of data” (p. 218).

The relevance of this study was to the researcher and those people affected by the disaggregation of ISAT subgroup scores. The actions and interventions taken in response to the changes in the reporting of student progress were relevant to the researcher, the participants, and those interested in the performance of students with disabilities.

Through survey and interview questions this mixed-methods study explored the instructional and organizational strategies, teaching practices, or interventions, in schools with successful and unsuccessful students with disabilities subgroups as determined by ISAT data from the years 2006, 2007, and 2008. The research population and collection process for question one considered the ways that the disaggregation of ISAT subgroup scores has impacted the progress and performance of the students with disabilities subgroup. These data were gathered through survey questions. The collection of data regarding the actions and interventions taken with the students with disabilities subgroup

and the effects of these actions and interventions was consistent with research question two and gathered through survey questions and then more in-depth interview questions. Survey questions and in-depth interview questions were also consistent with research question three, the ethical implications of the actions and interventions taken with the students with disabilities subgroup. The population of this study was middle schools with grades six through eight within two central Illinois counties that reported a significant subgroup of students with disabilities. The 26 middle schools were identified using the Interactive Illinois Report Card, a website constructed and maintained by Northern Illinois University and the state of Illinois. The data were collected from March to June 2009.

Survey and interview methodology within the mixed-method realm of research design was employed for all three research questions. Survey questions served as a preliminary data gathering instrument and helped identify participants willing to be included in a more in-depth follow-up interview. Contact people included district superintendents, special education directors, principals, special education classroom teachers, and or support staff. The participants were called or emailed and received a letter explaining the study. They were asked to complete an online survey. The survey addressed school demographics, AYP status, efforts toward maintaining or improving AYP status, consideration of ethical implications toward actions related to the ISAT process, and willingness to participate in personal interviews. Interviews were conducted to gather more in-depth information about key survey responses related to research questions two and three. The information gathered through surveys and interview transcripts was triangulated and analyzed using a coding process based on commonalities,

patterns, and regularities within the data. The emerging coded themes were used to create categories based on the participant responses to the research questions (Creswell, 2003; Gay et al., 2006; Villa, Thousand, Nevin, & Liston, 2005). An open coding method followed by thematic coding to determine emergent themes was used in the analysis of the qualitative data. Research questions two and three were also analyzed using quantitative measures. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) test was used to analyze data.

This study serves to expand the research knowledge base related to the actions or interventions taken to maintain or improve the progress and performance of students with disabilities. “NCLB assumes that there are valid, reliable research-based instructional practices that can eradicate the learning disabilities of students with disabilities, and that school districts have disseminated those practices to educators in ways that will support their use in classrooms” (Allbritten, Mainzer, & Zeigler, 2004, p. 159). Several researchers have called for more research in the area of this study. Foley (2006) recommended that districts that have successfully met AYP targets and districts that have not met AYP targets be studied to find common or different characteristics. Schulte and Villwock (2004) reported that the inclusion of students with disabilities on high-stakes testing may be desirable because it “would allow systematic investigation of the characteristics of schools that are associated with positive outcomes for students with disabilities” (p. 109). Lastly, Hansen (1993) reported that “in order for accountability to result in educational improvements, it must be linked through research to effective instructional practices” (Discussion, ¶ 4). This study will further the research base as suggested by these researchers.

The researcher of this study was a classroom teacher employed by a school district in one of the counties researched. She did not directly contribute her experiences to the collected information but formed naturalistic generalizations (Robson, 2002). Creswell (2003) further explained naturalistic generalization as “a propositional generalization – the researcher’s summary of interpretations and claims” (p. 133) that began with the development of themes and categories into patterns or generalizations.

CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The people of the United States have always valued education and to varying degrees, the accountability of education. Our educational system began small, housed in individuals' homes (Morris, 1971) but has developed into a national system implemented according to individual state's directives. What began as one educational system developed into two, general and special education, and continually struggles to find a balance which best educates all children. Laws have influenced both general and special education with mandated requirements (Callahan, 1962; No Child Left Behind Act, 2001; Ravitch, 2005). Educational accountability began early in our history and continues to be a focus of national attention (Elliot & Thurlow). Early educational assessment instruments were used to measure students' mastery of basic math and spelling skills. But with the development of standardized testing, a new method emerged to measure, identify, and sort students (Wynne, 1972). This identification and sorting led to the specification of subgroups within the general student population (Elliot & Thurlow, 2006). The exclusion and subsequent inclusion of these student subgroups has had a major impact on the public reporting of progress (Kowalski, 2005; Wilson, 2008). With current emphasis on adequate yearly progress and the focus on assessment results, many ethical issues emerged. Questions of number manipulation, teaching to the test, and

teacher and administrative cheating surfaced as questionable practices (Foley, 2006; Nichols & Berliner, 2007; Petress, 2006).

Historical Background

Education

The early European settlers established schools in colonists' homes. Through dame schools, parents were accountable for their children's learning; for without education, the emerging society would not survive (Morris, 1971). Dame schools evolved into one-room schoolhouses, which were often the focal point of growing communities. Over time, one-room schoolhouses evolved into community or neighborhood schools and as our country expanded and communities flourished, our public education system evolved. The quality of a community's developing public education system often dictated the economic status of the area (Morris). Therefore, the community carefully watched the teaching and the students' learning of their school. A teacher was often retained or dismissed based on the level of student performance. In other words, the community held the teacher accountable.

Accountability

The idea of accountability did not begin with the United States public education system. People have always been accountable to someone or to something.

Accountability is not new ... for we have always been accountable to some ... constituted authority. One of the most revered teachers, Socrates, was accountable unto death for his teachings. The sophists were accountable to their students ... The first universities were ...accountable to the student body and the local community. Today, the classroom teacher is legally accountable to the local

school board and morally accountable to self, profession, community, and nation.
(Morris, 1971, pp. 18-19)

The educational accountability movement on a national level can be traced back to the late 1800s (Hansen, 1993). The first official federal agency to deal with the education of the nation's children and provide greater accountability of the schools was the Department of Education created in 1867. This department later became the U.S. Office of Education (Hansen; Wynne, 1972). During the 1800s, several men were instrumental in the educational reform and accountability movement. Henry Barnard, a school official in Connecticut in the early 1830s and 1840s, had great concerns about the literacy of the nation. Barnard personally visited President Van Buren to discuss his concerns. Due to Barnard's persistence, the 1840 national census contained literacy questions and with the data from this census, the Department of Education began to address the educational needs of the nation. Barnard was a firm believer in data; better data would provide the key to educational improvement (Wynn). Another early educational reformer, Horace Mann, collected data on the Boston schools. His testing revealed what he suspected: students were not learning (Wynne). His findings were not very popular, and therefore, not widely publicized.

In the early 1900s, the administrative focus of education began to change from a scholarly pursuit toward a more businesslike approach. The organization and operation of schools had more emphasis on practical and immediately useful education (Callahan, 1962). Several influential men in education throughout the late 1800s, such as Horace Mann and Henry Barnard, switched their identity focus from the scholars to the successful businessmen. Schools' curriculum also began a shift from scholarly to

practical. According to Callahan, the educational emphasis of this era was on learning useful life skills and basic business skills; in other words, the power of earning instead of the power of learning. The men of great economic influence, Andrew Carnegie, Rockefeller, and Vanderbilt, were also very vocal about the source of their success, energy, initiative, and good old common sense – not book learning (Callahan). The shift toward imitating business processes led education on a path toward scientifically measured efficiency and stronger accountability. Project Talent, a federal project sponsored by the U.S. Office of Education in 1959, signaled a change in the course of accountability (Hansen, 1993). Before Project Talent the focus of accountability had been educational inputs – cost per student, teacher qualifications, and hours of instruction, but this large-scale research study focused on educational output – student performance. The Project Talent study drew national attention to the underachievement of students from low socio-economic families. On a national scale, accountability with an assessment component began to be utilized “as a tool for educational reform” (Hansen, historical context, ¶ 1).

Assessment

In the early 1900s Joseph Rice developed an assessment instrument which measured children’s math and spelling skills. The test results were so poor and he was so critical of the educational system that his work was not widely discussed. But, his assessment instrument did serve as a catalyst for future assessment instruments. The importance of assessment emerged in the United States’ educational system in the 1960s. Nichols and Berliner (2007) reported that “using testing for making important decisions about students, teachers, and administrators in the elementary and secondary schools” (p.

3) started with the passage of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act. This Act led the educational system toward making decisions based on assessments. The focus on minimum competency for American students soon led to the current focus on standards-based achievement. With standards-based learning came the legislative call for testing to measure students' achievement.

The 1970s continued to be a time of great change for assessment. Wide-spread testing models with "complex technical accounting systems" (Hansen, 1993, historical context, ¶ 1) were developed. The California Achievement Test, Iowa Tests of Basic Skills, American College Testing (ACT), and Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) became common assessment occurrences in the American public educational system. But, not all students were included in the testing models. Students with IEPs and educated within the special education system were excluded from the standardized assessment process. Therefore their educational progress was not included in schools' assessment results.

Special Education

The education of individuals with special needs has not always been a priority of the United States educational system. Early in our nation's history people that were 'different', people with blindness, deafness, or mental or physical impairments were hidden away by their families or institutionalized (Winzer, 1993). The educational system made no effort to include them in school. But strong parental demands and social pressure during the 1950s and 1960s prompted government intervention. Parents demanded that their children with mental retardation have the same opportunities as ordinary people. They wanted their children out of institutions and in their local school districts (Gloeckler & Daggett, 2004; Winzer). The politicians also began to focus on the

needs of people with disabilities. President John F. Kennedy gave special education a huge jump-start due in part, to his sister's mental retardation. President Kennedy pushed for increased research about mental retardation and provided grant money to universities for improvements in teacher training (Winzer). In 1963, President John F. Kennedy started The Division of Handicapped Children and Youth to benefit people with disabilities. With the increased attention of the federal government on education changes in public laws began to occur. Public laws were passed that funded educational research, required buildings be accessible for the handicapped, defined the term learning disabilities, and gave categorical assistance to programs for students with special needs (Gearheart, 1974). The classification and labeling of students became the basis of the categorical special education system "and enabled school personnel to secure funding and to provide special education services to exceptional students" (Ysseldyke & Algozzine, 1990). But the 'separate but equal' idea was not the answer that many thought it would be. Segregated classes became a dumping ground for any student who didn't fit the expectations of general education teachers. Special classes were filled with the mentally retarded, mentally ill, physically disabled, behavioral disturbed, stutterers, and those with learning problems. Untrained teachers taught many of these classes and provided low quality education, which cast a stigma on the children and the special education program (Ysseldyke & Algozzine).

Categorical special education began to change with the passage of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (PL 94-142) in 1975 (Vaughn et al., 2006). This law mandated that children with disabilities receive a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment. It gave parents the right to confidentiality and to be part

of the development of an individualized education plan (IEP) for their child. Special education flourished under this new law and became a mainstay in public education. PL 94-142 had, in effect, created a separate educational system for students with disabilities, complete with separate classes, separate teachers, sometimes separate facilities, and unique laws. Defur (2002) stated that “special education of the 1970s focused on educational access and equality for students with disabilities. These policies reformed how public schools included students with disabilities. In retrospect, a free, appropriate public education was defined as attendance in public schools” (p. 204). Research and changing laws continued to shape special education in the 1980s and the validity of a separate system for students with disabilities began to be questioned. In 1986, legislators passed the Regular Education Initiative (REI) partly because “there is little evidence that students placed in special education benefit from the services they receive, [that] in fact those services may limit life opportunities” (Ysseldyke & Algozzine, 1990, p. 271). Winzer (1993) also supported this statement through his research. He found that children did not fare any better in the segregated classroom than they had with the general population. REI specified that the general education system must assume the primary responsibility for educating all children within the public school system and pushed to blend the two separate parallel educational systems of the PL 94-142 era. The ultimate goal of the REI was to create a “unified, integrated approach and policy” (Lowenthal, 1990, p. 275) for education.

Educational change for students with disabilities continued with the revision, reauthorization, and expansion of PL 94-142. In 1990, this legislation became known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Through several more revisions,

one in 1997 and most recently in 2004, IDEA had become the cornerstone of special education policy (Vaughn et al., 2006). While the federal government focused on regulating special education policy, researchers and educators alike were concerned with the achievement and accountability for progress of students with disabilities.

