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## Leaving special educators behind?: an analysis of the No Child Behind Act and its impact on special education teachers

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LEAVING SPECIAL EDUCATORS BEHIND?  
AN ANALYSIS OF THE NO CHILD BEHIND ACT  
AND ITS IMPACT ON SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
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in

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by  
Joseph M. Abel  
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## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	ii
Table of Contents.....	iii
List of Tables.....	v
Abstract.....	vi
Introduction.....	1
Standards Based Education Reform Theory.....	3
Review of Literature.....	5
Policy Context and History of Standards-Based Education Reform.....	5
NCLB, IDEA, and Special Education.....	7
Teacher Quality.....	9
Teacher Satisfaction and Impact on Student Performance.....	11
Teacher Shortages.....	13
Special Education Teacher Shortage.....	14
Factors Contributing to Shortage of SETs.....	15
Workload and Paperwork.....	15
Stress.....	15
School Social Workers.....	17
Rational for this Study.....	18
Hypotheses.....	20
Methods.....	22
Sample and Design.....	22
Data Collection.....	22
Instrument.....	23
Demographics.....	23
NCLB Related Questions.....	23
Autonomy, Variety, and Feelings of Importance.....	23
Empowerment and Decision-Making Ability.....	24
Overall Job Satisfaction.....	24
Data Analysis.....	25
Results.....	26
Descriptives.....	26
NCLB-Related Questions.....	29
Autonomy, Job Variety, and Feelings of Importance.....	31
Empowerment and Decision-Making Ability.....	31
Qualitative Responses.....	32
Hypotheses Results.....	34
Discussion.....	36
Study Limitations.....	37
Policy Implications.....	38
Implications for Social Work.....	40

Conclusion.....	42
References.....	44
Appendix: Teacher Survey.....	52
Vitae.....	55

## **List of Tables**

Table 1: Demographics.....	27
Table 2: Demographic Data and Satisfaction.....	28
Table 3: NCLB Questions.....	30

## **Abstract**

From its inception in 2001, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) has been the subject of much debate among politicians, educators, researchers, and citizens. Much discussion has related to how NCLB affects students and their teachers in the classroom. This study examines NCLB's direct impact on special education teachers in the East Baton Rouge parish school district of Louisiana by measuring different aspects of their satisfaction levels. Overall job satisfaction is measured using the Brayfield-Rothe Job Satisfaction Index (1951). Specific aspects of job satisfaction are measured using an abbreviated form of the Job Diagnostic Survey (Hackman & Oldham, 1975) and the satisfaction portion of a survey employed by Zembylas and Papanastasiou (2005), both slightly tailored to elicit answers pertinent to NCLB. Quantitative and qualitative questions directly related to NCLB are asked to explore the relationship between the legislation and special education, its teachers, and its students.

## **Introduction**

In their State Special Education Data Profile for 2007, The Louisiana Department of Education reported just over 30% and 26%, in the English and Math LEAP tests respectively, of special education students were on grade level in East Baton Rouge (EBR). By eighth grade, the number of special education students that passed the LEAP tests fell to just over 14% in English and 16% in Math. The title “special education” means different things to different people and the range of disabilities is large but according to the same special education report, the majority of the roughly 7,000 EBR special education students spend 80% or more of their day inside a regular classroom. Recruiting and Finding special education teachers (SET) is also a problem for Louisiana. In the Department of Education’s (DOE, 2009) national report on teacher shortage areas for 2008, Louisiana is listed every year since the reports began in 1990. Specific subject areas where the shortages are occurring are listed, such as math or science, and although Louisiana has consistently experienced shortages in a variety of areas, special education is the only subject area listed all eighteen years. Louisiana has implemented programs to address teacher shortages in the state, such as the Students Teaching and Reaching (STAR). According to the Louisiana Department of Education, STAR began over ten years ago and provides meaningful field experiences for Louisiana students particularly in areas that are experiencing “critical” shortage areas such as math, science, and special education. Like other states, Louisiana also offers teachers the possibility of deferring or cancelling their student loans all together if they agree to teach in a designated teacher shortage subject area (DOE, 2008). Despite these efforts, the shortage of special educators and the underperformance of special education students persist.

Compounding this persisting shortage is the fact that many of the SETs in the state have not met the quality standards set by NCLB. According to the State Special Education Data Profile for 2007 (LA DOE, 2007), just over 66% of special educators in Louisiana meet the

highly qualified standard set by NCLB. A breakdown of parishes in the same study reveals that in East Baton Rouge Parish, the focus of this study, just under 38% of SETs are highly qualified. To summarize the facts from both reports, there is both a relative shortage of special education teachers, and a majority of the special education teachers presently in the classrooms of EBR not meeting the quality standards set out by NCLB. Add that to the sobering percentage of special education students underperforming, and it is easy to see that a problem exists in East Baton Rouge Parish and the state as a whole.

Initially, this study hoped to compare teacher satisfaction levels to student test outcomes in hopes of finding correlations, but the scores for this academic year would not have been ready in time. The study posed additional problems with officials of the EBR School System preferring that the study remain anonymous without the possibility to match SETs with individual schools. As a result, this study utilizes a cross sectional design to focus on different aspects of these SET's satisfaction levels. To evaluate exploratory data related to SET's general perceptions of NCLB policy, questions were posed related to the policy's impact on SET's ability to teach, levels of stress and workload. In addition, a question was included to gauge how the SET's perceive NCLB's impact on their students. Open-ended questions were also provided to allow for anecdotal data from the educators themselves.

At its core, this study attempts to contribute to the exploration of how NCLB has impacted the classrooms of special education teachers and their students by asking the special education teachers themselves. Several issues related to the challenges of a SET are examined by measuring overall job satisfaction, looking specifically at educators' opportunities for decision-making, job variety, levels of empowerment and autonomy, and sense of importance. A specific look is given to the NCLB Act and its effect on these facets of job satisfaction. Issues explored in the literature review include teacher shortages, teacher quality, teacher satisfaction, and how all of these factors ultimately impact on student performance. To understand NCLB, a history of

the policy that led up to the legislation, along with a brief review of the Act itself, will be presented. Particular focus on how the policy impacts special education will be discussed. Theoretical perspectives related to the philosophy and foundations of NCLB are reviewed and a brief discussion related to the challenges facing special education and its relevance to social work is presented.

