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NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND: THE IMPACT ON SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS  
AT THE SECONDARY LEVEL

by  
Stacey E. Gofberg

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the  
Master of Arts Degree  
of  
The Graduate School  
at  
Rowan University  
June 12, 2006

Approved

Date Approved 8/7/06

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## ABSTRACT

Stacey Gofberg

NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND: THE IMPACT ON SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS  
AT THE SECONDARY LEVEL

2005/06

Dr. Tanya Santangelo

Masters of Arts in Learning Disabilities

The purpose of this qualitative investigation was to explore how the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) has impacted special education teachers at the secondary level. Two research strategies were used for this study. First, surveys were given to eleven special education teachers at a southern New Jersey high school. Then, a veteran teacher and a novice teacher at the high school were interviewed. It was found that participants generally endorsed the overarching goals of NCLB, but they did not believe that all of the requirements were realistic for students with disabilities. Based on these findings, recommendations related to special education teachers and students with disabilities are offered.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my fiancé, Keith, for all his love and patience throughout a difficult and busy year. Throughout this process, he has been my strength and motivation. I cannot thank him enough for everything he has done for me in my life, especially for his encouragement during graduate school.

I would also like to especially thank my mother, Karen, for her help in editing this paper and being patient with me. She has been a major support system in my pursuit of my Master's Degree I could not have completed this program without her. She has been an inspiration to me in many aspects of my life, but I am particularly grateful for all those times she believed in me when I just wanted to give up.

A special thanks to my father, Alan, and my step-mother, Marcy, who have also assisted with my graduate education and supported me throughout these many years it has taken to complete this degree.

I cannot thank Dr. Santangelo enough for all of her encouragement, support, understanding, advice, and positive attitude. No matter what questions I had, you always had a smile on your face and kept pushing me through. Thank you very much and I could not have done it without you!

This thesis is dedicated in loving memory to my grandfather, Bernard Gofberg, who passed away on Thanksgiving Day, 2005. He was always proud of my chosen career in education and was supportive of my decision to attend graduate school. His interest in my chosen topic for this thesis was evident when I found an article addressed to me pertaining to No Child Left Behind following his death. His guidance and brilliance is missed everyday. Thank you Pop-Pop!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....iii

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....1

    Overview of the Study.....2

    Operational Definitions.....3

    Overview of the Paper.....4

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE.....5

    History.....6

    Goals, Requirements, and Implications.....6

    Structure.....8

    New Jersey Requirements.....9

    Specific Special Education Considerations.....10

    Outcomes.....11

    Summary.....12

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY.....13

    Guiding Research Questions.....13

    Research Strategies.....14

    Data Analysis.....14

    Selected School.....15

    Selected Participants.....16

    Potential Researcher Biases.....17

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS.....19

    Survey and Interview Questions.....19

Perceptions about Curriculum Changes.....	20
Students' Performance and Attitude.....	21
Impact of Highly Qualified Status.....	22
Strengths and Challenges of NCLB.....	24
Impact on Students' and Teachers' Classroom Experiences.....	25
Students with Disabilities and the HSPA.....	26
Summary.....	27
CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY.....	29
Summary of the Survey and Interview Data.....	29
Recommendations.....	31
Limitations.....	32
REFERENCES.....	34
APPENDICES.....	35
Appendix A: Survey.....	35
Appendix B: Table of Participants.....	36
Appendix C: The New Jersey Model for Identifying Highly Qualified Teachers...37	

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Since the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was passed in 2001, there has been controversy as to whether or not it effectively helps improve student performance.

Schools across the nation have been diligently striving to meet the standards that have been outlined by NCLB, including having students achieve proficiency on assessments and having a highly qualified teacher in every classroom (Mantel, 2005). No Child Left Behind also mandated that students with disabilities be held accountable for the same level of achievement as students without disabilities. This mandate means that special education teachers have had to make significant adjustments in curriculum, lesson planning, and daily activities (Mantel, 2005).

*Purpose.* The purpose of this study was to explore how NCLB has impacted special education teachers' classroom experiences. Specifically, this included highlighting perceptions about the strengths and weaknesses of NCLB, and opinions about whether or not the legislation has improved the achievement of students with disabilities. It provided insight from both a veteran teacher who has had to make adjustments since NCLB and a new teacher who has only taught since the law was implemented.

*Need.* The No Child Left Behind Act has only been implemented for three school years. This has not been an adequate amount of time to prove whether or not the law has been successful. Some research has been undertaken to explore whether the legislation has resulted in quantitative achievement gains, however much less is known about the qualitative experiences of special education teachers and students with disabilities. This

study helped provide insight into how NCLB has affected the classroom and curriculum for special education teachers and students with disabilities.

*Value of the study.* This study also provided feedback about whether the requirements of the law are effectively addressing the needs of students who qualify for special education services. With that information, both teachers and administrators can consider whether to continue or modify the strategies they are currently using to comply with NCLB. The results of also illuminated ways to create a comfortable and successful environment for special education teachers, administrators, and most importantly, students.

*Significance.* The No Child Left Behind Act has been a central focus for school districts across the United States. Its standards and goals have been on the minds of administrators and teachers since 2001. The requirement of 100% academic proficiency by 2014 is quickly approaching and creating pressure throughout education (Moore, 2005). Teachers and administrators are being held accountable for the progress of all students, including those with disabilities. However, this population is struggling to achieve proficiency and their scores are negatively impacting school and district performance (Moore, 2005). Thus, it is critical to understand how to promote success for students and teachers.

#### *Overview of the Study*

This qualitative study utilized surveys that were completed by a diverse group of secondary special education teachers. The format of the survey provided opportunities for participants to voice their personal opinions about NCLB without being influenced by the researcher. The survey was completed anonymously, which allowed the participants



to give honest and unbiased answers without scrutiny. Appendix A contains a copy of the survey distributed to the participants. They were given approximately one week to complete the survey.

Two special education teachers were also interviewed utilizing questions similar to those presented in the survey. One interviewee was a veteran teacher and the other was fairly new to the field of teaching.

*Guiding Research Questions.* The following research questions guided data collection and analysis.