Accountability for students with disabilities was based on each student's individual and unique needs and delineated in his or her IEP. Defur (2002) reported that although progress and accountability were to be products of each student's IEP, substantial improvement in achievement had not been achieved since the passage of special education laws. Defur stated:

IDEA '97 asserted that the educational progress of students with disabilities had been limited by low academic expectations that in turn narrowed student access to the general curriculum. Furthermore, IDEA '97 indicated that participation in state accountability systems (assessment) was the key to increasing participation in the general curriculum and raising the academic expectations for all students with disabilities. (p. 204)

IDEA '97 also addressed the concept of instruction based on data. "Assessment data will be used to make improved individual instructional program decisions" (Defur, p. 204). As educators have access to more data the legislation's intent was that educators would use that data to drive instruction. But data can also be misused. Pullin (2005) stated "as the stakes associated with standard-based testing increase for students and for institutions and educators, the uses and misuses of data concerning students with disabilities become more significant" (p. 215). The pressures of reaching annual benchmark goals or local achievement goals created opportunities for misuse of data.

The IDEA 2004 revision focused on the rights of individual students with an emphasis on their access to the general education curriculum and participation in state and district assessments. No longer was it acceptable for school districts to exclude students with special needs from the general assessment system. States were required to report publicly the assessment result data for all students, those with and without disabilities (Elliot & Thurlow, 2006).

NCLB and Special Education

The national spotlight focused on education with the adoption of the NCLB Act in 2002. “NCLB was motivated by a widely shared desire to improve the education of the nation’s youth” (Linn, Baker, & Betebenner, 2002, p. 15). Duran (2005) stated, “NCLB has been described as an attempt to place control of public education in the hands of the federal government. ... [and] to establish national policy clearly documenting a genuine national commitment to improving academic achievement for at-risk students” (p. 78-79). McDermott (2003) reported, “although the extent to which NCLB extends federal authority over public education is unprecedented, in general the law continues rather than departs from the general direction of federal education policy of the 1990s” (p. 154). NCLB supported the requirements of IDEA for students with special needs but added new components for everyone, accountability, and adequate yearly progress (Elliot & Thurlow, 2006). Linn et al. stated that the NCLB accountability requirements were much more rigorous than most states had in place before the law was enacted. Each state started the accountability process at different proficiency levels but all were expected to have 100% of their students proficient in math and reading by 2014. “In keeping with the NCLB emphasis on closing the achievement gap, the academic achievement goals must

be met not just for the total group of students considered as a whole but for each ... subgroup” (Porter et al., 2005, p. 32). Subgroups include ethnic, racial, economic, and ability groups including students with disabilities (Northern Illinois University, 2006). The government’s attention on the inclusion of all students was monumental because historically the United States’ educational system had excluded many students from standardized testing. Linn (2005) hailed NCLB as “praiseworthy for the special attention it gives to improve learning for children who have been ignored or left behind in the past” (¶ 1).

The intent in including students with disabilities as part of the entire student body and as a separate subgroup was twofold: (a) to protect children with disabilities from being excluded from accountability systems that provide valuable information to parents and educators and (b) to ensure that schools receive credit for the progress of all students. (Yell et al., 2006, p. 35)

With the inclusion of students with disabilities in the NCLB legislation, educators expressed concern about the academic expectations for this subgroup (Booher-Jennings, 2006; Linn; Schulte & Villwock, 2004; Wakeman et al., 2007). Gloeckler and Daggett (2004), the executive director of the Special Education Institute and president of the International Center for Leadership in Education respectively, formulated a reason for this concern. When the laws and expectations for students with disabilities were formulated in the early 1970s, the population was mostly a homogeneous group. “The driving force behind the landmark 1975 legislation had been parents of children with mental retardation or multiple disabilities, while the population receiving special education [today] is primarily identified as learning disabled, emotionally disturbed, and

speech impaired” (p. 1). Therefore, the student population has dramatically changed to include students with more academic capabilities but the academic expectations have not kept pace with the changes (Gloeckler & Daggett).

AYP and Students with Disabilities Subgroup

The NCLB Act established the concept of adequate yearly progress (AYP). As Hoxby (2005) stated, “AYP is the heart of NCLB” (p. 93). “The goal of AYP is to ensure that every school is on a trajectory such that all of its students will reach proficient achievement in a finite and relatively short number of years” (Hoxby, p. 81). That finite number of years is the school year 2013-2014. One term in the NCLB legislation that led to confusion, misleading data, and disagreement was the word *proficient*. Lawmakers did not define this term and it has been debated and defined in numerous ways. Hoff (2007) reported that US Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings expressed that proficient should reflect grade-level expectations. Others have stated that proficient should match the standards established by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), which is a time-honored test with rigorous clear proficiency levels (GAO, 2005; Ha, 2006; Stoneberg, 2006). Still others have suggested that proficiency should be based on real-world standards; proficient should mean students are “prepared for either college or the workforce” (Hoff, p. 23). In spite of the controversy surrounding the term *proficient*, states have established their proficiency standards. It is clear that the AYP targets must lead to the 100% proficient rate by the year 2014 (NCLB, 2001, PL 107-110).

Porter et al. (2005) explained the AYP requirements very clearly; “In order for a school to meet AYP requirements in a given year, students in the school must achieve at or above that state-established annual measureable objective that year in both

mathematics and reading/English language arts” (p. 32). Because AYP targets are applicable for all students the poor performance of a reported subgroup is one of the major reasons for schools not meeting AYP requirements. “One student subgroup’s poor test scores could cause a school’s failure” (Million, 2004, p. 32). Pullin (2005) stated that “an otherwise high-performing school can be deemed low-performing by missing AYP solely on the basis of the scores of students with disabilities” (p. 215). Richburg (2007) conducted a study in South Carolina that “assess[ed] the impact of including students with disabilities as a separate subgroup when determining AYP” (p. 6). Richburg found the students with disabilities subgroup was directly responsible for the schools’ failure to meet AYP targets. Bruins (2005) researched the “implications of including students with disabilities in AYP calculations” (p. 6). Similar to Richburg’s findings, Bruins found students with disabilities in 8th and 10th grade largely impacted the AYP of the schools researched. Little impact was noted when the students with disabilities scores were included in the overall school scores; but when the subgroup scores were reported separately, the schools’ AYP was negatively impacted.

Wilson (2008) also researched the impact of the students with disabilities subgroup on schools’ AYP. But unlike Richburg and Bruins, Wilson researched how schools were reacting to their failure to meet AYP. She stated, “an emerging area of failure is that of the high-performing school in which a particular subgroup has failed to meet AYP targets” (p. 1). She discovered how school personnel had changed to address their AYP failure. Wilson reported that relationships between general and special education teachers changed due to their schools’ status of failing schools. The teachers reported that they recognized a need for collaboration and respected each other’s

expertise. Teachers also realized that they needed to work together to provide appropriate education for both general education students and students with disabilities. Wilson found that professional development with a focus on the implementation of collaboration was needed to meet the needs of students with disabilities.

Richburg (2007) reported that subgroup size is a factor when considering AYP. States do not have a uniform subgroup size and are allowed to exclude subgroup scores if the number of students is statistically unreliable. Porter et al. (2005) reported that “states were allowed to specify the minimum number of students in a subgroup” (p. 33). Porter et al. found that 13 states had subgroup sizes of 25 or less, 13 states set the minimum number of students at 30, 14 states set the subgroup size at 40 students and 6 states had a minimum size of 50 or more. Two states, one being Illinois, set the statistically reliable subgroup size at 45 students.

Many states re-examined their instruction and assessment practices due to the goal of 100% student proficiency in math and reading by 2014. According to Porter et al. (2005), “states are free to design their own assessments of student achievement, though they must provide evidence that those assessments are aligned to their challenging academic content standards” (p. 38). One early concern of educators was that AYP did not “follow the progress of cohorts of students over time” (Wanker & Christie, 2005, p. 71). This concern has been partially addressed by Illinois. The total school and subgroup scores are reported yearly with the ability to track data for each grade and subgroup over multiple years (Northern Illinois University, 2006).

Another aspect of AYP that impacts the reporting of subgroup scores is safe harbor. Schools not meeting AYP requirements can still qualify as meeting AYP **if** they

meet the safe harbor provisions (Illinois State Board of Education, 2008a). Linn (2005) described the conditions of safe harbor as “a) the percentage of students who score below proficient level is decreased by 10% from the year before, and b) there is improvement for that subgroup on other indicators” (§ Safe Harbor 1). The safe harbor provision was designed to protect very low performing schools. Educators were concerned that schools performing far below the established state standards would be “unable to make the significant progress needed to reach that bar in just one year” (Weiner & Hall, 2004, p. 15). The safe harbor provision has helped schools reach AYP even though they remain below the state goal (Northern Illinois University, 2006).

Interventions for Poor Performing Subgroups

Attention to Curriculum and Instruction

To reach AYP and ultimately the 100% proficiency level, many schools focus on their curriculum and instruction. “If curriculum, instruction, and relevant learning become the focus, the tests will take care of themselves” (Daggett, 2005, p.1). While a focus on curriculum and instruction is essential, the attention must be on all students; all students require a rigorous curriculum and high instructional goals. Yell et al. (2006) cautioned educators to “pay close attention to the instruction and educational progress of students with disabilities” (p. 35). Defur (2002) reported that the subgroup of students with disabilities needs “powerful instruction strategies” (p. 209) to improve their achievement. In a research study by Sexton (2007), several successful instructional practices for students with disabilities were noted. The research highlighted the use of frequent teaching and learning repetitions, hands-on learning, personalized instruction, and carefully paced lessons. Daggett reported that “by determining the needs of the

hardest to serve students [and] then by applying the same principles to the other students” (p. 9), improvement for all students can be achieved. Schools with poor performing student subgroups have demonstrated improved student learning by creating a climate of support, high expectations, a belief that all students can learn, and using data-driven instruction.

Samuels (2007) reported that schools in Texas showed dramatic improvement in AYP after looking closely at the instruction of their students with disabilities subgroup. The “watered-down curriculum in ‘self-contained’ settings, away from their peers in general education” (p. 35) was one factor that affected student achievement. Another was the lack of using “student assessment data [as] a tool to improve instruction” (p. 36). Other factors in Texas’s improved student performance involved philosophical changes. Administrators and educators were challenged to believe that all students could learn and hold all students accountable to high expectations. Daggett (2005) and Samuels reported similar factors that contributed to improved student achievement.

Just as Samuels (2007) found that the setting of instruction was important, Browder, Wakeman, and Flowers (2006) stated, “the expectation is for all students to have access to the academic content for their assigned grade level” (p. 252). These researchers further emphasized the importance that “students with disabilities must have access to the general curriculum if they are to be successful in making progress toward state content and performance standards” (p. 256). But Wakeman et al. (2007) cautioned that the setting is not as important as access. The “current regulations do not require inclusion in general education classes, but rather access to the general curriculum” (p. 147). Although every student with disabilities is unique and the instructional program

including the presentation and setting must be addressed in the student's IEP, cooperation and collaboration between special education and general education teachers is a necessary component for student success (Frattura & Capper, 2007; Handler, 2006; Kraft, 2007; Monda-Amaya, Dieker, & Reed, 1998; Nyman, 2006; Siler, 2008; Styron & Nyman, 2008).

Collaboration

Frattura and Capper (2007) researched an instructional delivery model that provided collaboration and support for educators while ensuring student success. They suggested that schools use an integrated comprehensive service (ICS) delivery model. Frattura and Capper reported that the ICS model

organizes professional staff by the needs of each learner instead of clustering learners by label. An ICS model does not assign staff members to a unit or program and then place them in separate classrooms. Instead, support staff and general education teachers work collaboratively to bring appropriate instructional support to each child. (p. 17)

Other schools use a learning center model. Kraft (2007) stated that a learning center model "puts a special and general educator together in the general education classroom, teaching groups of students ... regardless of their special ed eligibility status" (p. 6). Whether instruction is through an ICS or learning center model, it is through shared responsibility that special and general educators will more effectively reach all students. Handler (2006) found that "through collaboration and knowledge-sharing, special educators can facilitate general educators' skill development to increase the potential for their ... teaching [of] struggling students, disabled and nondisabled" (p. 7). With the

sharing of knowledge, special educators can learn from their general education colleagues about content curricula and general educators can benefit from the expertise of special educators and the added support. Nyman (2006) studied the key characteristics of middle school performance. His study suggested, “Administrators should encourage collaboration between teachers. Teachers working collaboratively create a healthy environment conducive to learning. Greater gains in student achievement can be accomplished as teachers work together to improve instruction for all students” (Styron & Nyman, 2008, p. 13).