### Standards-Based Education Reform Theory

Sailor, Stowe, Turnbull, and Kleinhammer-Tramell (2007) define standards-based education reform in practice simply as an educational system based on student achievement of academic standards. According to the authors, standards-based education reform has been the driving force behind all of the United States' major education policy in the past two decades.

Reform theories, as pointed out by Loeb, Knapp, and Elfers (2008), are not like traditional theories in the sense that they contain assumptions about the reactions of, in this case, the teachers that must implement them. The authors also offer a rationale behind the logic of standards-based education reform theories in four parts: To create clear and high expectations for learning, to develop agreement on those expectations, to develop an assessment instrument that connects and measures the standards, and to provide a system with consequences for both students and schools. What makes the standard-based education reform theory incomplete, as the authors explain, is that too much of their success hinges upon the actions of the teacher. It assumes that the teacher will unilaterally support the measures, modify their teaching methods, believe in the ability of all their students to succeed, and have access to professional development opportunities.

This perspective is of particular interest to this study as part of its focus is on NCLB and how special educators in practice perceive it. As a policy with roots in this particular reform theory, the success or failure of NCLB would seem at the very least to partially hinge on the teacher's perceptions and whether they buy into it or not. This study only aims to provide a

small contribution to the discussion of educational policies and their formation and hopes further research on this subject will be conducted. It is always important to remember however, that educational policy is often built upon its predecessors, and the NCLB legislation was only the next in a long line of educational policy in America driven by standards-based reform theory.

## Review of Literature

### Policy Context and History of Standards-Based Education Reform

Just over twenty-five years ago, the National Commission on Excellence in Education published *A Nation at Risk* (DOE, 1983), which marked the first step towards standards-based education reform. Amongst other things, the report accuses Americans of “unthinking,” and of an “educational disarmament,” an analogy that makes more sense when put into the cold war context from which it comes. In the report, President Reagan refers to schools and colleges as perhaps the most important area of American life in regards to our society, people, and families. Standards-based education is clearly established as the framework as the report describes a goal of developing students’ talents to the fullest by stretching the limits of their capabilities. It also proposes that schools establish high standards in the hopes of increasing American productivity at home and in the increasingly competitive global market. While the motivation behind *A Nation at Risk* was primarily economic the impact of the report on K-12 education was greater than anything up to that point in history according to Guthrie and Springer (2004). While the authors purport that *A Nation at Risk* is one of the most influential public policy reports in American history, they provide both positive and negative results of the report.

As it pertains to standards-based education, the most positive result stated by the authors was the catalyst it provided to begin moving away from measuring schools by the amount of resources they received towards measuring a school’s success by the students’ outcomes and focusing on increasing teacher training. Some Negative arguments were raised about the effects, or lack thereof, of *A Nation at Risk* (Allen-Meares, 1990; Edwards & Allred, 1993), yet is only important for the purposes of this study to recognize that it began the educational policy trend towards standard-based education. In turn, this created the environment possible to allow for a piece of legislation like NCLB to arise and be implemented. Each major education policy that followed *A Nation at Risk* used standards-based education as its foundation.

Terrell Bell, the Secretary of Education during the Reagan administration, used the wave of *A Nation at Risk's* success to further the standard-based education trend with the creation of the “wall chart” (Vinovskis, 1999) in 1984, which ranked each state by their ACT and SAT scores. Secretary Bell’s staff acknowledged the shortcomings of the chart, which some believed was misleading and statistically flawed, but reiterated the value by citing it as a way to hold schools across the nation accountable for their progress, or lack of progress. Gradually, as public popularity for the chart grew throughout the 1980’s, states began using the chart to monitor progress and develop goals. Bell’s successor, William J. Bennett, formed the Alexander-James study group to further develop and study education progress.

During the presidential campaign of 1988, candidate George H.W. Bush pledged to meet with the leaders of each state to discuss education. Upon election, he was taken to task to address educational policy by the National Governor’s Association (NGA) and in September of 1989, President H.W. Bush met with the nation’s governors in Charlottesville, Virginia to set out specific standards to be met by each state and ways to record and monitor those goals across the country (Vinovskis, 1999). According to Vinovskis’ (1999) report on the meeting, known as the 1989 Education Summit, the governors were not the only group pushing for national education standards. The Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), made up of legislators and education officials in addition to many southern governors, was also pushing for the establishment of educational goals. Richard Riley, then the commissioner of the SREB, summed up the thinking behind standards-based education when he was quoted as saying, “Why are educational goals important? Simply put, the citizens of any state are not likely to achieve more in education than they and their leaders expect and aim for” (Vinovskis, 1999). Despite producing few tangible results, the 1989 Education Summit, says the author, set the stage for standards-based education reform in the 1990’s by rekindling government and public attention

and support for a better educational system. The goals it established became the backbone of the next push towards more standards based education reform in 1994, called Goals 2000.

Goals 2000: Educate America Act, was signed into law by President Clinton, one of the governors at the 1989 Education Summit, in 1994 (DOE, 2008). Standards-based education was featured throughout Goals 2000 in, as the name suggests, the national goals set for the education system. NCLB built upon these and other policies that used standards-based education reform as its framework while taking it a step further by federally mandating standards that must be met by each state.