1. What is the history and essence of NCLB?
2. What are the goals, purpose, and structure of NCLB?
3. How do special education teachers perceive the impact of NCLB?
4. What is highly qualified and how does it impact teachers?
5. What are the standards of NCLB that affect the special education classroom?
6. How has NCLB impacted student performance and attitude?

#### *Operational Definitions*

The following terms have a specialized definition within the context of this study:

*Highly Qualified.* Highly qualified pertains to the education, certification, and experience of all classroom teachers relative to the core academic subjects they teach (United States Department of Education, 2005).

*Accountability.* States must describe how they will close the achievement gap and make sure all students, including those who are disadvantaged, achieve academic proficiency (United States Department of Education, 2005).

*Adequate Yearly Progress.* Each state must establish a definition of adequate yearly progress (AYP) which is used to measure the achievement of schools and districts over time (United States Department of Education, 2005).

*Individualized Education Plan.* An Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is a specialized education plan for students with disabilities that specifically designed to address a student's individual needs (United States Department of Education, 2005).

### *Overview of the Paper*

In this chapter, an overview of the framework for this study was provided. Specifically, the purpose, need, and significance of this study were presented. The guiding research questions were listed and definitions of relevant terms were given. In Chapter Two, the literature and data relevant to NCLB is reviewed, including an examination of how it applies to students with disabilities and special education instruction. In Chapter Three, the study's methodology is further explained. In Chapter Four, the data from the study is presented and interpreted. In Chapter Five, the results and findings of this study are summarized, and the themes that emerged are discussed. Finally, recommendations for future practice are offered and limitations of this study are reviewed.

## CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In this chapter, literature related to the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act will be discussed. First, a history of how this legislation was created and implemented in the United States is offered. Next, an overview of the No Child Left Behind Act's purpose, goals, and structure is presented and federal and state assessment requirements are discussed. Next, information about the general provisions of NCLB is provided and specific details related to special education are highlighted. Finally, the NCLB highly qualified requirements for both general and special education teachers are discussed.

References for this literature review were accessed using several methods. First, broad searches were conducted on databases such as Academic Search Premier, EBSCO Host, CQ Researcher and internet websites, such as the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), U.S. Department of Education, and the New Jersey Department of Education. Relevant terms used in these searches included: structure, goals, and history of the No Child Left Behind Act, assessment requirements and NCLB, highly qualified teacher requirements and NCLB, provisions of NCLB, and teachers and NCLB. Then, relevant books were located and key information was highlighted and coded thematically. Ultimately, nine sources were utilized for this review. Because the focus of this study will be on the implementation and impact of NCLB on a suburban New Jersey high school, articles which were based on data from similar settings were included. However,

some relevant historical facts were taken from the articles focused on rural settings or elementary schools.

### *History*

On January 8, 2001, President George W. Bush signed the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. Unlike most bills which are signed by the President of the United States on the White House lawn, NCLB was signed at a ceremony at Hamilton High School in Hamilton, Ohio (Drasgow & Yell, 2005). The law, which passed with overwhelming support from Congress, represented “an unprecedented increase in the role that the federal government plays in education because along with the increase in funding, NCLB also increased federal mandates and requirements of states, school districts, and public schools” (Drasgow & Yell, 2005, p. 1). The passage of No Child Left Behind represented a radical overhaul to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which was the existing federal law governing education from kindergarten through high school. The No Child Left Behind Act is the most significant expansion of the federal government into education in our nation’s history.

### *Goals, Requirements, and Implications*

No Child Left Behind has five main requirements: (a) each state must demonstrate that it has adopted challenging academic content standards and challenging student academic achievement standards for the state, its agencies, and local schools; (b) the academic standards shall be the same that apply to all schools and children in the state; (c) each state has to demonstrate that it has developed and is implementing a single, statewide accountability system that include sanctions and rewards that it will use to hold local educational agencies and schools accountable for student achievement; (d) each

state must define what constitutes adequate yearly progress (AYP) for the state and all public elementary and secondary schools; and (e) sanctions can occur if schools fail to make adequate yearly progress in consecutive years (Dabney, 2004).

However, although these five general themes are outlined in the federal legislation, there are not uniform implementation requirements. Consequently, each state has developed its own assessment system to comply with the law (Moores, 2005).

The No Child Left Behind Act also contains specific goals to support its general themes. These include: (a) requirements for highly qualified teachers, (b) using research-based practices as the foundation of instruction, and (c) developing tests to assess students so that data-driven decisions become an integral part of the educational system (Drasgow & Yell, 2005). Additionally, the law requires every child achieve proficiency according to state-defined educational standards by the end of the 2013-2014 and that every student with limited English proficiency become proficient in English. The No Child Left Behind Act has also set a goal that all students will graduate from high school (United States Department of Education, 2004). Although there is currently a debate about whether these goals are realistic, there is little question that these goals require a fundamental change in the way student progress is measured (Drasgow & Yell, 2005).

If a school or district does not meet the goals of NCLB, the state can: (a) decrease management authority, (b) institute and implement a new curriculum, including professional development for all staff, (c) turn the school over to the state educational agency, or (d) enter into a contract with a private management company with a demonstrated record of effectiveness to operate the public school (Dabney, 2004).

### *Structure*

The No Child Left Behind Act consists of ten titles or sections which are specifically structured to help states progressively move towards achieving their proficiency requirements. These include: (a) improving the academic achievement of the disadvantaged, (b) preparing, training, and recruiting high quality teachers and principals, (c) language instruction for limited English proficient and immigrant students, (d) 21<sup>st</sup> century schools, (e) promoting informed parental choice and innovative programs, (f) flexibility and accountability, (g) Indian, Native Hawaiian, and Alaskan Native Education, (h) impact aid program, (i) general provisions, and (j) repeals, redesignations, and amendments to other statutes (Drasgow & Yell, 2005). Although all ten titles are an important part of NCLB, the first seven titles which relate to student performance, school programs, and the quality of education have the most significance and impact on teachers, principals, and parents (Drasgow & Yell, 2005).