Data-driven Instruction

Another important intervention for schools with poor performing subgroups is the use of data. Yell et al. (2006) suggested that to meet AYP standards administrators and teachers must “collect meaningful data on student progress and [use this data to] make instructional changes when necessary” (p. 38). Browder et al. (2006) also stated that use of data “must be an ongoing practice throughout the instructional process” (p. 256). Defur (2002) recommended that “educators must use data to act on behalf of improving educational outcomes for students with disabilities” (p. 209). But data are especially important in the teaching of students with disabilities. Holcomb (2004) found that schools with a high level of poverty and large subgroups of minority students, English Language Learner, and students with disabilities were able to ‘beat the odds’ if they used “assessment data to drive instruction” (p. 22). Crawford and Tindal (2006) conducted a study of “the knowledge and beliefs of education professionals related to the inclusion of students with disabilities in a state [Oregon] assessment” (p. 208). They found a difference of opinions between teachers and administrators in relationship to the

usefulness of state assessments in guiding instruction. Approximately 30% of the surveyed teachers believed that test results were useful in guiding instruction but surprisingly the same percent believed results were not useful. On the other hand, almost 60% of the administrators believed that test results frequently or always helped guide instruction. Crawford and Tindal concluded that “teachers do not currently see the usefulness of state-wide test data in driving instruction, nor do they consistently believe test scores are valid indicators of students’ knowledge and skills” (p. 216).

But schools have reported increased state assessment scores through the use of data-driven instruction. Some schools in Colorado and California use personalized instruction to address each “student’s weaknesses, evaluate teaching methods and curriculum, and to apply new skills and technologies to improve test scores” (Gamble-Risley, 2006, p. 38). This data-driven approach to improvement has led to integration of some new programming. Gamble-Risley demonstrated that data-driven personalized instruction is one key to academic improvement.

Subgroups’ Impact on Schools

Educators and researchers have acknowledged that including students with disabilities in state tests and accountability systems can be beneficial (Childs, 2006; Defur, 2002; Elliot & Thurlow, 2006; Goertz & Duffy, 2003; Linn, 2005; Samuels, 2007; Sunderman et al., 2005; Walberg, 2005; Wiener & Hall, 2004). The inclusion of students with disabilities leads to increased attention on their performance. With increased scrutiny on the students with disabilities subgroup, improved instruction should follow.

Other educators and researchers have found that including all students in these systems can have detrimental effects on schools, students, and teachers (Albrecht &

Joles, 2003; Booher-Jennings, 2006; Browder et al., 2006; Bruins, 2005; Johnson, 2005; Richburg, 2007; Wynn, 2008). Nagle, Yunker, and Malmgren (2006) studied the perceptions of key educational personnel from four states and found that the challenge of meeting AYP requirements for students with disabilities is a complex situation. “The implication for schools is that they risk identification as ‘failing schools’ based on the poor performance of students with disabilities” (p. 37). Perhaps one reason for the negative effects of the students with disabilities subgroup is due to the population included in the assessment procedure. Browder et al. stated, “the reality is that state standards and large scale assessments were not originally developed to be inclusive of all students” (p. 251). When students are included who were not originally considered conflicting issues arise. The development of assessment instruments that follow the curricula development methods suggested by Daggett (2005) benefit all assessed students. Daggett found that high performing schools molded their curriculum to meet the needs of students with disabilities and English Language Learners. When the assessment instrument mirrors the unique needs of these student subgroups, all assessed students will benefit.

In the ongoing debate, all researchers do not see a clear division between benefit and detriment. Allbritten et al. (2004) recognized that the NCLB requirements to include students with disabilities in the assessment and accountability system are encouraging but potentially harmful. “NCLB virtually guarantees that the presence of special education students in a school will contribute to the school’s failure to make AYP” (p. 157). When schools fail to make AYP based on the students with disabilities subgroup, the potential for anti-special education bias increases. “Too many school boards, administrators,

principals, and teachers continue to devalue the unrealized potential of students with disabilities” (p. 157). When faced with NCLB requirements and local pressure for success, many educators face tough decisions. In the continual race to fulfill the NCLB expectations by 2014, meet AYP, and educate all children regardless of race, gender, socio-economic level, or ability, ethical issues begin to emerge and cloud everyday decisions.

Ethical Issues

To hold schools accountable for student progress NCLB included penalties for failure to reach established goals. “The theory of action embedded in NCLB is that a system of threats and incentives tied to test performance will energize teachers and their students” (Nichols & Berliner, 2007, p. 8). While a system of threats was commonly used to manage the labor workforce many years ago, it is not common practice in today’s workforce. “Although rewards/bonuses are sometimes available, rarely are threats relied on as a way to spur workers into action” (p. 9). NCLB’s system of threats results in negative incentives, which often compel teachers and administrators to find ways around the system. In other words, they find ways to cheat the system.

Cheating

Sunderman (2008) stated, “Cheating ... can only produce spurious gains in scores. ... The incentive to cheat is strongest in the schools that must make the largest gains – that is, the low-scoring schools” (p. 16). Nichols and Berliner (2007) found many examples of adults cheating on standardized tests. Reports of unethical behaviors included teachers and administrators who copied the state test and provided it to students as a study guide, suggested students change answers, and manipulated the testing

population. According to Sunderman, cheating may take the form of “providing inappropriate hints during test administration, changing answer sheets after tests are completed, circulating actual test items ... before a test” (p. 16). Petress (2006) also reported, “evidence of testing fraud by administrators and teachers in order to achieve ‘satisfactory’ or better results” (p. 80). The fraud included “teachers fabricating results, changing test pages, and inappropriately prompting students during test taking” (p. 80). Petress further reported, “many other students with marginal learning disabilities were characterized as exempt from regular testing” (p. 80).

Teaching the Test

Educators have sought to increase test scores by focusing their instruction on the material covered in the tests. Sorrentino and Zirkel (2004) stated, “reaching AYP goals will require most schools to re-prioritize their curricula ... to place greater emphasis on test preparation” (p. 13). When curriculum, instruction, and assessment are aligned, teaching to the test is just good teaching (Nichols & Berliner, 2007; Santman, 2002). But there is a fine line between teaching to the test and teaching the test.

When teaching the test becomes a primary instructional practice, ethical issues arise. “We found numerous examples from schools across the country that had dedicated hours upon hours preparing students for the tests – drilling, emphasizing rote memorization, ... reviewing over and over the concepts that will be represented on the tests” (Nichols & Berliner, 2007, p. 122). Teachers in West Virginia, North Carolina, New York, and Arizona were reported to spend from three to over 36 days and in one case 100 days of instructional time on test preparation. Considering that students attend

school for approximately 180 days per year, this a substantial amount of time devoted to test preparation. Santman (2002) stated:

In too many places around the country, test practice has become the reading curriculum. Teachers look at the test and then decide what to teach. What is taught as reading are only those skills that the test defines as good reading, and those are only taught in the format of the test. (Readers workshop and test preparation, ¶1)

Questionable Testing Behaviors

Thurlow, Elliot, and Ysseldyke (2003) reported questionable testing behaviors by educators and administrators such as tampering with protocols, photocopying past test forms to use for future studying, many erasures on test protocols, and essays that were very similar.

One way that large school districts tried to improve test scores was to manipulate the numbers. “Just before administering the annual high-stakes tests, Birmingham officials had 522 young people ‘administratively withdrawn’ from high school. By doing so, scores on the state test went up ...” (Nichols & Berliner, 2007, p. 60). Similar cases were reported in Chicago, New York City, Houston, and Florida. Cullen and Reback (2006) explored the issue of ‘gaming the system’ and “the extent to which [Texas] schools manipulate the composition of students in the test-taking pool in order to maximize ratings ... in the 1990s” (abstract). They found that a “moderate degree of strategic behavior” (abstract) was used in the Texas performance accountability system. Booher-Jennings (2006) explored another questionable tactic in the numbers game, educational triage. “Educational triage has become an increasingly widespread response

to the accountability systems and has been documented in Texas, California, Chicago, Philadelphia, New York and even England” (p. 758). As the word triage suggests, educational triage is an emergency measure and serves students based on their ability to learn. Educational triage is a “process through which teachers divide students into safe cases, cases suitable for treatment, and hopeless cases and ration resources to focus on those students most likely to improve a school’s test scores” (p. 758). This system of rationing resources is potentially dangerous for students with special needs. “When a low-performing student enters a teacher’s classroom, he or she is seen as a liability rather than as an opportunity to promote individual student growth” (p. 759). The focus of this gaming system is not on student needs but on student performance where students serve the school instead of schools serving students.

Some activities aimed at improving student performance fall in the gray area of ethicalness. Some schools in Illinois provided breakfast for students on the mornings of state assessment tests (Krenek, 2008). Other school districts invite motivational speakers to their schools with the hope of putting students in a positive frame of mind for the state assessment tests. While school attendance is always important it becomes extremely important during state assessment days. Some schools have offered monetary incentives and special events for perfect attendance. Although these activities are not as ethically questionable as test tampering or manipulation of numbers, the ethicalness remains an issue.

The Other Side

Holley and Carr (2007) differed in their findings. They found that “high-stakes testing has introduced powerful new incentives that promote desired behavioral changes

in students, teachers, and administrators” (p. 677). Rather than focusing on the reports of cheating and unethical behaviors, Holley and Carr stated, “over 30 million students are tested annually, and ... high-stakes testing has not led to cheating among a vast majority of students, teachers, and administrators” (p. 678). Holley and Carr further contend that NCLB’s consequences do not need to result in cheating. Teachers recognize struggling students, regardless of labels, and “tailor instruction to the [their] needs and work hard to motivate them. ... many teachers can and actually do try to teach their students and promote success through hard work and perseverance, as high-stakes testing intends” (p. 678).

Amidst the research and discussion of ethical versus unethical testing practices, Richardson et al. (2008) conducted a study of the factors that influence teachers when reporting testing violations. They found that “a confident communicator with a positive attitude toward the [Texas] exam (perhaps working with a receptive supervisor) in a participatory work culture would be increasingly likely to report a peer who violated [Texas] testing policy” (p. 214). The researchers also found that when teachers perceive the test as a positive and meaningful endeavor they reported test policy violators more frequently. To further the research of ethics related to high-stakes testing, Foley (2006) researched the views of special education directors. She investigated the directors’ perceptions toward two pieces of legislation, NCLB and IDEA 2004, as related to students with special needs. The directors’ perceptions of students with special needs changed when challenged with meeting AYP goals in their schools. Their perceptions also presented an ethical “conflict between the philosophical intent and the daily

operations of each district” (p. 145). Foley reported, “students with disabilities were either seen as worthy, lynchpins or a liability for the AYP requirement” (p. 142).

Conclusion

Accountability and assessment within the educational system are here to stay. Early in the development of United States educational system assessment was used as a sorting mechanism. Students were assessed and sorted based on their intellectual abilities and potential productivity to society. But over time, the use of assessment has changed. Students are now assessed to measure their academic achievement. The assessments are used to hold schools accountable for the teaching and learning of their students.

During the past 30 years the special educational system has emerged and changed in many ways. The landmark special education legislation PL 94-142 ensured children with special needs had a right to public education. Special education soon developed into a system separate from the general educational system with unique eligibility qualifications, and specially trained teachers with separate classrooms and curriculum. The revisions of special education legislation led to IDEA '97 and most recently IDEA 2004. These revisions brought the focus of education for students with disabilities into the realm of the general education system with an emphasis on access to the general education curriculum.

The NCLB Act called for dramatic improvement in the educational system with high academic expectations for all children. With the emphasis on the inclusion of *all* children in assessment process and the reporting of their scores, the public’s attention on education increased. The age of accountability had arrived. To ensure that the goals of NCLB were reached, states established a trajectory path that included annual AYP

targets. All students, regardless of race, gender, socio-economic level, or ability were required to reach a proficient level in reading, writing, and mathematics. Although the term *proficient* has not been clearly defined, the NCLB Act clearly stated that 100% of the United States' children will be proficient readers and mathematicians by 2014.

One of the greatest challenges of the NCLB requirements was to improve the achievement of all student subgroups. The students with disabilities subgroup posed some unique challenges. These students identified with learning difficulties caused by a variety of reasons, were held accountable to the same standards as students without disabilities. To help improve student performance many schools renewed their focus on the curriculum and instruction for students with and without disabilities. Some schools with poor performing subgroups demonstrated improvement through data-driven instruction, a climate of support, collaboration and high expectations, and a belief that all students can learn (Daggett, 2005; Defur, 2002; Nyman, 2006; Sexton, 2007; Wilson, 2008). In addition to the students with disabilities subgroup's unique instructional challenges, this subgroup had the potential to impact the school's rating negatively. When a school fails to make AYP based solely on the students with disabilities subgroup, the potential for anti-special education bias increases (Allbritten et al., 2004; Wilson). This bias has led to questionable practices and decisions.