#### NCLB, IDEA, and Special Education

The Department of Education (DOE, 2008) lists the four pillars of NCLB as stronger accountability, freedom for states and communities, proven education methods, and more choices for parents. Faircloth (2004) provides a summary of the accountability system at the core of NCLB saying that success is measured by achieving proficiency on standardized tests in the core subjects of math, reading, and science based on each state's content standards. The scores, says Faircloth are then separated into subgroups made of characteristics such as race, ethnicity, poverty level, and disability. Schools failing to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) are subject to sanctions. AYP, as defined by the Department of Education (DOE, 2008) is each individual state's measure of progress towards the goal of all students achieving proficiency in reading and math.

As it relates to special education, NCLB requires that all special education students meet the same standards as all other students (DOE, 2008). NCLB mandates that students' test scores are included in the yearly assessment of school progress, which among other things determines whether a school receives sanctions or not. In addition, NCLB requires that all teachers become "highly qualified" in any core subject taught according to the DOE's website. The core subjects listed are English, reading or language arts, math, science, history, civics and government,

geography, economics, the arts, and foreign language. Since SETs may teach multiple subjects to their students, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) has enabled SETs to show competence in multiple core subjects through alternate evaluations that may combine education and experience.

In accordance with the IDEA, a child is placed into special education if they are found to have a learning or developmental disability after a professional evaluation. Once a child is placed into the special education system, they are required to receive an Individual Education Program (IEP). Explained on the Department of Education's website, an IEP contains a child's current academic and functional levels, reviewable goals and objectives, necessary accommodations, alternate assessment requirements, and any educational need due to the disability. The reauthorization of the IDEA in 2004, according to Smith (2005), came with a few changes to the IEP process aimed at reducing the stress of excessive paperwork required of a SET. Smith (2005) reports that some SETs spend as much time dealing with the paperwork requirements as they do on student programs. Paperwork, says the author, has contributed to the high attrition rate in SETs and one change meant to reduce that paperwork is the removal of the requirement of short-term goals in the IEP. IDEA 2004, according to the author also includes provisions to align more with the NCLB Act, such as a "highly qualified" mandate for SETs.

Despite attempts to synchronize the IDEA and NCLB, Faircloth (2004) finds a major incongruence between the two. The author suggests NCLB may put school administrators into an ethical dilemma by making them choose between focusing on each child individually and focusing on the school as a whole. Specifically, NCLB focuses on broad standards and outcomes, while the IDEA emphasizes the individual child and the SET is charged with balancing the requirements of NCLB and the unique and sometimes challenging needs of each student. Faircloth (2004) further expresses a concern that NCLB places too much emphasis on the standardized test score rather than the specific child. In part, NCLB aims to improve student

performance. One factor established as paramount to that goal is quality of instruction.

### Teacher Quality

In a press release (2002) a few months after signing the NCLB act into law, then President George W. Bush stated that "the effectiveness of all education reform eventually comes down to a good teacher in a classroom" (DOE, 2008, p.1). This statement is backed by a considerable amount of research and although teacher quality is not directly measured in this study, its place in the discussion of teacher satisfaction, job performance, and ultimately student performance is established and included in this study as a framework for its primary look into teacher satisfaction levels. Okoye, Momoh, Aigbomian, and Okecha (2008) cite teacher quality in their study of science teachers as a main indicator of substandard test scores. The authors identify a direct correlation between the variables, asserting that the quality of teachers, to a great extent, determines the quality of any educational system.

Gersten, Baker, Haager, and Graves (2002) explored learning among first grade English students and found that teacher quality is positively related to student outcomes. Haycock and Crawford (2008) treat the connection as common sense, saying teacher quality is hugely important in overall achievement. They also provide a common anecdote of a parent specifically requesting a teacher based on the perception of quality. School administrators often reply that all the teachers in the school can provide quality instruction. However, Haycock and Crawford (2008) claim this premise is false, and studies show what a difference a quality teacher can make (Sanders and Rivers, 1996; Ascher & Fruchter, 2001; Gordon, Kane, & Staiger, 2006; Hanushek & Rivkin, 2007; McLeskey & Billingsley, 2008)

Gordon, Kane, and Staiger's (2006) study suggests that the teacher in the classroom is what ultimately influences the success of the U.S. public education system. School reform, as the authors go on to say is meaningless without focusing on the teachers. Furthermore, other factors like testing, class size, greater accountability, and even educational standards are cited as

secondary by the authors compared to teacher quality. Attracting and retaining quality teachers, according to Hanushek and Rivkin (2007) is the most important policy issue in education today. Not only can a few years of quality instruction offset a negative home environment, say the authors, but also better prepare students for further academic success. Sanders and Rivers (1996) found that students exhibited decreases in achievement after consecutive years of learning under an ineffective teacher compared to students exposed to consecutive years of effective teachers who showed increased achievement. Ascher and Fruchter (2001) also report the strong relation between student performance and teacher quality. The overwhelming evidence that supports this linkage is cited here only to frame the educational policy that is NCLB within the context of the past research. Specifically, part of what this study explores is whether or not the educational policy that teachers must operate under is structured to attract quality teachers and retain the quality teachers working now.

The question of teacher quality carries directly over to the realm of special education and research shows that quality SETs are hard to find (Brownell, Hirsch, & Seo, 2004). Without better support systems or incentives, say the authors, schools are unlikely to recruit quality SETs with the amount of expertise or certification they are looking for. These authors conclude that a wide-range of policy initiatives is the best way to recruit and maintain quality SETs. McLeskey and Billingsley (2008) cite evidence that teacher quality contributes more to student achievement than any other factor including the background of the student, class composition, and the size of the class. The authors admit that although most of the research on the effect of teacher quality has been focused on general education, it is logical to assume that the research applies to special education. They go on to say that since many of the students placed in special education have failed to make the necessary progress in general education, SETs must have knowledge, skills, and expertise not possessed by general education teachers.

Darling-Hammond (2000) identified the strongest correlates of student achievement were measures of teacher preparation and certification, the latter of which is used by NCLB to measure teacher quality. The author goes on to report that states such as Minnesota and Wisconsin that hold high standards on hiring quality teachers showed the highest student scores on national assessments in 1996, while states with low hiring standards, such as Louisiana, show scores near or at the bottom. It must be noted however, that in 2008, Louisiana ranks 6<sup>th</sup> nationally in the teaching portion of Education Week's annual "Quality Counts" report (Education Week, 2008), which includes an accountability component for quality.