*Assessment.* The No Child Left Behind Act required that states develop academic standards and corresponding assessments in each of the content areas. Specifically, by the 2005-2006 school year, states had to develop an assessment system which includes two annual tests in reading/language arts and mathematics that would be administered to all students in grades 3 through 8, and at least once in grades 10 through 12 (United States Department of Education, 2004). “The purpose of the statewide testing is to measure how successfully students are learning what is expected of them and how they are progressing toward meeting these important academic standards” (Drasgow & Yell, 2005, p. 22).

Schools are required to test 95% of their students, including 95% of students from racial and ethnic minority backgrounds, and students who are economically disadvantaged, who have disabilities, and who have limited English proficiency (Dragow & Yell, 2005). Regardless of background, virtually all students are expected to perform well on state assessments (Dabney, 2004). Collectively, schools' assessment data are used to establish whether or not they achieved requirements of state-developed Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) standards. By the 2013-2014 school year, NCLB mandates that all schools will reach 100% proficiency with each AYP standard (Dragow & Yell, 2005).

The AYP accountability system must be based on the state's academic standards, statewide assessments, and rates of graduation and attendance. The same accountability system must be used throughout the state and recognize achieving schools with rewards and apply sanctions to those who do not meet the set standards (Dragow & Yell, 2005).

#### *New Jersey Requirements*

In response to the NCLB mandate for a comprehensive state assessment system, New Jersey developed three sets of academic tests. These include: the Elementary School Proficiency Assessment (ESPA) administered to all fourth grade students, the Grade Eight Proficiency Assessment (GEPA) administered to all eighth grade students, and the High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA) administered to all eleventh grade students (New Jersey Department of Education, 2005). Data from the ESPA and the GEPA are used to monitor students' individual progress towards academic standards and a school's AYP. However, scores from the HSPA are also used to determine whether a student can graduate, because they have demonstrated academic proficiency.

After two years, parents of children who attend a school that repeatedly fails to meet AYP will have the option to transfer to another school. The state may also appoint an outside expert to advise the school on its progress toward making AYP (Dabney, 2004). Also by 2014, the state can replace or remove any school staff, including the principal, who is relevant to the failure to reach AYP.

#### *Specific Special Education Considerations*

There are also key provisions of NCLB that relate to special education. Students with disabilities are equally accountable and are required to achieve proficiency under NCLB; however, they are entitled to some special considerations. No Child Left Behind requires that students with disabilities receive appropriate testing accommodations and recognizes that grade-level assessments would not be appropriate for some students with disabilities (Caron, Embler, Hernandez, & McLaughlin, 2005). No Child Left Behind also gives school districts some flexibility to utilize alternate achievement standards with students who have severe cognitive disabilities.

*Highly qualified teachers.* Another requirement of NCLB is that school districts must only employ teachers who are considered to be “highly qualified.” To meet these standards, general education teachers must possess a bachelor’s degree, be certified in the content area that they teach, and pass a “rigorous” exam related to their specific content area (Caron, et al., 2005). Qualification requirements for special education teachers are governed by regulations in NCLB and in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA). Both laws emphasize that special education teachers must be highly qualified in the core academic subjects they teach. However, because the roles



and responsibilities of special education teachers are often broader than those of general education teachers, there are caveats to the enforcement of the regulations. The Council for Exceptional Children, for example, has explained:

While provisions in IDEA 2004 provide some flexibility in determining the qualifications of special education teachers teaching multiple subjects, meeting the standard of being highly qualified in every core academic subject is likely to present a significant challenge, especially for teachers across grade levels. As a result, it is likely that many students with disabilities will receive their primary instruction in core academic subjects in the general education classroom from the general education classroom teacher with consultative services from special education staff. (CEC, 2005, p. 2)

To accommodate for the fact that many special education teachers do not meet the requirements to be certified in a core academic subject area, many states, including New Jersey, developed a points system that allows teachers to document their experiences (such as years of successful classroom teaching), their participation in high-quality professional development, their service on curriculum development teams, and other activities related to the development of core academic content (see Appendix C) (CEC, 2005).

### *Outcomes*

In preparing for this study, it became evident that there is very little research documenting the actual impact of NCLB. After many thorough searches, no articles that explore how this legislation has impacted students with disabilities or special education

teachers were located. One article written by Mantel (2005) did show the impact of NCLB on different aspects of general education, such as student performance, schools meeting AYP, and the quality of teaching. According to Mantel, law suits have been filed and legislators from several states have implemented bills seeking exemptions from NCLB requirements. In contrast, supporters of the law are worried that NCLB is not being strictly enforced and there is too much leniency, therefore, its impact will be diluted. Mantel also reported that 74% of secondary education teachers are highly qualified in New Jersey and most schools in the United States are not meeting Adequate Yearly Progress.

### *Summary*

As described, NCLB has had a significant impact on education in school districts across the United States. However, despite the wide-spread impact of this legislation, there is a notable absence of research exploring the specific impact or outcomes for students with disabilities and special education teachers. This study was specifically designed to fill that void.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the research methodology used in this study. First, the guiding research questions for this study are presented. Next, the research strategies and data analysis procedures are discussed. Then, the site and participant selection is described. Finally, the potential biases of the researcher that impacted this study are discussed.

### *Guiding Research Questions*

The following research questions guided data collection and analysis. These questions were developed based on the themes which emerged through the review of the literature and on the researcher's personal understanding of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and the selected school.

1. What is the history and essence of NCLB?
2. What are the goals, purpose, and structure of NCLB?
3. How do special education teachers perceive the impact of NCLB?
4. What is highly qualified, and how does it impact teachers?
5. What are the standards of NCLB that affect the special education classroom?
6. How has NCLB impacted student performance and attitude?

### *Research Strategies*

This qualitative study involved two primary research strategies, surveys and interviews. The purpose of the study and an informed consent were reviewed and signed before the survey was distributed and interviews were conducted

*Surveys.* Surveys were distributed to all the special education teachers at one high school. The format of the survey provided the participants opportunity to express their own perspectives, without being influenced by the views of the researcher. The questions were developed based on relevant themes and what the researcher found to be inadequate information through the review of literature. Appendix A contains a copy of the survey given to each teacher. Each participant was given approximately one week to complete the survey.