When faced with the negative sanctions of NCLB some teachers and administrators have tried to find ways to 'cheat' the system. Teachers have reported that they spend extraordinary amounts of time reviewing for state tests. Reports of falsifying results, prompting students, and manipulating numbers have cast questions on the ethicality of the assessment procedure.

Accountability and assessment are complex practices but accountability and the assessment of students with disabilities are more complex. General education and special education personnel have begun to accept the shared responsibility of educating all children. The boundaries between general education and special education have begun to blur and the two have begun to merge into one. Instructional strategies, curriculum, assessment, and accountability for each system will continue to blur and merge until one system exists for the education of all children.

Chapter III
METHODOLOGY
Introduction

Education has always been important to the American people. What began as a small home-based educational system (Morris, 1971) has grown into a multi-layered system with programs designed to meet the needs of all children. Growth has not been without controversy (Callahan, 1962; Hansen, 1993). The American educational system has struggled to find a balanced system that best educates our country's children. The United States educational system of today focuses on the education of all children and on the accountability of that education at the state and federal levels (Elliot & Thurlow, 2006; No Child Left Behind Act, 2001).

The exclusion and subsequent inclusion of students with disabilities in the American educational accountability system has had a major impact on schools and their public reporting of progress (Kowalski, 2005; Wilson, 2008). As school personnel strive to improve student achievement and reach the 100% proficiency level by 2014, they also struggle to meet the increasing benchmark goals or AYP for all students. The subgroup of students with disabilities poses a great challenge in meeting those goals (Linn 2005; Porter, 2005; Yell, 2006). Schools not meeting AYP standards are subject to state imposed sanctions, which include the publically announced classification as failing schools. Due to the accountability component and many schools not making AYP based

on the poor performance of the subgroup of students with disabilities (Northern Illinois University, 2006), the education of students with disabilities has become a focal area in the educational community today (Booher-Jennings, 2006; Linn; Schulte & Villwock, 2004; Wakeman et al., 2007).

In response to the increased attention on accountability and the poor performance of students with disabilities, school personnel have examined their organizational structure, the administration, and the teaching in their schools (Booher-Jennings, 2006; Foley, 2006; Richardson, 2008). Some schools have segregated students with disabilities from the general education students (Kowalski, 2005) while others have integrated them into classes with their peers (Samuels, 2007). Many educators recognized that cooperation and collaboration were necessary components for student success (Frattura & Capper, 2007; Handler, 2006; Kraft, 2007; Monda-Amaya, Dieker, & Reed, 1998; Nyman, 2006; Siler, 2008; Styron & Nyman, 2008). Throughout all the challenges for improved student achievement and the attention to accountability, ethical issues have emerged. Some schools have been found to be cheating (Nichols & Berliner, 2007; Petress, 2006; Sunderman, 2008), some teaching to the test (Santman, 2002; Sorrentino & Zirkel, 2004), and some schools have used questionable testing behaviors (Booher-Jennings; Nichols & Berliner; Thurlow et al., 2003).

This study investigated the ways that the disaggregation of ISAT scores has impacted the progress and performance of students with disabilities in two counties in central Illinois. It also sought to discover the actions or interventions currently in place or being considered regarding the students with disabilities subgroup and the effects of those actions and interventions. This study further explored the ethical implications related to

these actions and interventions taken with students with disabilities. This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. In what ways has the disaggregation of ISAT scores impacted the progress and performance of students with disabilities?
2. What actions or interventions related to students with disabilities are currently in place or being considered by schools in two counties in central Illinois to maintain or improve AYP and what are the effects of these actions or interventions?
3. What are the ethical implications of the actions or interventions currently in place or being considered for the students with disabilities subgroup?

Research Design

The current study used a mixed-methods format which explored the instructional and organizational strategies, teaching practices, and interventions in schools with successful and unsuccessful students with disabilities subgroups as determined by ISAT data from the years 2006, 2007, and 2008 through survey and interview questions. The quantitative and qualitative data were gathered simultaneously through an online survey with open-ended descriptive and closed-ended questions. Follow-up personal interviews explored the survey responses in more depth and added richness to the survey data. The predominant method of this study was the qualitative approach of gathering data, which was gained through descriptive survey questions and follow-up personal interviews. The collection and analysis of quantitative data were given less priority and therefore “embedded, or nested, within the predominant method” (Creswell, 2003, p. 218) of a qualitative study. The integration of both types of data occurred during data collection, data analysis, and the interpretation process.

The survey questions developed by the researcher were based in part, on a previous study (Wilson, 2008). The format, content, and design were adapted to correlate with this study’s focus and research questions. Table 1 explains the correlation of the research questions and the survey questions. The first two survey questions related to the consent for participation in the study. The third survey question clarified the participants’ roles in providing support to students with disabilities. This demographic information was used to provide a greater depth in the analysis of participants’ responses.

Table 1

Consent for participation and demographic information of participants

Research Question	Survey Question
Consent to participate	1.1: Informed consent to participate in a research study (an explanation of the study) 1.2: Please indicate your informed consent to participate in this study (yes or no)
Demographic information	2.1: How are you involved in providing special education in your school?

The relationship between research question one and the survey questions is explained in Table 2. To determine how the disaggregation of ISAT scores had impacted progress and performance of students with disabilities, several survey questions were asked. Participants indicated a yes or no response if the NCLB and AYP requirements had helped the school’s students with disabilities (survey question 2.2; see Appendix A

for complete online survey) and if these students were currently performing below standards (survey question 3.1). To explore the effects of the disaggregation of ISAT scores, participants were asked if their school had ever failed to meet AYP status based solely on the performance of students with disabilities (survey question 5.1). An open box extended response question (survey question 6.1) asked for participants' opinions about why the students with disabilities had not met AYP targets. No follow-up personal interview questions were related to this research question.

Table 2

Research Question One, In what ways has the disaggregation of ISAT scores impacted the progress and performance of students with disabilities, and the Correlated online survey questions

Survey question 2.2: Has NCLB (No Child Left Behind) and AYP (Adequate Yearly Progress) requirements helped your school's students with disabilities?

3.1: Does your school currently have students with disabilities performing below standards?

5.1: Has your school ever failed to meet AYP targets based solely on the performance of the students with disabilities subgroup?

6.1: In your opinion, why have the students with disabilities at your school not met the state's AYP targets?

To clarify the relationship between research question two, the survey questions, and the follow-up personal interview questions, the following information and Table 3 were provided. Research question two pertained to the actions or interventions related to students with disabilities that were in place or being considered to improve or maintain a school's AYP status and the effects of these actions or interventions.

Table 3

Research question two, What actions or interventions related to students with disabilities are currently in place or being considered to maintain or improve AYP by schools in two counties in central Illinois and what are the effects of these actions or interventions, Survey questions, and Follow-up interview questions

Survey Questions	Personal Interview Questions
4.1: Did your school undertake specific actions or interventions to address the poor performance of students with disabilities?	1: Please elaborate about your thoughts on the actions or interventions that contributed to the improvement of your, or your school's, students with disabilities performance on the ISAT.
4.2: What measures have been taken to address the poor performance of students with disabilities?	2: Tell me more about the measures that you or your school has taken to address the performance of students with disabilities.
6.3: To what do you attribute the improvement of your students with disabilities?	6: Please elaborate about the actions or interventions that have been taken for the students with disabilities in your class or your school. Probing questions: what have the effects been of these actions? Are you comfortable with these actions? Are you concerned about any of the interventions?
7.1: Where do students with disabilities in your school receive their academic instruction?	3: Please explain the academic instructional setting for students with disabilities in your school.
7.2: What data are available to measure the progress or performance of your students with disabilities?	4: Please explain how you measure student progress and your data collection process.
8.1: Do special education and general education teachers in your school collaborate? 8.2: In what ways do they collaborate? 9.1: Do you or your school have plans to begin collaboration in the future? 9.2: What are your plans for future collaboration?	5: Please explain the collaboration between general education and special education teachers in your building.
11.3: Were the efforts taken with the students with disabilities different than those taken with the general education students?	7: During the ISAT testing weeks many activities take place in my building. Please share some of the activities that occur in your building during the ISAT weeks or the weeks leading up to the tests.

Survey question 4.1, a yes/no type question about the specific actions or interventions taken to address the poor performance of students with disabilities and personal interview question 1, please elaborate about the actions taken to address the performance of students with disabilities, directly related to research question two. The online survey question 4.2 and personal interview question 2 explored the measures taken to address the poor performance of students with disabilities. Survey question 6.3 and personal interview question 6 were extended response, open-ended type questions related to the causes and effects of the actions or interventions stated in the previous questions. Survey question 7.1 and personal interview question 3 explored the academic instructional environment for students with disabilities. The multiple-choice type question 7.1 offered instructional environment options ranging from general education classrooms for all classes to special education classes for all classes while the interview question 3 clarified the instructional environment. Online survey question 7.2 explored the progress monitoring and data collection processes used with students with disabilities. The interview served as an in-depth exploration of the progress monitoring methods and data collection process.

Table 3 also demonstrates that research question two related to online survey questions 8.1, 8.2, 9.1, and 9.2 with personal interview question 5 probing more deeply into online responses. All five questions explored the collaboration between general education and special education teachers. Survey questions 8.1 and 9.1 were yes/no questions. Question 8.2 and 9.2 were multiple-choice type questions, which explored the methods of collaboration used in the respondents' schools including the choices of co-teaching, common plan time, grade level meetings, and other. An open box was provided

in the survey that provided participants the opportunity to elaborate the ‘other’ choice. Survey question 9.2 focused on future plans for collaboration between general education and special education teachers. Personal interview question 5 was an extended response, open-ended type question that explored in more depth the collaboration occurring in the interviewees’ school. The last survey question related to research question two was question 11.3, exploring if the efforts taken by the respondents to improve ISAT scores were different for students with disabilities than with general education students. Follow-up personal interview question seven explored the respondents’ attitudes toward the activities that took place in their buildings during ISAT weeks. In-depth explanations about the activities associated with the activities and implementation of ISAT were gathered from the interviewees.

The relationships between research question three, the online survey questions, and the follow-up personal interview questions is delineated in Table 4. Research question three explored the ethical concerns of actions or interventions as related to students with disabilities. Several survey questions, 10.1, 10.2, 10.3, 11.1, and 11.2, explored the idea of ISAT preparation and were related to the follow-up personal interview question 7. Question 10.1 asked the participants to indicate the number of days spent reviewing or preparing for this year’s ISAT. The answer options ranged from 0-3 days to more than 32 days with intervals of three. Question 10.3 explored if the efforts made toward ISAT improvement were the same for general education students and students with disabilities. The follow-up questions, 10.2 and 11.1, asked respondents to indicate if the amount of time and efforts indicated in the previous question was more, less or about the same as previous years. Question 11.2 was an open response question

with respondents explaining how the efforts differed from past efforts. Follow-up personal interview question seven explored the activities that occurred in respondents' buildings during the ISAT weeks and in the weeks leading up to the tests.

Table 4

Research question three, What are the ethical implications of the actions or interventions currently in place or being considered for the students with disabilities subgroup, Survey questions and Interview questions

Survey Question	Personal Interview Question
10.1: How many days have you spent reviewing and/or preparing your students for this year's ISAT? 10.2: How does this amount of time compare to previous years' preparations? 10.3: Did you take extra efforts to ensure the success of your students with disabilities in this year's ISAT? 11.1: Are these efforts different than in past years? 11.2: Please explain how these efforts are different.	7: During the ISAT testing weeks many activities take place in my building. Please share some of the activities that occur in your building during the ISAT weeks or the weeks leading up to the tests.
12.1: All actions and interventions have some degree of ethical implications. Are you concerned about the ethicality of actions or interventions occurring in your school? 13.1: Are your concerns related to ... only students with disabilities? ... only students in general education? ... all students? 13.2: If you would, please elaborate about your concerns. Remember, your comments will not be linked to you in any way.	8: One part of my dissertation focuses on the ethical implications of testing procedures and activities and the inclusion of students with disabilities in standardized tests. Are there any activities or occurrences in your building that are questionable in your eyes? Do you have any concerns about inclusion of students with disabilities in the standardized tests? Please explain.