Carlson, Hyunshik, and Westat (2004) sampled 1,475 SETs to determine the factors that influenced teacher quality. Of the five factors studied, teacher self-efficacy, measured by perception of skill, job performance, and personal belief of effectiveness, was one of the top two measurements of teacher quality. Research of teacher efficacy consistently shows a positive effect on student outcomes (Woolfolk & Hoy, 1990; Ross, 1994; Brinson & Steiner, 2007; Poulou, 2007). Hanusheck and Rivkin (2007) study the lack of quality teachers and argue that retaining quality teachers can be achieved by improving working conditions, peer and administrative support, and addressing behavior issues. Having shown the inarguable importance of teacher quality to student outcomes, this study will now attempt to establish the foundation to further explore the relatedness between teacher quality and teacher satisfaction as it impacts student achievement.

#### Teacher Satisfaction and Impact on Student Performance

The primary aim of this study is to determine whether SETs in East Baton Rouge Parish are satisfied with their job. General dimensions of their satisfaction are measured and specific questions related to the NCLB Act are asked to gauge how the policy impacts their job. It is the hope that this study lays the groundwork for further discussion of education policy and its impact on SET's level of job satisfaction and performance. Logically, it makes sense that a high level of

job satisfaction will improve the teacher's quality of performance and in turn the outcomes of students and existing research has pointed to a positive relationship between these factors (Miller, 1981; Lumsden, 1998; Schacter & Thum, 2005). For example, Miller (1981) reports that high teacher morale can not only improve students' attitudes, but also make learning more pleasant. Black (2001) concludes that a low level of teacher morale usually reflects a low level of student performance. Lumsden (1998) also makes this connection, saying low levels of satisfaction can indicate lower teacher productivity. Lumsden also points out that in schools where morale was high, there tends to be a rise in student achievement. Schacter and Thum's (2005) study of high quality teachers and student achievement cite job satisfaction as an important factor in recruiting and maintaining quality teachers and reinforce the link between teacher satisfaction and student learning.

Low satisfaction rates, teacher burnout, and high attrition rates may leave special education students without quality teachers, and in some cases, without a teacher at all Stempien and Loeb (2002), in their measurement of satisfaction levels between general education and special education teachers found that SETs reported a lower level of job satisfaction than the general education teachers. Their findings also show that SETs often end each day emotionally drained and with inadequate time or energy for planning. Stempien and Loeb (2002) report frustration as the biggest factor in SETs dissatisfaction. Teachers who are dissatisfied, say Quaglia, Marion, and McIntire (1991), perceived themselves as having low expectations of students. Eichinger (2000) directly studies the shortage of SETs and establishes high stress and low job satisfaction as key components contributing to the high attrition rate. Several studies establish the negative relationship between stress and satisfaction across other disciplines, such as healthcare providers (Snelgrove, 1998), school counselors (Rayle, 2006), and restaurant managers (Hayes & Weathington, 2007). In part, high levels of stress and low job satisfaction among teachers help answer the question of why there is such a shortage, but for the purposes of

this study, it is helpful to explore this question further. An aim of this study is to contribute to the discussion of educational policies and their impact on teachers. It is important to research whether NCLB helps or hinders teachers in the classroom and to what extent it contributes to or helps combat existing teacher shortages.

### Teacher Shortages

National trends in education over the past two decades show a consistent shortage of teachers at every level of instruction (Ogden, 2002). Ogden elaborates the crisis, stating that teachers are leaving the schools faster than they can be replaced. *A Nation at Risk* (1983) brought those shortages to light nearly three decades ago, but the problem still remains. Allen-Meares (1990) believes that not enough was done in the eighties to address the shortage. General education teacher (GET) shortages persisted throughout the nineties according to Nehring (1999) who reported a growing teacher shortage in public schools. Howard (2003) in his research on GET shortages in urban settings also recognizes the problem, remarking that the shortage of teachers is arguably the largest threat to the country's schools. Howard (2003) also lays out possible solutions to this shortage. His recommendations include improving overall conditions of the workplace, increasing the strength and support of the administration, and improving teacher pay. Increasing salary and incentives seem to be a unifying theme in addressing the problem of the teacher shortage, however there are other, deeper reasons given for this shortage. Ogden (2002) identifies the compounded issues affecting the teacher shortage and points out that bright students are actually being dissuaded from entering the teaching professions by, ironically enough, teachers. But is this trend ironic?

Teaching used to be viewed as a noble and prestigious profession, but is becoming an increasingly undesirable choice (Howard, 2003), especially for the smartest students. Teachers are overworked and underpaid. In addition, the level of trust between the parent and teacher has disintegrated. Nehring (1999) echoes these sentiments citing the demanding schedule forced

upon a teacher, amongst many of the other reasons highlighted, as a reason for our brightest students looking elsewhere for work. As can be expected, SETs are also faced with these issues, and perhaps to a larger degree. It is therefore necessary to turn our attention to the deficiency of special education teachers.

### Special Education Teacher Shortage

A discussion of the SET shortage is included in this study since many of the factors that contribute to the high attrition rate are specifically investigated here as they relate to SET satisfaction. The shortage of, and inability to retain SETs is documented over the past two decades (Billingsley, 2004; Boe, 2006; Brownell, Hirsch, & Seo, 2004; Payne, 2005). Billingsley (1993) relates findings over a four-year period in the late eighties and early nineties, showing the need for certified SETs increased 74% while the supply of SET graduates decreased by 34%. Other research has shown that nearly half of all special educators leave the profession within the first five years (Brownell, Smith, McNellis, & Lenk, 1995). High attrition rates serve only to exacerbate the shortage of special educators. Efforts have been made to address this shortage.