*Interviews.* Semi-structured, individual interviews were conducted with a veteran teacher and a teacher who had only been teaching for four years. The same questions used in the survey (Appendix A) also guided the interviews. Each question was asked and then the researcher probed the interviewee to elaborate responses, as appropriate. Each interview was tape recorded and notes were taken by the researcher in order to determine common themes and key points.

### *Data Analysis*

The responses to survey questions were carefully read and highlighted to note key points made by the participants. Specific efforts were made to look for evidence which did not support the researcher's personal expectations. Ultimately, data from both the survey and interviews were integrated and summarized to derive findings.

### *Selected School*

This study was conducted in a high school which is part of a regional suburban high school district located in New Jersey. The school district consists of three high schools which serve approximately 5,000 students. This study focused on one high school which will be given the pseudonym, Pine Valley Regional High School. Pine Valley has approximately 1,450 students in grades 9-12. The demographic breakdown of Pine Valley Regional High School is 62.85% Caucasian, 28% African-American, 5% Hispanic, 4% Asian, and .15% American Indian. Out of the total population of students, 19% receive a free or reduced lunch and 12% are eligible to receive special education services.

The high school has one principal, four vice-principals, and eighty-five general education teachers. There are twelve full-time special education teachers, (including the researcher), one permanent substitute in the department, ten full-time educational assistants, and a complete Child Study Team with a social worker, psychologist, and Learning Disability Teacher Consultant. The average general education class size is twenty-five students and the average special education resource room class size is between twelve and sixteen students. Based on their Individualized Education Plan (IEP), students with disabilities can be placed in a resource room pull-out setting, general education classes with support, and/or included full-time in general education classes.

The school for this study was selected out of convenience because it is the researcher's place of employment. However, it was an ideal location for this study because both the district and the school are significantly affected by the implementation of NCLB. In the eleventh grade, students are administered the High School Proficiency

Assessment (HSPA), their final assessment before graduation. Overall, students at Pine Valley Regional High School were 80.2% proficient in Mathematics and 95.2% proficient in Language Arts. However, this data does not reflect students with disabilities or Limited English Proficiency students.

This particular school system has recently restructured the English and Math curriculum to simulate questions that will be posed on the HSPA. The administration also created an extra English class for eleventh grade students who receive special education services in order to focus solely on HSPA material. The students are taught by both a special education and general education teacher for five weeks prior to the administration of the HSPA. There is also a specific course designed to assist students with disabilities achieve proficiency in Math. In the 2004-2005 school year, 40% of special education students achieved proficiency in Mathematics and 100% proficient in Language Arts on the HSPA. However, only six students were in the special education subgroup. Thirty-three students classified with disabilities fell in the subgroup of students who are exempt from passing based on their IEP. Of those thirty-three students, 15.2% were proficient in Mathematics and 34.4% were proficient in Language Arts.

#### *Selected Participants*

The sample for this study consisted of five male and six female teachers with different levels of experience. This approach ensured that the data represented multiple perspectives from individuals. As shown in Appendix B, participants' years of experience range from three to fourteen years teaching special education, with the average being seven years. One veteran teacher, who has taught for fourteen years, and one new teacher, with only four years experience, both females, were purposefully

selected to be interviewed. This allowed the researcher to obtain the personal viewpoints of a teacher who has had to adjust to standards set by NCLB and one who has only taught since NCLB was enacted.

All of the special education teachers at Pine Valley Regional teach various grade levels, ranging from the ninth to the twelfth grade. Ten special education teachers are both resource center teachers and in-class support teachers in general education classrooms based on their highly qualified status. One participant is a self-contained teacher who teaches all academic subjects to students with behavioral disabilities. Each participant is highly qualified in at least one academic area, and some are highly qualified in multiple subjects. Specifically, these included: English, Science, Social Studies, Mathematics, Music, and Health and Physical Education.

Based on responses to survey and interview questions, it was found that participant's knowledge of the history and structure of NCLB was variable. Only one participant indicated that he was very familiar with the law and four had little or no familiarity with NCLB. The majority indicated some knowledge, but not expertise. Participants were slightly more familiar with the goals of NCLB and the term Adequate Yearly Progress, although one teacher reported very limited knowledge with both of these areas.

#### *Potential Researcher Biases*

As previously mentioned, the primary researcher for this study was a member of the special education department at Pine Valley Regional High School. This role potentially had both positive and negative impacts on the study's findings. On the positive side, my personal experiences as a special education teacher provided me with

the insight about the impact of NCLB. Because I was a colleague to the study's participants, my familiarity also facilitated access and increased their willingness to provide honest answers.

However, my role in the school also had a potentially negative impact on this study. Because I was intimately familiar with the issues associated with NCLB, I might have had a bias interpretation of the data. In order to reduce this bias, surveys were completed privately by each participant. The interviews were tape recorded, and direct quotations were used to support conclusions drawn from this study. During the interview, I did not offer any personal insight or opinion on the background or effects of NCLB and made a conscious effort to provide neutral encouragers in order to receive detailed responses.



## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

This chapter describes the results of this qualitative study. First, the survey and interview questions are presented. Then, the integrated findings from both data sources are presented.

### *Survey and Interview Questions*

These questions were developed based on the themes which emerged through a review of the literature and on the researcher's personal understanding of the No Child Left Behind Act and the selected school.

1. How has the curriculum changed in the subject(s) you teach since NCLB passed in 2001?
2. How have students' levels of performance and attitudes changed since NCLB was passed in 2001?
3. How have the requirements to be considered "Highly qualified" impacted your teaching career?
4. Based on your experiences, what do you see as the strengths and challenges associated with NCLB?
5. In what ways (if any) has NCLB positively impacted students and teachers' classroom experiences?
6. Do you feel that all special education students will be able to pass the HSPA by the 2013-2014 school year? Why or why not?

Surveys were completed individually and returned within one week by the participants. Then, two personal interviews were conducted and notes were taken in order to highlight the key points made by each interviewee. After the surveys and interviews were completed, responses were reviewed to extract relevant information and identify common themes. Data was organized, integrated, and summarized to acquire the findings that are presented in this study.