Table 4 concluded with questions dealing with ethical concerns. Survey questions 12.1, 13.1, 13.2, and personal interview question 8 explored the concept of ethicality. Question 12.1 was a yes/no question related to relating to participants' ethical concerns

about actions or interventions occurring in their schools. Question 13.1 asked if the concerns were related to only students with disabilities, only general education students, or all students. Question 13.2 was an open response type question that explored in more depth respondents' concerns about ethical issues. Follow-up personal interview question eight explored participants' ethical concerns about testing procedures or activities of students with disabilities as related to standardized tests.

The participants had the opportunity to preview the follow-up personal interview questions, which were transmitted to each interviewee via email. The participants were also given a copy of the interview questions during the follow-up personal interview.

Population

The population of this study was middle schools with 6th through 8th grade configuration within two central Illinois counties. The middle schools were identified in both counties using the Interactive Illinois Report Card, a website constructed and maintained by Northern Illinois University and the State of Illinois. The two counties differed in geographical size and the number of school districts. The smaller county consisted of 10 elementary or unit school districts with four of those districts housing middle schools with the 6th through 8th grade configuration. The geographically larger county consisted of approximately 21 elementary school districts with 22 middle schools with the 6th through 8th grade configuration. This larger county's elementary districts varied greatly in population size and diversity. Several districts were located in small rural communities, some in growing suburban-type communities, and one was located in a medium-sized urban community.

The potential participants were chosen with a stratified sampling method. The participants were selected based on an educational subgroup within the targeted population. The potential participants of this study were special education and general education administrators, teachers, and support staff in the identified middle schools that had contact with students with disabilities. The teachers were both general education and special education classroom teachers. The potential participants were identified through information located on the schools' websites, principals' recommendations, or through the researcher's personal knowledge.

Data Collection

The data collection process began in Spring 2009 and was completed in June 2009. After the research population was identified and survey questions were entered into an online format using SurveyMonkey.com, a pilot survey was sent to four participants with all four responding. The pilot survey took place in March 2009. The purpose of this pilot survey was to test for clarity of content, to check for ease on online completion, and to estimate the approximate time for the completion of the survey. No adjustments were necessary and the pilot survey became the final online survey (Appendix A). Building principals in the targeted schools were also contacted during Spring 2009. Contact was made using the principals' school phone numbers gathered through the online information with follow-up contact using their email addresses. To gain permission for interviewing their staff, the purpose and scope of the study were explained and verbal permission to include their school personnel in the data collection process was requested. Most principals were able to make the decision to participate but some needed

authorization from district personnel. If needed, the researcher contacted the district personnel to request permission.

Once permission to participate in the study was received from the necessary administrator, the researcher assembled the email addresses of the potential participants, middle school staff members, to be included in the study. Some principals supplied the email addresses of their staff members and some email addresses were acquired from the schools' websites. Through the SurveyMonkey.com website, invitations to participate in the online survey were sent to 88 participants (Appendix B). Follow-up participation email requests were sent to non-respondents three weeks after the initial mailing. Of the 88 potential participants, 51 completed surveys were returned within the first three weeks and 18 responded after the second request. A total of 66 completed online surveys were included in the data collection process. Three online surveys were incomplete and therefore not included in the survey results. This was a 75% return rate for the online survey. The online survey data-collecting period was open from mid-April to the beginning of June 2009.

The follow-up personal interviews were conducted during the online survey data-collection period with the majority of the interviews completed in May 2009 (Appendix C). From information provided on the surveys, interviewees were contacted and mutually agreeable interview times were established. Twenty-nine participants volunteered for follow-up personal interviews and 15 interviews were conducted. The interviews were conducted during or after the participants' school day and in their assigned buildings. With the interviewees' permission, the interviews were recorded and each participant was assigned an identification code known only to the researcher and the individual

participant. A paid secretary later transcribed the recorded interviews. The interviews were examined for commonalities, differences, and emerging themes.

As part of the online survey, participants had the opportunity to register for a chance to receive a thank you gift. One participant was chosen through a random selection process to receive a Barnes and Noble gift certificate. The randomly selected winner was notified via email. The Barnes and Noble gift certificate was mailed through the United States Postal Service (Appendix D).

Analytical Methods

The data collected during this study were analyzed using quantitative and qualitative methods. Some of the data gathered through online surveys and follow-up personal interviews produced quantitative data. These data were analyzed using the correlation and comparison methods with the SPSS program using a one-way ANOVA test. The follow-up personal interviews yielded qualitative data. These data were analyzed using an open coding method followed by a thematic coding method. The re-emerging themes were then identified.

A correlation method was used to analyze the quantitative data by comparing two quantitative values that are qualitatively different. This method determined if the values were related. The online survey question, “Has your school ever failed to meet AYP targets based solely on the performance of students with disabilities?” which reflected research question one about the ways in which the disaggregation of ISAT subgroup scores had impacted the progress and performance of the students with disabilities subgroup, has a relationship to several other survey questions. The answers to this survey question were compared to answers related to the questions about the actions and

interventions for students with disabilities. This method of analysis provided a measure of correlation between answers. A positive correlation existed if both variables moved the same way or a negative correlation if they moved in different ways.

The online survey questions with an open-ended format provided a qualitative dimension to the preceding quantitative questions. The open-ended questions 2.2, 4.2, 6.1, 6.3, 11.2, and 13.2 provided the qualitative depth. The qualitative answers were analyzed using an open coding method. A thematic coding method was then used to group the open code responses into general themes. Re-emerging themes were identified.

The follow-up personal interviews added richness and depth to the online survey information. The researcher asked questions that delved more deeply into the actions and interventions taken in relationship to students with disabilities for research question two. The interview process also gave the researcher the opportunity to explore the participants' thoughts about the ethical implications of the actions and interventions related to students with disabilities for research question three. The personal interview data were examined using the same methods as the open-ended online survey questions. The interviews were analyzed using an open coding method. This method allowed for grouping of many similar words. The interviewed educational professional used many different words that meant the same thing. The open coding method allowed for flexible grouping of the vocabulary and led to the thematic coding of the responses. The thematic codes were identified leading to the identification of re-emerging themes.

Limitations

This study had three major limitations. They were the timing of the study, the availability of interviewees, and the process of gathering the participants.

1. The timing of the study was the primary limitation. This was due, in part, to the data collection period, which occurred toward the end of the school year, April to June. This time of year is an extremely busy time for educators. Participants reported that finding time for the completion of the online survey was difficult.
2. The personal interview process was another limitation. This limitation was due to the difficulty in arranging a mutually agreeable time for many of the potential participants. The researcher was granted professional release time to conduct follow-up personal interviews during the day and to allow for travel time to distant districts. But, many potential participants declined interviews based on the availability of time.
3. The process of contacting participants for the online survey was also a limitation. The number of participants that took the online survey was limited by the lack of administrative permission for participation. Larger school districts required district-level administrative permission in addition to the principal's permission. To gain access to district-level personnel proved to be a very difficult task for the researcher.

Chapter IV

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

The findings, conclusions, and recommendations of this study follow a brief description of the background, purpose and description of this study. The findings were based on quantitative and qualitative data gathered through online survey and personal interview methods. Conclusions were based on the data collected through both methods and strove to be free from conjecture and bias. The implications and recommendations were based on changes that could be implemented based on the results of this study. The recommendations also include questions that occurred during the course of this study.

The American educational system has struggled to find a balanced system that best educates our children. Today's system focuses on the education of all children and on the accountability of that education at the state and federal levels (Elliot & Thurlow, 2006; No Child Left Behind Act, 2001). The exclusion and subsequent inclusion of students with disabilities in the American educational accountability system has had a major impact on schools and their public reporting of progress (Kowalski, 2005; Wilson, 2008). The subgroup of students with disabilities poses a great challenge to all schools in meeting the NCLB goals of 100% proficiency by 2014.

This study investigated the ways that the disaggregation of ISAT scores has impacted the progress and performance of students with disabilities in two counties in

central Illinois. It also sought to discover the actions or interventions currently in place or being considered regarding the students with disabilities subgroup and the effects of those actions and interventions. This study further explored the ethical implications related to these actions and interventions taken with students with disabilities. This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. In what ways has the disaggregation of ISAT scores impacted the progress and performance of students with disabilities?
2. What actions or interventions related to students with disabilities are currently in place or being considered by schools in two counties in central Illinois to maintain or improve AYP and what are the effects of these actions or interventions?
3. What are the ethical implications of the actions or interventions currently in place or being considered for the students with disabilities subgroup?

Findings

The findings of this study were gathered by quantitative and qualitative methods. The online survey provided both types of data with extended response questions producing the qualitative data. The follow-up personal interview questions provided more in-depth qualitative data. The interviews clarified and probed survey questions in greater depth. The quantitative data were analyzed through the online survey company with percentages reported for the entire survey population and desegregated by participants' roles in relationship to students with disabilities. The quantitative data were further analyzed by running a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) test to determine if there was a comparison between the amount of time spent preparing for ISAT and the school's performance in meeting AYP standards. Results are reported in the Research Question

Two section. The qualitative data were analyzed through an open coding method. Further analysis was completed using a thematic coding method to determine the emergent themes. The themes were substantiated with the online survey descriptive responses and the follow-up personal interview responses.

Research Question One

The first research question of this study addressed the impact of the disaggregation of ISAT scores on the progress and performance of students with disabilities in two counties in central Illinois. Through an online survey, 100% of the responding participants (n = 66) indicated their school had students with disabilities performing below state standards at the time of the study. The responding participants identified their role in providing special education services in their school as administrator 15%, general education teacher 28%, special education teacher 38%, or support staff 22% (Figure 1).

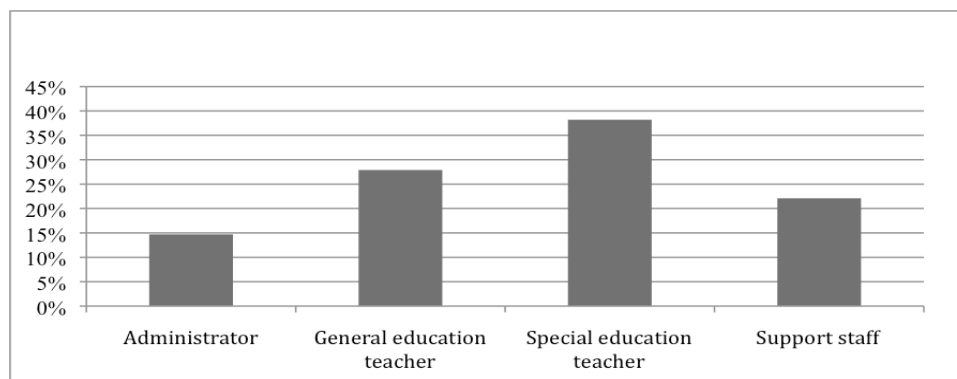


Figure 1. Roles of participants. Participants indicated their involvement in providing special education services in their school.

Administrators included principals, assistant principals, and special education directors. General education teachers' group included content-area 6th, 7th, and 8th grade teachers. The special education teachers' group included resource and self-contained teachers. Support staff included school social workers, school psychologists, and paraprofessionals.

Participants were asked if the NCLB and AYP requirements, as measured by the ISAT, had helped their students with disabilities. A chi-square test was run to determine if there was a relationship between the participants' role of administrator, general education teacher, special education teacher, or support staff, and their opinion of the helpfulness of the NCLB and AYP requirements for students with disabilities. There was no statistical significance between the participants' roles and their opinions, $\chi^2(6) = 9.1$.

Failure to meet AYP standards. When asked if their school had ever failed to meet AYP targets based solely on the performance of the students with disabilities subgroup 56% of the administrators indicated yes, 39% of the general education teachers, 22% of the special education teachers, and 39% of the support staff also indicated yes (Table 5). The most significant response was from the special education teachers with 70% not sure if their school had failed to make AYP based solely on the students with disabilities subgroup.

Table 5

Failure to Meet AYP

Failed to meet AYP based on students with disabilities subgroup	Administrator	General Education Teacher	Special Education Teacher	Support staff
Yes	56%	39%	22%	39%
No	44%	17%	8%	23%
Not sure	0%	44%	70%	38%

The participants who indicated that their school had failed to meet AYP standards based on the students with disabilities subgroup were also asked if their school had returned to meeting AYP. Half of the administrators indicated that their schools now met the state standards. The majority of the general education teachers, special education teachers, and support staff were not sure if their schools had returned to meeting state standards as measured by the ISAT.