According to Brownell (2005), 90 million dollars is provided each year to the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs to improve preparation and retention of SETs. Despite this investment, Brownell comments that the field still suffers from teacher shortages and those shortages appear to be increasing. One of the unfortunate consequences of the SET shortage, say Nichols-Cooley, Bicard, Bicard, and Baylot-Casey (2008) is that unqualified teachers end up teaching some students. The authors also state that the amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities in 1997 and 2004 combined with the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2002 make the SET shortage worse, a claim this study hopes to expound. The IDEA of 2004, say the authors, increased the amount of students eligible to receive special education services and the NCLB Act added new guidelines for accountability for

special education students and re-defined what it means for a SET to become “highly qualified.”

#### Factors Contributing to Shortage of SETs

**Workload and paperwork.** Factors affecting the general education teacher shortage cited from Ogden (2002), Nehring (1999), and Howard (2003) such as the demanding workload and the increasing undesirability of teaching also apply to special education. The stigma now attached to teaching reported by Howard (2003) is even greater in special education with regard to the negative attitude that GETs exhibit towards special education students (Cook, Cameron, & Tankersley, 2007). Nehring, reports the demanding schedule GETs experience as a variable contributing to the teacher shortage. A special educator’s schedule can be more demanding with a higher level of stress due to the excessive amount of paperwork reported by Wisniewski and Gargiulo (1997).

Excessive paperwork has long been identified as a stress for SETs that leads to teacher burnout. Olsen and Matuskey (1982), in their study of one hundred and seventy three SETs in Florida, report excessive paperwork as the highest reported stressor among their participants. Harvey (2004) also states that NCLB has increased the amount of paperwork required for SETs. Screening assessments for special education students are recommended both initially and throughout the year along with an individual record of each student’s performance. Harvey (2004) concludes that this additional paperwork cuts into instructional time and sets up the teacher and student for failure. MacDonald and Speece’s (2001) study of a first year SET point out how overwhelming the task of finding the time to complete the required work can be. In addition to citing a demanding workload as a leading factor in the decision for SETs to exit the profession, Brownell, Smith, McNellis, and Miller (1997) highlight the increased stress levels of SETs.

**Stress.** Stacks of paperwork and a demanding workload both contribute to the stress of SETs and another factor that increases stress are the behavior management concerns faced by

SETs. Mastropieri (2001) reports the unique and challenging behavior management issues that SETs can face when they relay the story of a special education student wielding a knife at a first year SET. The author also remarks how difficult it is to manage a classroom full of students with emotional and behavioral difficulties. Therefore, SETs do not only have to deliver quality education, but they have to handle unexpected and dramatic behavioral issues in the classroom, some that other general educators may not experience, and that increase stress levels. For example, Olivier and Williams' (2005) qualitative study of the challenges faced by SETs includes the short attention span of many mentally handicapped students as a behavior management related responsibility of a SET. Boyer and Lynn (2001) also discuss the additional responsibilities of a SET, one of which is the challenge of understanding federal and state policy that deal with special education and applying that knowledge to translate into successful classroom practice. Boyer and Lynn (2001) go on to cite the additional work that SETs do in terms of developing specific plans that meet each student's individual needs. These additional responsibilities can only serve to increase stress levels.

Another facet of the increased stress levels felt by special educators comes in the form of the extra skills required of a SET. Carter and Scruggs (2001) for instance, explore the experiences of one first year SET, identifying that in addition to the skills required of all educators, SETs need to have extraordinary people skills to handle to necessary interactions with the parents and other professionals. Improvisation and innovation, say the authors, along with advocacy skills for promoting the well being of the children are necessary qualities for a SET. Lack of support from administrators and other teachers has also been identified as a stress contributor for SETs. According to the first-year teacher from Carter and Scruggs (2001) study, problems came from places other than just the classroom, mostly from other staff and administrators. In general, says the teacher, few other school employees saw the special education program as equal to the general education, or even as an equal part of the school itself.

The educator, who eventually left the school, speaks of a breaking point that was reached, in combination with a severe lack of support, after working night after night till 9 p.m. just to keep up. Many SETs share these sentiments. Mastropieri (2001) reports a similar lack of support from general education teachers along with a demanding time schedule, lack of resources, and lack of training as factors contributing to the shortage of SETs.

Not only is there a shortage of SETs, but also a shortage of qualified SETs, and the trend appears to be worsening. McLeskey and Billingsley (2008) present a data table of national shortages of qualified SETs from 1989-2003 that reveals the percentage of unqualified SETs hovered around 9% from 1989 to 1998 but averaged over 11% from 1998-2003, with the highest percentage, 12.38%, coming in 2003. The evidence linking teacher satisfaction, teacher quality, and student performance is clear and demands that policy makers and school districts not only recruit more SETs, but recruit quality SETs while understanding the unique and complicated challenges in the field of special education and reflect that understanding in the policies that impact special educators. Increased workload and high stress levels are established as paramount in the dissatisfaction of special educators, and as a result are included in this study. Perhaps looking for solutions in other areas could go far in decreasing both workload and stress.

#### School Social Workers

One group of professionals especially poised to recognize and address the problems surrounding special education are school social workers. Social workers are an integral part of schools responding to the requirements of students with disabilities and must be knowledgeable about the laws surrounding this population. Edmonds-Cady and Hock (2008) identify school social workers as those most likely on the front line of dealing with some of the discipline issues associated with special education students. The social work code of ethics calls for social justice, especially on the behalf of vulnerable populations, such as students with disabilities. According to the National Association of Social Workers website (NASW 2007), school social

workers play the unique role of mediators between home, school, and the community while providing direct and indirect services to education professionals, students, and their families. In a statement regarding the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), NASW mentions specifically the need to provide quality services to children with disabilities. Pryor, Kent, McGunn, and LeRoy (1996) state the importance of school social workers in ensuring that all children receive an appropriate education. Altshuler (2007) discusses the importance of social workers understanding the educational rights of children with disabilities in order to provide the needed advocacy on behalf of this population. Closer involvement between school social workers and special educators could not only decrease a SETs workload and stress, but also improve the relationship between the SET and the parents of their students.