### *Perceptions about Curriculum Changes*

Participants were asked to describe how the curriculum has changed since NCLB was passed in 2001. Five out of the eleven teachers surveyed and interviewed, included references to the implementation of material found on the High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA). Specifically, the English and Math teachers reported that a substantial amount of material from the HSPA needs to be taught while maintaining other curriculum assignments. For example, Mrs. Jones noted the major change she has observed is the addition and emphasis on the three writing tasks from the HSPA. She also noted that up to this point, the resource center English classes have had a combination of students ranging in ages. She stated that next year will be the first year the classes will be divided into four separate grade levels, requiring a new curriculum.

Four out of the eleven teachers described that Pine Valley Regional district has been moving towards a more structured curriculum which will be standardized throughout the three high schools. Two teachers, however, stated that there is no set curriculum for the students in the resource centers, so they are required to mirror difficult standards utilized in the general education classes.

### *Students' Performance and Attitude*

Participants were asked to note any changes in students' performance and/or attitudes since the implementation of NCLB. Nine out of the eleven teachers surveyed and interviewed responded that they have not seen any change in students' academic levels. For example, Mrs. Jones reported that she does not feel that her students in the resource center or those who are mainstreamed into general education classes are any stronger academically now than they were prior to NCLB. Out of those nine teachers who felt they have not seen any change, four described the frustration and pressure the students are experiencing with the HSPA. For example, Mr. Heart stated that student performance has remained the same, but fear and frustration surrounding the HSPA has increased. Similarly, Mr. Brick stated that until recently, students with disabilities were told they did not have to pass the HSPA, so they did not care. On the other hand, Ms. Harrison expressed that she noticed that the eleventh graders now feel the pressure to pass the HSPA.

Only one teacher, Mrs. Water, specifically noted in her survey, that students are showing attitudes. She stated that there is not a yearly test used to assess students, but she felt that students' performance and academic abilities have declined. She noted that ninth graders are entering high school with inadequate ability to think independently, low comprehension skills, and negative attitudes. She also stated that they refuse to challenge themselves or take responsibility for school work.

### *Impact of Highly Qualified Status*

Participants were asked how NCLB's requirement for highly qualified teachers has impacted their teaching career. Responses to this indicated both positive and negative perceptions.

On the positive side, Mr. Smith responded that teachers are being held more accountable, but there is less emphasis on accountability for students in the classroom. Two participants noted that they do not feel that it has affected their jobs because they have either attended workshops to become highly qualified in their academic area or have only taught the same subject for multiple years. Mr. Heart stated that the requirement to be highly qualified has prevented him from teaching in subject areas which he is not familiar, such as Science, which in his opinion, is a good thing. Similarly, Mr. Ernie believed the requirement is positive because it has helped him pursue full certification in history. Although, Mrs. Water stated that highly qualified status has prevented her from teaching anything other than Science, she does feel that she is definitely becoming more proficient in that particular academic area.

In contrast, participants indicated that the highly qualified requirement has had many negative impacts. For example, Ms. Harrison found the requirement to be confusing because she was teaching History in a resource center class, removed from the subject after NCLB was implemented, and now she has returned to teaching History, without being highly qualified in that area. Similarly, Mr. Hunt, stated that it has made his job more difficult because he teaches in a self-contained classroom to students with behavior disabilities and is required to be highly qualified in all academic areas.

Other teachers felt that it has significantly limited their teaching options and they should be able to teach the subjects they have been teaching for years. For example, Mr. Smith noted that teachers certified solely in special education have limits to their teaching assignments. He felt that this has caused a great deal of pressure and frustration amongst special education teachers.

Similarly, during her interview, Mrs. Miller stated that she had been teaching Spanish for seven years in the resource center and as an in-class support teacher. However, after NCLB was implemented, she stopped teaching Spanish because she is not considered highly qualified in this academic area. She stated, “Although, there is no statistical information, the students are not performing well in this required course because there is not a special education teacher who is familiar with the language. Their grades are showing low performance”. She also stated that she was specifically hired to teach Spanish to students with disabilities, but she has not been able to perform that duty. Mrs. Miller also stated that her teaching assignment has been a stressful one because she can no longer teach a foreign language, which was a subject she enjoyed. As a result, she felt that her job has become more challenging because she is teaching subjects she has not taught in many years and the curriculums have changed. Her current teaching assignment has also put pressure and stress on the students because now they are all mainstreamed into a regular education foreign language class without support and they do not comprehend the material.

### *Strengths and Challenges of NCLB*

Participants were asked what strengths and challenges they felt were associated with NCLB. Based on this question, both strengths and challenges were identified, however, there were many more negative impacts described.

*Strengths.* The participants generally felt that NCLB is based on good intentions and has forced the staff to be more qualified. They felt there are now more structured goals and there is increased accountability for teachers, students, and parents. As a result, they are motivated to achieve these higher goals. Mrs. Water noted that because of NCLB, the district is now challenging students with disabilities more and is holding them responsible for learning the required material. They are not just “pushing them through each grade” anymore, irregardless of their performance. During her interview, Mrs. Miller, concurred that NCLB has given every student an ample opportunity to succeed.

*Challenges.* Although participants agreed that NCLB is probably based on good intentions, most teachers felt that it was not realistic or beneficial for student with disabilities. In her interview, Ms. Anderson stated that “students with disabilities get lost in the shuffle. They are being taught to state standards and not as individuals which is the purpose of their Individualized Education Plan (IEP)”. Similarly, Mrs. Jones noted that NCLB does not take into account individual learning differences, abilities, and disabilities, and it is in complete violation of the spirit of special education and the idea of “individualized education”.

Mrs. Water and Ms. Harrison both stated that the students’ difficulties with literacy and other skills they should have learned in the middle and elementary schools pose challenges within the high school classroom and have prevented students from

meeting the goals of NCLB. Mr. Brick elaborated on that view by explaining that students who qualify for special education services have difficulty learning and may not remember questions taught to them on a test and/or even be able to read and comprehend the test material. Mr. Ernie also stated that the 100% proficiency goal is unobtainable and creates a test-driven classroom climate that is stressful for both students and teachers.