When asked to what they attributed their school’s return to AYP, 75% of the administrators indicated specific actions or intervention and the state’s recalculation of AYP (Table 6). The analysis of qualitative data also revealed that administrators indicated their schools had made AYP by meeting the safe harbor targets. All of the general education teachers, 100%, indicated specific actions or interventions were the reason for now meeting AYP. Special education teachers and support staff, 40% of the respondents, also indicated specific actions or interventions as the reason for their school’s return to meeting AYP standards. Of the special education teachers, 40% indicated that their students had not improved even though their school had returned to

meeting AYP. Responses can equal more than 100% due to participants indicating more than one cause for the improvement of students with disabilities.

Table 6

Return to AYP

Reasons for meeting AYP standards	Administrator	General Education Teacher	Special Education Teacher	Support staff
Specific actions or interventions	75%	100%	40%	40%
Student population change	0%	0%	20%	0%
Staff changes	50%	14%	20%	20%
State's recalculation of AYP	75%	14%	0%	0%
Our students with disabilities subgroup has not improved	0%	0%	40%	20%

Benefits of NCLB and AYP requirements. Participants were asked if the NCLB and AYP requirements, as measured by the ISAT, had helped their students with disabilities. The total responses indicated that 41% (n = 25) of the participants agreed that the requirements were helpful for students with disabilities (Table 7). Of that group, 67% of the respondents were administrators and 56% were general education teachers.

Table 7

NCLB and AYP Helpfulness

NCLB and AYP helped students with disabilities?	Administrator	General Education Teacher	Special Education Teacher	Support Staff	Response Totals
Yes	67%	56%	26%	31%	41%
No	33%	44%	78%	69%	61%

Although the percentage of the online survey’s positive responses was not significant, the survey’s descriptive responses and the qualitative information gathered through personal follow-up interviews were coded for significance. Two significant themes emerged. The most significant emergent theme relating to the benefits of the NCLB and AYP requirements was accountability for teachers and schools. “It [NCLB] provided clear guidelines on expectations and requirements needed by school districts to achieve success for students with disabilities” (online descriptive response, question 2.2, April 5, 2009). The teachers instructed with more intentional focused instruction and taught to the state standards. As one special education teacher stated,

They [NCLB and ISAT] have required us to look at how these students [with disabilities] get exposed to the material that is required in our state standards. IEP (Individual Education Plan) goals are written based upon state standards, more mainstreaming is provided, [and] more specific curricular materials for remediation are being considered. (Online survey descriptive response, question 2.2, April 2, 2009)

As part of accountability created by NCLB and the AYP requirements, schools were forced to address the needs of students with disabilities. According to the

respondents, NCLB laws have increased the academic rigor for students with disabilities. “Higher expectations for students [with disabilities] brought on by NCLB and AYP prevent schools from isolating these students and ignoring their progress” (online descriptive response, question 2.2, April 5, 2009). With the clear guidelines and requirements of NCLB, schools were forced to monitor student progress more closely and focus on the deficiencies and achievements of all students. “It [NCLB] has raised the level of awareness in our staff that we need to hold these students [with disabilities] to a certain level of performance” (Administrator 5, personal communication, May 20, 2009). “A tremendous amount of work is done each day to help our students with IEPs achieve these levels” (online survey descriptive response, question 2.2, April 18, 2009). It was also stated repeatedly that schools could no longer ignore the student subgroups or their progress; they are vitally important to the schools’ success.

The second emergent theme in the qualitative data related to the benefits of NCLB, AYP, and the ISAT processes that impacted the progress and performance of students with disabilities was co-teaching and inclusion. “No Child Left Behind has brought IEP students into the regular classroom where they are learning the Illinois Standards. The IEP students are in a co-taught classroom being taught the same lesson with modifications, as their peers” (online survey descriptive response, question 2.2, April 22, 2009). Co-teaching and inclusion helped build confidence and self-esteem in students with disabilities. It was reported that through co-teaching and inclusion students’ behavior also improved. As general education teacher 8 expressed, “Sometimes the students with disabilities were more excited and cooperative than the general education students” (personal communication, May 15, 2009). Inclusion was implemented in the

respondents' schools as an effort to meet AYP benchmarks. Co-teaching and inclusion were also indicated as interventions to address the poor performance of students with disabilities. Research Question Two explains the co-teaching and inclusion interventions in more detail.

Negative impact of NCLB and AYP requirements. Of the 61% of online survey respondents who indicated that NCLB and AYP requirements had a negative impact on students with disabilities 78% (n = 37) were special education teachers and 69% were support staff (Table 7). These people were also asked to comment further about their thoughts on the negative impact of the NCLB, AYP, and ISAT processes and the reasons for the poor performance of the students with disabilities. The primary emergent theme from online descriptive responses and personal follow-up interviews was that the AYP targets were unrealistic for students with disabilities. The standardized tests, ISAT, were too difficult for the students' achievement level. For example, "a 6th grade student with a functional reading level of a 2nd grader should not be expected to meet the [state] expectations on the 6th grade ISAT reading test" (online descriptive response, question 6.1, April 3, 2009). As one teacher stated, "Our students who have been identified as needing special education services were identified for a reason: because there was an adverse effect in the general education environment" (online survey descriptive response, question 6.1, April 5, 2009).

Research Question Two

The second research question of this study explored the actions or interventions related to students with disabilities that are currently in place or being considered by schools in two counties in central Illinois to maintain or improve AYP. The effects of

these actions or interventions on students with disabilities were also explored. Of the online survey respondents, 90% indicated that their school had taken specific actions or interventions to address the poor performance of students with disabilities.

Seventy-five percent of all survey participants indicated that the most common action or intervention taken to address the poor performance of students with disabilities was instructional change (Table 8). The group that indicated instructional changes as the reason for improvement was composed of 89% general education teachers and 70% special education teachers. Other actions or interventions taken that were related to students with disabilities involved curricular and organizational changes. Curricular changes were indicated by 56% of all participants. Organizational changes were indicated by 38% of all respondents and were also mentioned repeatedly in the personal follow-up interviews. Ten percent of all respondents indicated that nothing was done to improve the performance of students with disabilities with 17% of the special education teachers responding to this type of action or intervention. Responses can equal more than 100% due to participants indicating more than one action or intervention that was taken towards improved performance.

Table 8

Types of Interventions

Reasons for improvement	Administrator	General Education Teacher	Special Education Teacher	Support staff	Response Totals
Instructional changes	67%	89%	70%	69%	75%
Curricular changes	44%	67%	57%	46%	56%
Organizational changes	56%	50%	22%	39%	38%
Nothing	22%	0%	17%	8%	10%

Instructional Changes. The analysis of the survey and interview data indicated that the primary intervention or action taken towards the improvement of performance for students with disabilities was instructional changes. All the groups of participants, administrators, general education teachers, special education teachers, and support staff indicated, with 75% of the responses, that instructional change was the intervention taken the most often (Table 8). The qualitative data gathered through the descriptive survey questions and personal interviews also supported the theme of instructional change.

The analysis of qualitative data revealed that more than 95% of the responses indicated that co-teaching and the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classes was the primary action taken to improve student progress (Table 9).

Table 9

Types of Instructional Changes

Instructional Changes	Qualitative data analysis
Co-teaching and the inclusion of students with disabilities in general ed classes	> 95% of responses
Research-based reading strategies and repeated practice	> 90%
Test-taking skills	87%
Data-driven instruction	80%

The biggest intervention was moving the students [with disabilities] to the general education classes. It has been very positive. The kids have mixed very well. The students [with disabilities] get all the broad information and then they go to advisory [instructional study hall] for reinforcement to work with the special education teacher. The students hear all the regular education information and are exposed to it. (General education teacher 8, personal communication, May 15, 2009)

Respondents stated that NCLB and AYP requirements had helped the co-teaching intervention. “We have more students in co-taught language arts classes that would have been in self-contained [classes]. They are learning from their peers as well as [from] general education teachers” (online survey descriptive response, April 3, 2009). Co-teaching allowed general education and special education teachers more opportunities for collaboration. The area of collaboration between general education and special education teachers also emerged as a significant action or intervention currently in place or being

considered for the future. The collaboration provided through co-teaching gave teachers the opportunity to discuss methods of adapting the curriculum to meet students' needs. "I connect with the teacher and see what is being worked on by talking directly with them or jumping on their website to see what the task is so I know what's being done. I can modify for my classroom" (Special education teacher 10, personal communication, May 15, 2009). It was reported that everyone worked together to help the students reach their goals. "We have one teacher [special education] for our grade team so that is nice. We can share information about the students and the special education teacher is right there to give feedback" (General education teacher 8, personal communication, May 15, 2009). Co-teaching also provided students with disabilities with opportunities to be exposed to the general education curriculum. Through inclusion and co-teaching, students with disabilities were reported to have improved self-confidence and behavior. "With co-teaching the behavior [of the students with disabilities] improves a lot so that helps them learn" (Special education teacher 8, personal communication, May 20, 2009). "Having kids staying out of trouble for a majority of the day and focus on grades helped to make for success of these students [students with disabilities]" (Special education teacher 14, personal communication, May 29, 2009). Special education teachers reported that co-teaching had provided them with an increased awareness of the Illinois Learning Standards and an added focus to their instruction. It was also reported that administrative support is necessary for long-term successful co-teaching.

Participants indicated in more than 90% of their responses that they used research-based reading strategies, extra help, and repeated practice to improve the performance of students with disabilities (Table 9). It was noted that the extra help and

practice were provided for all students not just the students with disabilities. Repeated practice was focused on general reading, writing, and math skills and the process of writing extended response answers.

It was also reported with 87% frequency in the qualitative data that teachers taught more test-taking skills to help improve the performance of all students (Table 9). The skills taught included providing students with “insight on how to eliminate answers or how to choose one answer over another” (Special education teacher 10, personal communication, May 15, 2009) and how to use the standardized test format. Students were taught how to use a bubble-format answer key correctly and record their answers appropriately. Instructional focus was also provided through the use of the types of questions that appear on the ISAT. “When we know that a child will be confronted with ‘this’ type of question, we want to get them ready” (Special education teacher 14, personal communication, May 20, 2009).

A fourth approach to instructional change indicated by 80% of the qualitative responses was the use of more meaningful data-driven instruction (Table 9). Teachers’ instruction focused on individual student needs as measured by standardized and teacher-made tests. Progress monitoring of student learning was also used to measure progress. Both general education and special education teachers reported that they focused on making the instruction meaningful to students by trying to relate their instruction to students’ daily lives and provide additional background information when needed.

Curricular changes. Over 50% of the online respondents indicated they had made curricular changes to improve the performance of students with disabilities (Table 8). The changes in curriculum and instruction are often closely linked. As mentioned in the

instructional changes, the focus on reading was also important. An intensive reading program geared towards students with disabilities had been recently adopted in several schools. Other changes included curriculum mapping across grade levels for both general education and special education and compacting, or condensing, the curriculum for students with disabilities. In several schools, new RtI (Response to Intervention) programs had been implemented for all students.

Organizational Changes. The third measure taken to address the improvement of students with disabilities involved organizational changes. Although this measure was not as significant in participant response through the online survey (38%) it was significant in the qualitative data. Again, organizational changes were apparent in the other interventions involving instructional and curriculum changes therefore overlapping areas emerged in this improvement measure. Through personal interviews and the descriptive responses on the surveys, organizational changes, were significant at the school administrative level, the teacher level, and at the instructional level. Of the seven schools represented by the data, four schools had undergone recent administrative changes with new principals or assistant principals.

It was also reported repeatedly that teacher assignment had been changed. Special education teachers were assigned to general education grade level teams and responsible for the students with disabilities at that grade level. These special education teachers provided additional student support during an instructional study hall time and served as the key person for providing support to the general education teachers at that grade level. The special education teachers also reported that they were more careful in the development and implementation of IEP modifications related to testing conditions.

The largest area of organizational change related to ISAT preparation and implementation. The idea of ISAT preparation and implementation was repeated with over 90% frequency in the qualitative data. Teachers indicated that ISAT preparations had routinely become part of their teaching. “The preparation for ISAT started with day one [of school]” (online survey descriptive response, question 11.2, April 6, 2009). As special education teacher 5 stated, “Preparing for the test is incorporated throughout the learning experience. ISAT skills are a part of our everyday teaching” (personal communication, May 13, 2009). Special education teacher 15 expressed one of the reoccurring ideas of organizational change related to ISAT preparation. “I feel that every day of meaningful teaching prepares them [students with disabilities] for ISAT” (personal communication, May 20, 2009).