Exploring what school social workers can offer to special education is only a piece of the puzzle and their efforts alone cannot correct the problems surrounding the field of special education. Further, the entire scope of the issues that face special education would be extremely difficult to capture in any one study. As a result, this study focuses on only one facet of the problem, mainly teacher satisfaction, and the question of satisfaction is evaluated within the context of the NCLB legislation. Students with disabilities in East Baton Rouge Parish in Louisiana, like other school districts across the country are failing to reach the standards set by NCLB. NCLB has made changes to the educational system in America by imposing a federal mandate of accountability for every state, and therefore a closer look at how it affects America's children is not only constructive, but I would argue, obligatory. In the face of teacher shortages and high attrition rates among SETs, NCLB makes changes that directly affect SETs and their students. Specific rationale for this study is now presented.

#### Rationale for this Study

The extra skills required of a SET, along with the excessive paperwork, behavior management issues, and peer and administrative support have been established as stress factors

that could lead to dissatisfaction among SETs. Specific factors chosen for this study include SETs' sense of empowerment, decision-making ability, job variety, amount of autonomy, and feelings of importance. A teacher's sense of empowerment and decision making ability have been cited by previous studies as important in influencing their feelings of self-efficacy and therefore, their performance. Quaglia, Marion, and McIntire (1991) find empowerment as a factor in a teacher's feelings of self-efficacy, which, according to the authors, is critical in meeting the complex needs of students. Zembylas and Papanastasiou (2005) state that increasing empowerment and decision making ability of a teacher improves their commitment, expertise, and as direct result, student performance. They also link these factors to increased self-esteem, job satisfaction, and greater productivity among teachers, which may improve student achievement. The authors concede that improving these two factors alone does not necessarily equate improved student performance. For this reason, empowerment and decision making ability were chosen for this study, as more research is needed to explore their relationship to job satisfaction, teacher quality, and student performance.

Hackman and Oldham (1975) present job variety, significance or importance, and autonomy as three of the five core job characteristics that can influence job satisfaction. Job variety, or the degree to which a job requires different activities and the use of different skills and talents along with the feelings of importance or significance, defined as the degree to which the job has a substantial impact on the lives of other people are both found to have a significant positive relationship to positive work behaviors (Chiu & Chen, 2005). The authors found that the greater the job variety and perceived importance, the more likely the employees were to possess intrinsic job satisfaction. For this reason, I have included these two additional factors in this study.

Pearson and Moomaw (2006) define teacher autonomy as the freedom to prescribe the best treatment for their students or the control they have over themselves and their work

environment. They also state that lack of autonomy is one of the most often cited reasons teachers give for leaving the profession. In addition, the degree of perceived autonomy, say the authors, is indicative of job satisfaction and positive reactions to teaching. Their study aims to confirm the findings of a related study (Brunetti, 2001) wherein a teacher's autonomy seems to be a crucial predictor to commitment to their profession and is associated with high teacher satisfaction, and as a result, it has been included in this study.

In order to establish a clear correlation between job satisfaction and NCLB, the study incorporates questions specific to NCLB. Questions regarding the law's impact on workload, stress level, ability to teach, and its impact on students were included since these factors have been identified as paramount to teacher satisfaction, quality, and student performance.

#### Hypotheses

- H1: The impression of SETs toward the No Child Left Behind Act, as reported by the response to the No Child Left Behind question, is related to the overall special education teacher satisfaction, as measured by the overall score on the Brayfield-Rothe Satisfaction Index.
- H2: The amount of autonomy a SET feels in their job under NCLB, as reported by the autonomy related question from the Job Diagnostic Survey, is related to the overall special education teacher satisfaction, as measured by the overall score on the Brayfield-Rothe Satisfaction Index.
- H3: The amount of variety a SET encounters in their job under NCLB, as reported by the variety related question from the Job Diagnostic survey, is related to overall special education teacher satisfaction, as measured by the overall score on the Brayfield-Rothe Satisfaction Index.
- H4: The amount of significance or importance a SET feels from their job under NCLB, as measured by the significance-related question from the Job Diagnostic

Survey, is related to overall special education teacher satisfaction, as measured by the overall score on the Brayfield-Rothe Satisfaction Index.

- H5: The degree to which a SET feels a sense of empowerment in their job under NCLB, as reported by the capacity to influence student achievement question, is related to overall special education teacher satisfaction, as measured by the overall score on the Brayfield-Rothe Satisfaction Index.
- H6: The degree to which a SET feels a sense of empowerment in their job under NCLB, as reported by the capacity to contribute to the rest of the school question, is related to overall special education teacher satisfaction, as measured by the overall score on the Brayfield-Rothe Satisfaction Index.
- H7: The degree to which a SET feels a sense of empowerment in their job under NCLB, as reported by the capacity to influence student behavior question, is related to overall special education teacher satisfaction, as measured by the overall score on the Brayfield-Rothe Satisfaction Index.
- H8: The amount of decision making ability a SET has in their job under NCLB, as reported by the leadership opportunity question is related to overall special education teacher satisfaction, as measured by the overall score on the Brayfield-Rothe Satisfaction Index.
- H9: The amount of decision making ability a SET has in their job under NCLB, as reported by the school decision making question is related to overall special education teacher satisfaction, as measured by the overall score on the Brayfield-Rothe Satisfaction Index.

## **Methods**

### Sample and Design

The current study uses a cross-sectional research design soliciting responses from special education teachers throughout the East Baton Rouge Parish School District. Permission was obtained from the Louisiana State University Institutional Review Board, the East Baton Rouge Parish offices of Exceptional Student Services, and the East Baton Rouge Office of Accountability, Assessment, and Evaluation.