#### *Impact on Students' and Teachers' Classroom Experiences*

Participants were asked whether they believe NCLB has positively impacted students' and teachers' classroom experiences. Both positive and negative responses were given; however, there was little reference to any impact on the student's experience. Participants' responses to this question were similar to those given related to the strengths and challenges of NCLB.

*Positive impact.* Participants believe that NCLB has helped some teachers become more motivated, qualified, and focused on their career. For example, Mrs. Harrison stated that she feels NCLB has allowed her to focus on one particular academic area and continue to master that curriculum. Similarly, Mrs. Jones stated that NCLB has forced some teachers who were previously very lenient to now require more from their unmotivated students.

Of the eleven participants, only Mrs. Jones directly mentioned a positive impact on students' experiences. Specifically, she felt that NCLB has forced some students to study harder in order to pass the HSPA and graduate from high school. Finally, one other teacher did not feel that there has been any impact on the students, positive or negative, since NCLB was implemented.

*Negative impact.* Four out of eleven participants felt that they have not seen a positive impact on the students or in their own classroom experience. Even though the question specifically mentioned how NCLB has “positively impacted students and teachers classroom experience”, only negative opinions were offered. For example, during her interview, Mrs. Jones stated that NCLB has “left some students with disabilities in the dust with little hope of finding their way through”. Similarly, Mr. Brick indicated that he does not feel that the teachers can become highly qualified from one year to the next without taking expensive academic courses. Finally, Mrs. Harrison believes that NCLB has created stress on teachers because scheduling is difficult.

*Students with Disabilities and the HSPA*

Participants were asked whether they believe that students with disabilities will be able to achieve the goal of 100% proficiency (as demonstrated by their HSPA scores) by the 2013-2014 school year. Unanimously, they expressed the belief that this goal is unreachable. Specifically, they indicated that students with disabilities will not be able to meet this goal because of learning disabilities, emotional disabilities, low abilities, lack of motivation, and a poor support system at home. For example, in her survey, Mrs. Jones expressed that the HSPA is designed for students who work on or around an eleventh grade reading level, but some students with disabilities only read at a second grade level. She also noted that some students have difficulty thinking abstractly which makes it very difficult for them to complete multiple step math problems. Because of this, they often “just pick any answer.”

Other teachers expressed the belief that the only way to increase high school students’ performance is to change the curriculum in the elementary and middle schools.



For example, Mr. Heart noted that unless more emphasis is put on passing the standardized assessments in the lower levels, this goal will not be obtainable. Similarly, Mr. Ernie stated that one primary characteristic of a student with a disability is difficulty completing daily assignments that utilize basic skills obtained through their early education. He believes that until these skills are mastered, these students will not obtain the goal of 100% proficiency. During her interview, Ms. Anderson also stated:

The HSPA is getting more difficult and standards are getting higher and higher. I am not sure how this goal is reachable when students with disabilities are not performing 100% now, let alone in seven years. The students have difficulty not only reading and performing on the test, but some have major test anxiety.

Another teacher felt that in order to help with this problem, the special education teachers should focus “solely on helping students pass the HSPA, disregarding other curriculum work, if that is what the government wants.

### *Summary*

Overall, participants offered a range of opinions to each of the survey and interview questions. Most of the special education teachers expressed at least moderate endorsement for having highly qualified teachers in the classroom because they feel more motivated and more confident in the academic areas that they are currently teaching. Their confidence and knowledge have made their classrooms more successful and productive. However, some also feel frustration related to how highly qualified requirements have forced them to teach subjects that do not interest them.

Most participants indicated that NCLB has not directly changed curriculum

content, but it has required teachers to focus on preparing students for the mandated assessments. Participants explained that they feel significant pressure and accountability related to the HSPA, but have not seen a corresponding change in students' performance or attitude. A few also mentioned that a lack of parental support contributes to students' lack of motivation and negative attitudes.

Finally, all eleven participants expressed significant concern and frustration with the mandate that all students, including those with disabilities, must achieve 100% proficiency by 2013-2014. Specifically, they feel that the assessments are too difficult for these students and they fear the standards will only get harder in the future.

## CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY

This chapter summarizes the results of this qualitative study. First, a thematic summary of the interview and survey data is offered within the context of the literature review findings. Next, recommendations for both special education teachers and students with disabilities are outlined and discussed. Finally, the study's limitations are reviewed.

### *Summary of the Survey and Interview Data*

In preparing for this study, it became evident that there is very little research documenting the actual impact of NCLB and no information was found that explored how this legislation has impacted special education teachers or students with disabilities. This qualitative study was completed in order to fill that void by exploring the perceptions and experiences of special education teachers.

*Academic Requirements.* The No Child Left Behind Act outlines goals and requirements for all United States schools. It also specifies that state designed assessments must be used to measure student performance (Drasgow & Yell, 2005). There are specific considerations of NCLB in relation to special education including highly qualified requirements for special education teachers.

The results of this study indicate that a majority of the special education teachers at Pine Valley Regional High School believe that NCLB is based on good intentions, but is not realistic for students with disabilities. One seminal goal of NCLB is that all

students will reach 100% academic proficiency by 2013-2014, but unanimously, the teachers agreed that this will not be possible due to learning disabilities, emotional disabilities, low abilities, lack of motivation, and a poor support system at home.

They also report that they have not seen much change in curriculum since NCLB passed in 2001, with the exception of HSPA test material being introduced in special education classrooms. They felt that the material on the test is at a higher level than their students' abilities. A major concern was that the students are not coming to the high school with the basic skills needed to perform well on the HSPA, so there needs to be more focus on functional math and reading in the elementary and middle school classrooms.

*Highly qualified teachers.* Participants also indicated that the pressure to be highly qualified in particular academic areas has created frustration among the special education teachers. Specifically, student performance is being adversely affected because highly qualified requirements have created a situation where experienced teachers are no longer permitted to teach subjects that they are familiar with. Teachers also indicated that it has been difficult to become highly qualified in academic areas due to the expense of college courses and the lack of workshops offered.

On the other hand, a few teachers noted that they feel more confident and qualified to teach particular subjects because they have become highly qualified in those areas. They also felt that they are better able to assist students because of increased content knowledge and curriculum familiarity.