To help improve students’ performance on the ISAT they were given the opportunity to take ownership of performance by tracking their scores over time and predicting their level of proficiency on future tests. To raise the awareness of the importance of the ISAT, the qualitative data revealed that attempts were made to raise the level of excitement for the test. Activities to increase excitement included pep assemblies before or after the weeks of ISAT, special ‘testing’ t-shirts, nutritional snacks, and fun downtime during the weeks of testing. It was also indicated by respondents in several schools that the ISAT was administered in the morning only and that no new material was introduced in any academic classes during the weeks of testing.

When asked how many days were spent reviewing and preparing the students for the ISAT approximately half of the respondents indicated that they spent 32 or more days in preparation. The average amount of time spent reviewing and preparing was 24-27

days. Approximately 70% of the respondents indicated that the amount of time spent in test preparation was about the same as previous years' preparations but 81% of the respondents took extra efforts to ensure the success of their students with disabilities. Of this group, 100% of the special education teachers reported that they took extra efforts with their students toward success on the ISAT, which was different than previous years for half of the special education teachers.

A one-way ANOVA test was run to compare the number of days spent reviewing and preparing for the ISAT and the respondents' indication of AYP failure based on the poor performance of students with disabilities. There was no significant difference in the days spent reviewing for the ISAT and a school's failure to meet AYP, $F(2, 61) = 1.24$.

Another one-way ANOVA was run to compare the number of days spent reviewing and preparing for the ISAT and the respondents indication that their school had returned to meeting AYP for the students with disabilities subgroup. There was no significant difference in the days spent reviewing and preparing for the ISAT and a school's return to meeting AYP, $F(3, 60) = 1.16$.

Collaboration. Another emergent theme related to the actions or interventions related to students with disabilities that are in place at the respondents' schools or are being considered by the respondents was that of collaboration (Table 10). Of the online survey respondents, 98% indicated that the general education and special education teachers in their school collaborate. The primary method of collaboration with 93% response total on the survey was co-teaching. Grade level team meetings were also a common method of collaboration with 92% of the responses. Common plan time was another significant method of collaboration with 73% of the responses. Responses can total more than 100%

due to participants indicating more than one method of collaboration. Of the administrator respondents, 87% indicated that their teachers are now collaborating through co-teaching and 100% of them indicated future plans for collaboration through co-teaching.

Table 10

Collaboration

Do special education and general education teachers in your school collaborate?	Administrator	General Education Teacher	Special Education Teacher	Support staff	Response Totals
Yes	100%	100%	96%	100%	98%
How do the teachers collaborate?					
• Co-teaching	87%	100%	87%	100%	93%
• Grade level team meetings	100%	83%	96%	92%	92%
• Common plan time	63%	83%	70%	69%	73%

Research Question Three

One of the last questions of the online survey asked participants if they were concerned about the ethicality of actions or interventions occurring in their school (Table 11). Half of the respondents skipped this question. Of the half who responded, 67% indicated that they were not concerned about the ethicality of the actions or interventions occurring in their school. This represents 34% of the total responses. Of the 33% who had concerns about the ethicality of actions or interventions in their schools, 42% were special education teachers.

Table 11

Ethical Concerns

Do you have ethical concerns?	Administrator (n=4)	General Education Teacher (n=8)	Special Education Teacher (n=12)	Support staff (n=9)	Response Totals (n=33)
Yes	25%	12%	42%	45%	33%
No	75%	88%	58%	55%	67%

The primary emergent theme gathered from the online descriptive responses and personal follow-up interviews was the ethicality issue of state standardized tests, primarily the ISAT, being administered to students with disabilities. Overwhelmingly, respondents indicated that students with disabilities do not have the capacity or capability to perform successfully on grade level standardized tests. The students with disabilities were reported as prepared and making progress but were not capable of achieving the benchmark standards. “To a certain extent it is [unethical] because we are trying to measure somebody on something that is impossible for [them] to meet,” (Support staff 5, personal communication, May 13, 2009). One respondent related the concept of testing students with disabilities on grade level tests to dunking a basketball.

I would love to dunk a basketball. I will train and workout and practice everyday, but I will never be able to dunk a basketball because it’s five feet for me. I don’t know anyone who has a five-foot vertical. So I’ll get as high as I can, but I’m not going to dunk it. So I think it’s kind of the same with kids with disabilities. If their IEPs say they are only at this point then let’s push them to that point and

once they get there, we'll try to get them a little farther. (General education teacher 9, personal communication, May 15, 2009)

All of the respondents indicated that their concerns in these areas related to all students, both students in general education students and students with disabilities.

Conclusions

Conclusions were based on the data collected for each research question through online survey completion and personal interviews. Both quantitative and qualitative data were considered and reported in the findings. The conclusions were as free from conjecture and bias as possible.

Research Question One

The disaggregation of data from the ISAT scores and the NCLB and AYP requirements has impacted the progress of students with disabilities and their schools in both positive and negative ways. All schools that participated in this study had students with disabilities performing below state standards for their age-appropriate grade level. This finding was expected and not surprising. The students with disabilities subgroup had impacted the schools' ability to reach the AYP standards established by the state. While most administrators were aware of this subgroup's effect on their school's AYP status, many teachers were unaware. Most special education teachers were not sure if their students had affected their school's AYP status at all. The special education teachers' lack of knowledge related to their schools' AYP status is an area of concern. Administrators need to make a greater effort to inform their staff, especially the special education teachers, about the performance of the students with disabilities.

Both general education and special education teachers were generally unaware of their school's AYP status or if the school had returned to an acceptable level of performance. The knowledge of AYP status was very role specific. Administrators were very clear in their knowledge and special education teachers were the least knowledgeable of their school's AYP status. Again, administrators need to make an effort to keep their staff informed of students' progress toward AYP standards.

The primary reason for schools' return to AYP status was the implementation of specific actions or interventions. These specific actions or interventions were discussed previously in this chapter. Administrators also stated that the state's recalculation of AYP and safe harbor targets helped their students with disabilities group meet AYP.

Most administrators and general education teachers reported that the NCLB and AYP requirements have benefitted the students with disabilities. Special educators and support staff disagreed and reported that NCLB and AYP requirements had a negative impact on the students with disabilities subgroup. Accountability for teachers and schools emerged as the most significant benefit of the NCLB, AYP, and ISAT requirements. Both general and special education teachers use data to drive their instruction and teach with an intentional attitude toward the state standards. The special education teachers that reported the NCLB requirements as a benefit for their students use the state standards to write students' IEPs and to drive their instruction. The academic rigor for students with disabilities has also been increased in some schools. Because schools are required to closely monitor and report this subgroup's progress, the instruction of students with disabilities can no longer be ignored. Their success is vitally important to the success of the school as a whole. Another benefit of the NCLB, AYP, and ISAT requirements was

the implementation of co-teaching strategies, more inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classes, and collaboration between general education and special education teachers. Co-teaching, inclusion, and collaboration emerged as the primary theme in all collected data.

Most special education teachers and support staff indicated that the NCLB and AYP standards had a negative impact on students with disabilities. The focus of the negativism was based on the state's unrealistic expectations of student performance. Students functioning several years below grade level cannot be expected to perform with competency on grade level ISAT questions. It was significant that special education teachers and support staff expressed dissatisfaction in the testing and reporting process while the majority of administrators and general education teachers reported a positive impact of the NCLB requirements. This group of special education and support staff professionals has direct contact with the students with disabilities and witnesses the negative impact of the testing procedures on their students. It was also significant that special education teachers were skeptical of their students' progress even though their school had reported an improvement in AYP status.

Although the benefits of the NCLB and AYP requirements were reported by less of the survey participants, the positive impact was of greater value than the negative impact. The increase in the accountability of teachers and schools as related to students with disabilities has brought the progress of this group of students to the forefront of educational planning. As a result of the higher expectations, the academic rigor for students with disabilities has also been increased. It was significant that general education and special education teachers used data to drive their instruction. The use of data-driven

instruction has increased the awareness of teaching toward the standards and raised the expectations of the performance of students with disabilities. It has also provided a basis for the development of IEP goals based on individual needs and state standards.

Another positive impact of the NCLB and AYP requirements was that the educational placement of students with disabilities had moved to a more inclusive setting with co-teaching existing in most of the surveyed schools. All of the participating administrators anticipated that co-teaching would begin or continue in their schools during the 2009-2010 school year. With the continuation and expansion of co-teaching, more students with disabilities will be exposed to the state learning standards and have the opportunity to increase their learning.

Research Question Two

Co-teaching, inclusion, and collaboration emerged as the primary actions or interventions related to students with disabilities. The middle schools in this study that had incorporated co-teaching throughout all grades, and in at least reading and math, reported an increase in the performance of students with disabilities as measured by ISAT. The use of research-based reading strategies, intensive repeated practice, and extra help has also contributed to the improved instruction and performance of students with disabilities. Some of the non-academic effects of co-teaching, inclusion, and collaboration were an increase in the confidence, self-esteem, and behavior of students with disabilities. As students' behavior improved in co-taught classes more time was spent on-task and more learning occurred.

Another action or intervention that occurred was the intentional teaching of test-taking skills. The effect of this action was that students were better equipped to take

standardized tests. Many students with disabilities have difficulty with test-taking skills and need to be taught to transfer one set of skills to another area of instruction. With the intentional teaching of test-taking skills this transfer can occur. Students were taught how to eliminate answers in multiple-choice test questions and were familiar with the bubble-format answer document. These skills contribute the improvement of student performance on the ISAT.

Several organizational changes contributed to the improvement of students with disabilities. Staff changes, the preparation for the ISAT, and the implementation of the ISAT with students with disabilities were significant actions or interventions. Administrative changes made a large impact on student performance. The new principals brought a renewed focus on student performance and their staff responded with more attention to student learning. Also, the change in teachers' teaching assignments to include more co-teaching and specific grade-level responsibilities contributed to the improvement of student performance. The most significant organizational actions or interventions taken to improve student performance were the changes in the preparation and administration of the ISAT. Preparations for ISAT were embedded in instruction.

The general education instruction focused on state standards and students' deficit areas. Although most special education teachers were not sure of the performance of their students as related to AYP status, teachers were aware of the importance of the ISAT results. As reflected in the amount of time spent preparing and reviewing for ISAT, an average of 24-27 days with many teachers spending more than 32 days, teachers were well aware of the importance of ISAT. Schools used a variety of methods to increase this awareness including activities during the weeks before and after ISAT and an increased

attention to the testing modifications listed in the students' IEPs. With the positive activities and attention on the testing process, students and staff had a more positive, optimistic outlook toward the ISAT. Through the increased attention on IEP test modification requirements, students' opportunities for success were increased.

Research Question Three

It was significant that half of the online survey participants skipped the questions about ethical concerns related to students with disabilities. The researcher concluded that by skipping the questions the participants might have little to no ethical concerns, little to no commitment to make ethical decisions, or just wanted to finish the survey. The ethical questions were the last of the survey. Of the half of participants that answered the questions, most respondents had no ethical concerns. Based on existing past research, this was significant. Ethical concerns had been reported nationwide but in two central Illinois counties most survey and interview participants had few ethical concerns. Of the half of respondents that answered the questions related to ethical concerns, the concern that emerged with the most frequency was related to testing students with disabilities using state standardized tests. The use of the ISAT for students with disabilities was a concern regardless of the respondents' role. The use of state standardized tests and the subsequent reporting of scores for students with disabilities needs to be examined and evaluated with a focus on the ethicality of testing this subgroup.

Implications and Recommendations

The following implications and recommendations were based on changes that could be implemented as a result of this study. The primary impact of this study was on the instruction of students with disabilities. The study has potential impact on the

organizational structure of schools as related to students with disabilities. The recommendations also include questions that occurred to the researcher during the course of this study. The implications and recommendations were based on the original research questions.

Implications

Many teachers were unaware of the AYP status of their school. This was especially true for special education teachers. The implications of being unaware of one's school's AYP status could be positive or negative. But the findings related to the lack of awareness by the general education and especially the special education teachers raised some concerns about the implication of the teachers' lack of awareness.

Another implication of this study related to one of the reported benefits of the NCLB, AYP, and ISAT requirements. The implication was that an increase in the academic rigor for students with disabilities leads to improved students' progress and performance. The findings of this study demonstrated that in schools with strong co-teaching and teacher collaboration programs the performance of students with disabilities as measured by ISAT results improved.