There are roughly 800 special education teachers in East Baton Rouge. Their email addresses were obtained through the Office of Exceptional Student Services and each teacher was sent the consent form and survey via Survey Monkey (Finley 2009). The target response rate was 25%, or a sample size of 200. Shann (1998), in her study of teacher satisfaction in urban schools had a sample size of 200 and given the nature of email survey response rates, 200 was initially the desired sample size for this study.

### Data Collection

A link to the survey on Survey Monkey was sent in the form of an email and included the following: A brief description of the study and consent form, demographic questions, questions specific to NCLB and how it impacts special education, questions measuring the amount of autonomy, variety, sense of importance, empowerment, and decision-making ability, and the Brayfield-Rothe Job Satisfaction Index. Through Survey Monkey, the study was completely anonymous and responses were received without any identifying information. The body of the email included an explanation that the survey was completely voluntary and in addition to providing a link to the actual survey, it also provided an option to decline. The initial collection period lasted roughly three weeks, from May 20, 2009 to June 9, 2009. On June 9, the first survey was closed and another email was sent thanking those that participated and reminding those who had not that they would have three more weeks to fill out the survey. The

second collection period was ended on July 3, 2009. Participants who attempted to access the survey past that point were given a message informing them of the closure and providing them with the researcher's email address for further inquiry.

## Instrument

**Demographics.** Non-parametric demographic data included gender, race, and political ideology, and parametric demographics included age, years teaching, years teaching special education, and class size. Standard questions were used for both age and gender. Years teaching, years teaching special education, and class size were each followed by a blank for the respondents to reply. Race was considered with the following responses: *African American, Caucasian, Hispanic, Native American, Asian, and Other*. Political ideology was included due to the nature of the study and included the following responses: *Very Conservative, Conservative, Moderate, Liberal, Very Liberal, and Other*.

**NCLB Related Questions.** Questions directly related to the NCLB act were included following the demographics section of the survey. The first question asks teachers directly what they would do with NCLB if given the choice: get rid of it completely, make specific changes, or leave it in place as it is. The next three questions ask how NCLB affects a special educators' workload, level of stress, and ability to teach. The fourth question asks how NCLB impacts special education students. Each question in this section also contains a qualitative element, a space for the participant to add comments as he or she wishes. Responses are on a nominal level of measurement and are therefore non-parametric.

**Autonomy, Variety, and Feelings of Importance.** The next element was taken from the short form of the Job Diagnostic Survey (JDS) developed by Hackman and Oldham (1975). The present study asks three questions from the JDS to determine the amount of autonomy, variety, and feelings of importance that SETs report under the NCLB Act. Each question is on a 7 point Likert format with 1 representing *very little variety, autonomy, or feelings of importance* and 7

representing very high levels of each attribute. Responses are on an ordinal level of measurement and are therefore non-parametric data. In the authors study, reliability for both the autonomy and sense of importance variables was reported as .66 and the reliability of the variety variable was reported as .71.

**Empowerment and Decision-Making Ability.** The second section of the survey is a modified version of a questionnaire developed for the Teacher 2000 study by Dinham and Scott (1998) and used by Zembylas and Papanastasiou (2005) with a reliability coefficient of .94. Five questions were taken from the survey, three dealing with the amount of empowerment a teacher feels and two concerning the decision-making ability a teacher has. Each question was modified slightly to serve the purpose of this study by adding the phrase “under NCLB” to the end. Responses were recorded on a 7 point Likert format ranging from *highly satisfied* to *highly dissatisfied*, and each response is on an ordinal level of measurement. Each response was looked at individually in this study and is therefore at a non-parametric level of measurement.

**Overall Job Satisfaction.** The final section of the survey uses The Brayfield-Rothe Job Satisfaction Index to achieve a picture of the SETs overall level of satisfaction with their job (Brayfield & Rothe 1951). The Job Satisfaction Index (JSI) was developed by Arthur H. Brayfield and Harold F. Rothe in 1951 and has been used in satisfaction studies before and reports a reliability coefficient of .87. Wu and Short (1996) use this index in their study of teacher satisfaction. Stempien & Loeb (2002), in their study on job satisfaction, commented that many researchers of teacher satisfaction have designed their own measures despite the fact that these scales lack reliability and validity. They employed the Brayfield-Rothe Job Satisfaction Index, which received a corrected odd-even reliability coefficient of .87, to avoid this shortcoming and this study shares that reasoning. Another factor that led this study to employ the Brayfield-Rothe Job Satisfaction Index was its brevity. The index consists of 19 questions with a 5-point Likert response format ranging from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*. The

neutral response is “undecided.” Of the 18 questions, half of them are reverse coded so that a response of “strongly agree” can indicate high satisfaction or high dissatisfaction, depending on the question. The scoring weights for each question ranges from 1 to 5 leaving a possible total of an interval measure of 18, indicating low satisfaction, and 90, indicating high satisfaction, with a score of 54 indicating a neutral level of satisfaction. The overall score is on an interval level of measurement and therefore is parametric data.

#### Data Analysis

Due to the exploratory nature of the investigation the study employs univariate and bivariate techniques. Univariate analysis was used to report frequency and percentage for all non-parametric variables and the mean and standard deviation of all parametric data. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), according to Heppner and Heppner (2004) is used to compare the mean differences across multiple levels of one independent variables on one dependent variable. As a result, one-way ANOVAs were used to determine the relationship between variables’ mean differences for each of this study’s nine hypotheses. Tukey’s post hoc analysis was conducted if statistical significance was found in order to determine significant pair wise mean difference.