## *Recommendations*

Based on a comprehensive review of the literature, the findings of this qualitative study, and my personal insights and experiences, as a special education teacher for six years, the following recommendations are offered for special education teachers and students with disabilities in regards to the No Child Left Behind Act.

*Workshop on NCLB.* In general, the participants in this study were not well informed about NCLB. Consequently, it is recommended that the school district offer a comprehensive workshop that provides in-depth information regarding NCLB. The workshop should include the history, goals, and structure of NCLB and its implications on both students with disabilities and special education teachers. It should also explain the importance of the highly qualified requirement and the multiple components of Adequate Yearly Progress.

*Professional development and college courses in content areas.* In addition to the district's informational workshop, content area professional development workshops and college courses should be offered to special education teachers at the district's expense. This is particularly important for special education teachers because many have limited opportunities or resources that enable them to become highly qualified in specific content areas. Offering workshops and financial support to enroll in college course that focus on specific academic areas will result in more highly qualified teachers in the classroom.

*Supplemental HSPA course.* To increase the number of students with disabilities who are able to demonstrate academic proficiency on the HSPA, a course specifically focusing on test material be offered beginning in the ninth grade. The curriculum for this course should include structured practice with sample test questions and instruction

focused on increasing students' familiarity with the advanced language used on the HSPA. This course should be offered in addition to students' regular English, Math, and Science classes, so they continue to have access to the general education curriculum.

*HSPA modifications.* Based on the findings of this study, it also appears that it would be beneficial to modify the HSPA, such that it is consistent with the requirement for an appropriate, individualized education for each student with a disability. One way to do this would be to create a test at a lower reading level that assesses the same skills as the regular HSPA. This approach would allow the government to validly monitor student's academic progress in accordance with their rights under IDEA. Another strategy would be to utilize alternate assessment formats and accommodations such as oral assessment, dictated responses, a reduction in the amount of test questions, and/or minimizing the number of answer choices. Each of these strategies would be help to meet the goal of 100% academic proficiency by 2013-2014.

#### *Limitations*

Although this study was based on solid qualitative methodology, there are a few limitations that need to be acknowledged. First, as described in Chapter Three, the researcher had a potentially biased perspective because of being employed at the school where this study was conducted. However, precautions were taken to minimize these risks. Second, the experiences at one school need to be taken within context of that unique setting. In other words, factors such as student population, average household income in the district, curriculum standards, and teacher experience are all unique to the selected school and will vary between districts. Finally, this study was conducted at a school in the state of New Jersey and is solely based on that particular states standards

and assessments. Although, NCLB is a federal law of the United States, each individual state requires unique standards and the results of this study might not be consistent in another state.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Survey

This study is being conducted as part of my Master’s Thesis examining how the No Child Left Behind Act has impacted Special Education teachers. This research is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Tanya Santangelo at Rowan University. The results of this survey are completely anonymous.

Unfamiliar -----Very Familiar

1. How familiar are you with the history of NCLB?  
1      2      3      4      5
2. How familiar are you with the structure NCLB?  
1      2      3      4      5
3. How familiar are you with the goals of NCLB?  
1      2      3      4      5
4. Are you familiar with term Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)?  
1      2      3      4      5
5. How long have you been teaching in special education? \_\_\_\_\_
6. What subjects and in what levels (e.g. LD1, LD2, ICS) do you teach?
7. In what areas are you highly qualified?
8. How has the curriculum changed in the subject(s) you teach since NCLB passed in 2001?
9. How have students’ levels of performance and attitudes changed since NCLB was passed in 2001?
10. How have the requirements to be considered “Highly Qualified” impacted your teaching career?
11. Based on your experiences, what do you see as the strengths and challenges associated with NCLB?
12. In what ways (if any) has NCLB positively impacted students and teachers’ classroom experiences?
13. Do you feel that all special education students will be able to pass the HSPA the 2013-2014 school year? Why or why not?

Appendix B: Table of Participants

Name of Teacher	Years of Experience	Subjects Highly Qualified	Grade Levels	Classroom Setting
Ms. Harrison	3	English	9-12	RC
Mr. Hunt	3	English, Science, Physical Education, English	9-12	SC
Ms. Anderson (interview)	4	English, History	9-12	ICS/RC
Mrs. Williams	4	English, History, Science	9-12	ICS/RC
Mr. Ernie	7	History	9-12	ICS/RC
Mrs. Jones	8	English	9-12	ICS/RC
Mrs. Water	8	Science	9-12	ICS/RC
Mr. Smith	9	Science, Health	9-12	ICS/RC
Mr. Brick	10	Math, Science	9-12	RC
Mr. Heart	11	English	9-12	ICS/RC/SC
Mrs. Miller (interview)	14	Science, Math, Music	9-12	ICS/RC

ICS – In-Class Support

RC – Resource Center

SC – Self-Contained

Appendix C: The New Jersey Model for Identifying Highly Qualified Teachers

**The New Jersey HOUSE Standard:  
Content Knowledge Matrix**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ School Building: \_\_\_\_\_

Title of Teaching Certificate: \_\_\_\_\_

**Content Area Teaching Assignment (Check one content area assignment per form):**

- Elementary Generalist (full-day, all subjects)       Science  
 Social Studies (Economics, History, Civics, Geography)       Mathematics  
 Language Arts Literacy (English, Reading, Lang. Arts)       World Languages  
 Visual and Performing Arts       No Current Assignment

**Grade-level Teaching Assignment:**     Elementary (K-5)     Middle (6-8)     Secondary (9-12)

**Grade-level Content/Curriculum:**     Special Ed. (K-5)     Special Ed. (6-8)     Special Ed. (9-12)

**Directions:** Enter the number of points for which you are eligible in each category in the right-hand column. Total the number of points. Attach the required documentation for each category to each HOUSE Standard Matrix you complete. Complete a separate matrix form for each content area teaching assignment for which you must determine whether you satisfy the definition of a Highly Qualified Teacher.

**Note:** *Elementary generalists* and *elementary special education teachers* who teach all subjects to one group of students during the school day complete only **one** form.