It was significant that special education teachers were skeptical of their students' progress even though their school had reported an improvement in AYP status. The implications of this skepticism were a concern. Was their skepticism based on frustration and uncertainty in the testing process, in the public reporting of student performance, or in the ethical issues of state standardized testing for students with disabilities?

The use of co-teaching and collaboration were the primary interventions that emerged as findings in this study. These interventions were evident in varying degrees in

all schools participating in this study. One of the implications of co-teaching and collaboration between general education and special education teachers was that more students with disabilities were exposed to the content material stated in the Illinois Learning Standards. Students also had more opportunities to increase their learning through the exposure to the general education curriculum. Co-teaching and collaboration needs to continue and be expanded to give students with disabilities more opportunities for success.

The intentional teaching of test-taking skills was also a significant intervention used to improve the performance of students with disabilities. One of the implications of teaching these skills was that students would perform better on standardized tests. More intentional teaching of test-taking skills is needed for students with disabilities.

Schools used a variety of methods to increase student awareness of the importance of their performance on the ISAT. The methods to increase awareness included many activities in the weeks prior to ISAT, special attention to the actual implementation of the ISAT during the state scheduled testing weeks, and the days after ISAT. The implication of an increased focus on ISAT with positive activities and attention was that ISAT scores would improve.

The research base of knowledge as related to actions and interventions taken toward the improvement of the academic performance of students with disabilities has been expanded through this study. It also expanded the research base related of the effects of those actions or interventions in relationship to students with disabilities. More is also known about the actions taken by some middle schools in two counties in central Illinois towards increasing the awareness of the importance of the ISAT.

The ethicality of testing the students with disabilities subgroup was a minor finding of this study. The use of state standardized tests and the subsequent reporting of scores for students with disabilities has negatively impacted middle schools in two counties of central Illinois. The implications of the testing and subsequent reporting of scores for students with disabilities were that schools failed to meet AYP targets and were classified as failing schools. As the NCLB deadline of 2014 approaches, more schools face the possibility of negative sanctions.

Recommendations

More information is needed to explore the causes of teachers' lack of information regarding their school's AYP status. Were teachers uninformed by the administration? Were teachers too busy in their day-to-day teaching responsibilities or were they just unconcerned about their school's AYP status? Does the lack of awareness lead to lower expectations of student learning? Does teacher awareness of AYP status differ among elementary, middle, and high school teachers? These questions could be explored through future research.

More research is needed to document the changes in the academic progress and performance for students with disabilities. Future research is needed to determine if the increased academic rigor for students with disabilities causes a decrease in the number of students in this subgroup or creates other phenomenon. Future research could also explore schools' responses to a decrease in the number of students with disabilities within the subgroup.

Additional research is needed to determine the impact of co-teaching and collaboration between general education and special education teachers on the

performance of students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers. As the use of co-teaching and collaboration expands further research is needed to document the validity and effectiveness of these interventions.

Further research is needed to determine the effectiveness of positive activities and increased attention toward the importance of ISAT scores. With increased attention on students' needs as related to standardized state testing, does long-term improvement of ISAT scores take place? Finally, as the NCLB law continues to change, further research is needed to determine the effects of the ever-changing NCLB and AYP requirements as related to the subgroup of students with disabilities.

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Appendix A
Online Survey

Special Education, AYP, and student success

1. Consent for Participation

Please read the information below and indicate your consent for participation in this study.

Thank you for your time and thoughts.

1. Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

You are invited to take part in a research study, which is part of my doctoral dissertation through the EdD - Ethical Leadership program at Olivet Nazarene University (ONU) in Bourbonnais, Illinois. This study is exploring the impact of NCLB and AYP targets on students with disabilities. This study will also explore the actions and or interventions, the effect and ethical considerations or implications of those actions related to the performance of students with disabilities. Administrators, teachers, and support staff are invited to participate in this study. Your participation is completely voluntary and the completion of the online survey should take approximately 15 minutes. If you choose to participate in a follow-up interview, it will take approximately 30-60 minutes and arranged at a time convenient for you. I will be the only person conducting the interviews and your answers and identity will be confidential.

The purpose of this study is to discover the actions or interventions taken by schools with successfully performing students with disabilities, as measured by ISAT scores, and the actions and interventions of schools with poor performing students with disabilities. The ethical implications of the actions or interventions will also be explored.

Online survey questions will ask about your experiences and interactions in relationship to ISAT, AYP, and students with disabilities. There are no right or wrong answers and you will have an opportunity to explain your answers as part of the survey. At the conclusion of the online survey, you will have the opportunity to participate in a personal interview at a later date, if you so desire. During the interview I will be taking notes and recording the session. You will have the opportunity to ask me to stop the interview or turn off the recorder at any time. You may also choose to review the interview transcript to check for accuracy, if you so desire.

You may choose to end the interview or not answer a question at any time.

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There are no adverse affects to ending your participation in the survey or interview.

The online survey questions, interview process, and your responses do not pose any risk to you or your school.

You will not receive any direct benefit from this study. The information gathered may be helpful to you or your school and I will provide a summary of my findings upon completion of the study, if you wish to receive one.

The results of the online survey will be tabulated as a group and no individual responses will be reported. If you choose to participate in an interview, you will be assigned a code to identify your responses. No one, other than you and me, will know your responses. All recordings and hand written notes will be stored in a locked file located off the ONU campus. All electronic notes and transcriptions will be saved on the ONU network, accessible only by me, and on my personal computer. All recording will be destroyed within three years of the acceptance of my dissertation.

If you have any questions at any time, please feel free to ask or contact me. I can be contacted through email at rreynol1@olivet.edu or reynolds.ruth@gmail.com. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Institutional Review Board at ONU at 1-815-939-5011.

As a thank you for participating in this study, you are eligible to enter a drawing for a \$50 Barnes and Noble gift certificate. Only one participant will be randomly drawn and receive the certificate at the conclusion of the data collection period, approximately midsummer 2009. If you wish to enter this drawing please include your email address below.

*** 2. Please indicate your informed consent to participate in this study.**

Yes

No

2. Survey

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* 1. How are you involved in providing special education services in your school?

- Administrator
- General education teacher
- Special education teacher
- Support staff

2. Has NCLB (No Child Left Behind) and AYP (Adequate Yearly Progress) requirements helped your school's students with disabilities?

- Yes
- No

If yes, please describe the ways these requirements have helped

3. Students with poor performance

* 1. Does your school currently have students with disabilities performing below state standards?

- Yes
- No

4. poor performance

1. Did you or your school undertake specific actions or interventions to address the poor performance of students with disabilities?

- Yes
- No

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2. What measures have been taken to address the poor performance of students with disabilities?

- Instructional changes
- Staff changes
- Organizational changes
- Curricular changes
- Other
- Nothing

If you checked any of the first four changes (instructional, staff, organizational, or curricular) or other, please explain in the box below.

5. Failed AYP solely due to sp ed

* 1. Has your school ever failed to meet AYP targets based solely on the performance of the students with disabilities subgroup?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

6. Failing AYP

1. In your opinion, why have the students with disabilities at your school not meet the state's AYP targets?

2. Has your school now returned to meeting AYP for the students with disabilities subgroup?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

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3. To what do you attribute the improvement of your students with disabilities. Check all that apply.

- Specific actions or interventions
- Student population changes
- Staff changes
- Other
- State's recalculation of AYP
- Chance
- Our students with disabilities subgroup has not improved

If you marked any of the first four attributes above (specific actions or interventions, student population changes, staff changes, or other), please explain your interventions or changes in the box below.

7. place of instruction

1. Where do students with disabilities in your school receive their academic instruction? Please check all that apply

- General education classroom for all academic classes
- General education classroom for 1-2 academic classes
- Resource room
- Special education classroom for 1-2 academic classes
- Special education classroom for all academic classes

Other, please specify

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2. What data are used to measure the progress or performance of your students with disabilities? Please check all that apply

- Standardized tests
- Textbook tests
- Teacher-made tests
- Portfolios
- Curriculum based measurement assessment
- Progress Monitoring

Other, please specify

8. Collaboration

*** 1. Do special education and general education teachers in your school collaborate?**

- Yes
- No

2. In what ways do they collaborate?

- Co-teaching
- Common plan time
- Committee participation
- Grade level meetings

Other, please specify

9. ways of collaboration

*** 1. Do you or your school have plans to begin collaboration in the future?**

- Yes
- No

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2. What are your plans for future collaboration?

- Co-teaching
- Common plan time
- Committee participation
- Grade level meetings

Other, please specify

10. ISAT

1. How many days have you spent reviewing and/or preparing your students for this year's ISAT?

- 0-3
- 4-7
- 8-11
- 12-15
- 16-19
- 20-23
- 24-27
- 28-31
- 32 or more

2. How does this amount of time compare to previous years' preparations?

- It is more time
- It is less time
- It is about the same amount of time

* 3. Did you take extra efforts to ensure the success of your students with disabilities in this year's ISAT?

- Yes
- No

11. Extra efforts for the ISAT

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1. Are these efforts different than in past years?

Yes

No

2. Please explain how these efforts are different.

3. Were the efforts taken with the students with disabilities different than those taken with the general education students?

Yes

No

Not sure

12. Ethics

Please be assured that your answers will be treated with respect and confidentiality. Your answers will be tabulated with other responses and no individual answers will be disclosed.

* 1. All actions and interventions have some degree of ethical implications.

Are you concerned about the ethicality of actions or interventions occurring in your school?

Yes

No

13. Ethic concerns

1. Are your concerns related to

only students with disabilities?

only students in general education?

all students?

2. If you would, please elaborate about your concerns. Remember, your comments will not be linked to you in any way.

14. Interview

Special Education, AYP, and student success

1. Are you willing to meet with me to participate in a more in-depth personal interview?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

If yes or maybe, please include your contact information with the best time and preferred method of contact.

15. Thank you

Thank you so much for your time and thoughts. Without you, this study would not be complete!

If you chose not to enter in the drawing for a \$50 gift Barnes and Nobles gift certificate at the beginning of the survey, you have one more chance to change your mind.

Once again, thank you. Click on the Done button to finish the survey.

1. Enter your email address here.

Appendix B

Email Invitation to Participate in the Online Survey

Subject: Your help is requested with my dissertation

Body: [FirstName]

I am conducting a survey for my doctoral dissertation through ONU and your response would be appreciated. I know this is a very busy time of the year and your time is precious. I would really appreciate your input and opinions. This survey will take about 15-20 minutes to complete and can be accessed wherever you have Internet connection.

Your name was selected for this survey with permission from your building principal or special education director. Only teachers, administrators, and support staff from middle schools in Kankakee and Will counties are eligible to participate in this survey. You are one of the special few!

Please follow this link to the survey:

<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx>

This link is uniquely tied to this survey and your email address. Please do not forward this message. If you know of others who would like to participate just let me know and I will be happy to send them an invitation to participate.

Once again, I appreciate your time and your willingness to help me in my study.

Thanks for your participation!

Please note: If you do not wish to receive further emails from us, please click the link below, and you will be automatically removed from our mailing list.

<http://www.surveymonkey.com/optout.aspx>

Appendix C

Follow-up Personal Interview Questions

1. Please elaborate about your thoughts on the actions or interventions that contributed to the improvement of your, or your school's, students with disabilities performance on the ISAT.
2. Tell me more about the measures that you or your school has taken to address the performance of students with disabilities.
3. Please explain the academic instructional setting for students with disabilities in your school.
4. Please explain how you measure student progress and your data collection process.
5. Please explain the collaboration between general education and special education teachers in your building.
6. Please elaborate about the actions or interventions that have been taken for the students with disabilities in your class or your school.
7. During the ISAT testing weeks many activities take place in my building. Please share some of the activities that occur in your building during the ISAT weeks or the weeks leading up to the tests.
8. One part of my dissertation focuses on the ethical implications of testing procedures and activities and the inclusion of students with disabilities in standardized tests. Are there any activities or occurrences in your building that are questionable in your eyes? Do you have any concerns about inclusion of students with disabilities in the standardized tests? Please explain.

Appendix D

Notification to the Randomly Selected Winner of the Thank You Gift

Ruth Reynolds <rreynoll@olivet.edu>

To: xxxxx (name deleted to ensure anonymity)

xxxxx,

At long last, the winning name has been selected from the many who responded to my dissertation survey last spring and.....

CONGRATULATIONS, you won the \$50 gift certificate to Barnes and Noble!

Please let me know if you would like me to mail it to you or deliver it to school. Either way is fine with me.

If you have any questions, or if you just don't believe your good fortune, feel free to call or email me.

Once again, congratulations!

Ruth Reynolds
ONU EdD candidate