<b>CATEGORY</b>	<b>CRITERIA</b>	<b>CREDIT</b>	<b>YOUR POINTS</b>
<p><b>Content Area College Coursework</b></p> <p><b>Courses must be at least 2 credits.</b></p> <p><b>(4 Points required in this category; may accrue all 10 points)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Successful completion of a credit course in content for the subject area listed above from an accredited community college, college or university               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Courses may be taken in person or online</li> <li>▶ Courses may be taken in or outside New Jersey</li> <li>▶ Education courses are <b>not eligible</b> to be counted <b>unless</b> they are specifically connected to academic content</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p><b>2 Points per course</b></p>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Teaching a credit course in content for the subject area listed above at an accredited community college, college or university               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Courses may be given in person or online</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p><b>2 Points per course</b></p>	

# Content Matrix FORM F



CATEGORY	CRITERIA	CREDIT	YOUR POINTS
<p>College Coursework (continued)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Courses may be given in or outside New Jersey</li> <li>▶ Education courses are <b>not eligible</b> to be counted <b>unless</b> they are specifically connected to academic content</li> <li>▶ Multiple sections of the same course count once</li> </ul> <p><b>Documentation:</b> Copy of transcript; instructor's contract or letter of appointment.</p>		
<p>Content Area Professional Activities  (6 Point overall limit in this category)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Service on a committee to develop, select, validate and evaluate local, state, and/or national               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Content Standards</li> <li>▶ Content Curriculum</li> <li>▶ Content Assessments</li> </ul> </li> <li>■ Completion of the relevant Content Area National Board Certification Assessment Process</li> <li>■ Participation in high quality, sustained, intensive professional development that is classroom-focused, research-based, aligned with the NJ Core Curriculum Content Standards and state assessments, and designed to advance teachers' understanding and use of content-specific instructional and assessment strategies to create a positive and lasting impact on classroom instruction</li> <li>■ Making a content-specific presentation in a subject area at a state, regional, national or international professional organization meeting or conference or for a school or</li> </ul>	<p>1 Point per documented activity in any area in this category per year</p> <p>(Activities must have been completed within the last 4 years)</p>	

# Content Matrix FORM F



CATEGORY	CRITERIA	CREDIT	YOUR POINTS
<b>Professional Activities (continued)</b>	<p>district level in-service program (multiple presentations of the same material count once)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Publishing an article addressing content knowledge and/or content-specific pedagogy in state, regional, national or international professional journal</li> </ul> <p><b>Documentation:</b> Copy of Professional Development Certificate(s) and/or Professional Improvement Plan (PIP); committee appointment; presenter contract; program agenda; published article</p>		
<b>Content Area Teaching Activities</b>	<p>Collaborative, interdisciplinary work on a sustained unit of study with a content area specialist (both teachers must be working simultaneously with the same group of students)</p> <p><b>Documentation:</b> Copy of PD Certificate and/or PIP; letter of appointment or team-teaching schedule assignment</p>	<p><b>1 Point per year</b></p> <p><b>(Within the last 4 years)</b></p>	
<b>NBPTS Elementary Certification</b>	<p>Elementary teachers who have earned National Board Certification as an Elementary Generalist from the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS)</p> <p><b>Documentation:</b> Copy of NBPTS certificate</p>	<p><b>4 Points</b></p>	
<b>Successful Content Area Teaching Performance</b>	<p>Successful teaching experience in the content area specified on this form. Experience may be in New Jersey or out-of-state schools.</p> <p><b>Documentation:</b> Satisfactory evaluation for each year</p>	<p><b>8-15 yrs = 2 pts</b></p> <p><b>16+ yrs = 3 pts</b></p>	

# Content Matrix FORM F



CATEGORY	CRITERIA	CREDIT	YOUR POINTS
<p><b>Total Points:</b></p>	<p><b>Elementary Teachers (K-5)</b> with fewer than 10 points must either pass the Praxis II Elementary Education: Content Knowledge Test or complete activities chosen from among those listed on this form to accrue 10 points by the end of the 2005-2006 school year.</p> <p><b>Middle/Secondary Teachers (6-8, 9-12)</b> must complete a NJ HOUSE Standard: Content Knowledge Matrix for each core academic subject they teach. Teachers with fewer than 10 points must either pass the Praxis II Content Knowledge Exam for the level(s) and subject(s) they teach or must complete activities chosen from among those listed on this form to accrue 10 points for each content area teaching assignment by the end of the 2005-2006 school year.</p> <p><b>Special Education Teachers</b> who provide direct instruction in the elementary grades or content must satisfy the requirement for elementary teachers listed above. Special education teachers who provide direct instruction in departmentalized middle and/or secondary grades must satisfy the requirement based on the <b>grade level of the content/curriculum they are teaching</b> rather than on the chronological age of their students. Those who satisfy secondary level content expertise automatically satisfy the content expertise requirement for middle levels.</p> <p><i>The 2004 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) reauthorization provides additional flexibility outlined on page 9 (Q&amp;A 12).</i></p>	<p><b>YOUR TOTAL:</b></p>	

**Content Matrix  
FORM F**



**REMEMBER**

If you do not have 10 points now, you have until the end of the 2005-2006 school year to satisfy the definition of a Highly Qualified Teacher. You may take and pass the relevant Praxis II Content Knowledge Test(s) or you may accrue 10 points by participating in activities listed on the NJ HOUSE Standard: Content Knowledge Matrix. Teachers with 5 or fewer points on the HOUSE Standard Matrix may want to consider taking a content knowledge test so as to satisfy the definition of a Highly Qualified Teacher by the end of the 2005-2006 school year.

**FLEXIBILITY UNDER IDEA  
FOR NEW SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS**

New (first-year) special education teachers who teach multiple content areas in middle or secondary settings and who have passed a content test or hold a degree in math, science, or language arts have up to two years from their date of hire to demonstrate content expertise in the remaining content area(s) they teach. These teachers may use the NJ HOUSE Standard: Content Knowledge Matrix to accrue 10 points in each remaining content area or may pass relevant content area exam(s). This flexibility is open to new special education teachers in both Title I and non-Title I schools.