## Results

### Descriptives

Despite a desired sample size of 200, 100 participants responded and make up the actual sample size. Of those, 92 were female and their mean age was 43.08 (SD=12.173, range 23-65). The racial breakdown of participants was diverse, with 46% responding Caucasian, 36% African American, 13% Asian, 2% for both Hispanic and Pacific Islander, and 1% Native American. The average class size was just over 12 (SD=8.035) and participants had taught special education for an average of 11.2 years (SD=11.1827). Reported political affiliation was 3% very conservative, 28% conservative, 42% moderate, 19% liberal, and 8% very liberal. A complete list of all demographics can be found in table 1. As mentioned above, a score of 54 on the Brayfield-Rothe Job Satisfaction Index (JSI) indicates a neutral satisfaction level. The range for the participants in this study was 43 to 68 with a mean of 57.08 (SD=4.467), indicating a slightly higher level of job satisfaction. There were a small number of missing responses reported in the JSI, and these values were replaced with the group mean for that question. According to Heppner and Heppner (2004), this strategy is commonly used to account for missing data since the group mean for a question represents the central tendency of that item.

A review of the satisfaction levels along demographic lines revealed that both Caucasians (M=58.22) and African Americans (M=57.19) were more satisfied than Asian special education teachers (M=51.91), who represented the lowest satisfaction scores of all ethnicities. Political affiliation among participants showed little variance in their overall job satisfaction as the three largest groups: Moderate (M=56.92), conservative (M=56.96), and liberal (M=56.93) had almost identical satisfaction scores. Respondents were asked how long they planned to continue teaching and those answering “3 years or less” were more satisfied (M=58.71) than those that responded “4-6 years” (M=56.63) and “7 years or more” (M=56.49). A complete list of demographic means can be found in table 2.

**Table 1. Demographics**

Variable	Valid %	Mean (SD)	Range
<b>Gender</b>			
Male	8.0		
Female	92.0		
<b>Race</b>			
African American	36.0		
Asian	13.0		
Caucasian	46.0		
Hispanic	2.0		
Native American	1.0		
Pacific Islander	2.0		
<b>Political Affiliation</b>			
Very Conservative	3.0		
Conservative	28.0		
Moderate	42.0		
Liberal	19.0		
Very Liberal	8.0		
<b>Intended Years Left Teaching</b>			
3 years or less	25.0		
4-6 years	22.0		
7 years or more	53.0		
Age		43.1 (12.2)	23 – 65

(table continued)

Class Size	12.5 (8.0)	2 – 49
Years Teaching Special Ed.	11.3 (11.2)	.5 – 39
Year Began Teaching	1993.7 (12.1)	1966 - 2009

Note: Sample size was 100; therefore *n* was not included when reporting percentages

<b>Table 2. Demographic Data and Satisfaction</b>	N	Mean	SD
<b>Race</b>			
African American	31	57.19	4.4
Asian	11	51.91	3.8
Caucasian	36	58.22	3.7
Hispanic	2	58.50	.7
Native American	1	54.00	
Pacific Islander	2	63.50	.7
<b>Political Affiliation</b>			
Very Conservative	2	62.00	4.2
Conservative	26	56.96	5.5
Moderate	36	56.92	4.0
Liberal	14	56.93	3.2
Very Liberal	5	57.40	5.0
<b>Intended Years Left to Teach</b>			
3 Years or Less	21	58.71	3.8
4-6 Years	19	56.63	4.5
7 Years or more	43	56.49	4.7

## NCLB-Related Questions

Due to the focus of the study on the impact of NCLB legislation, the results of the NCLB related questions are of particular interest. The main question elicited what special educators would do with NCLB if they were given the choice. Of the 87 that responded, 41.4% would “entirely do away with NCLB,” 44.8% would “Leave NCLB in place, but make specific changes with respect to special education,” and 13.8% would “leave NCLB as it is.” The second question asked how NCLB impacted a special educator’s workload, a main factor in teacher burnout. An overwhelming majority, 75.9% of the 87 respondents, chose the “NCLB increases my workload” option while 24.1% chose the “NCLB has no impact on my workload” option. Not one respondent chose the “NCLB decreases my workload” option.

Similarly, for the third question, dealing with the affect NCLB has on special educator’s stress levels, no participant chose the “NCLB decreases my stress level” option. 72.1% of the 87 respondents feel that NCLB increases their stress level while 27.9% said it has no impact on their stress level. The fourth question questioned special educators about NCLB and it affect on their ability to teach. Nearly half of the 86 respondents, 45.3%, said that NCLB negatively affects their ability to teach, 36% said it had no impact on their ability to teach, and 18.6% said that NCLB has a positive affect on their ability to teach. The last NCLB related question dealt with the impact NCLB has on special education students from the special educator’s perspective. The majority, 69% of the 84 respondents, said that NCLB has a negative impact on special education students, 6% said it had no impact on their students, and 25% said that NCLB has a positive impact on special education students. See table 3 for a detailed breakdown of the participants’ responses to the NCLB questions.

**Table 3. NCLB Questions**

Question	Valid % (n)
<hr/>	
If given the choice, would you...	
Entirely do away with NCLB	41.4 (36)
Leave NCLB in place as it is	13.8 (12)
Leave NCLB, but make specific changes with respect to special education	44.8 (39)
<hr/>	
How does NCLB affect your workload?	
Increases my workload	75.9 (66)
Decreases my workload	0.0 (0)
Has no impact on my workload	24.1 (21)
<hr/>	
How does NCLB affect your stress level?	
Increases my stress level	72.1 (62)
Decreases my stress level	0.0 (0)
Has no impact on my stress level	27.9 (24)
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How does NCLB affect your ability to teach?	
Negatively affects my ability to teach	45.3 (39)
Positively affects my ability to teach	18.6 (16)
Has no impact on my ability to teach	36.0 (31)
<hr/>	
How does NCLB affect special education students?	
Has a negative impact on special education students	69.0 (58)
Has a positive impact on special education students	25.0 (21)
Has no impact on special education students	6.0 (5)

## Autonomy, Job Variety, and Feelings of Importance

The results of the autonomy, job variety, and feelings of importance questions were less conclusive. Reporting the most significant results, 40.2% of the 82 respondents reported a “moderate” level of autonomy, which was the neutral response on the 5-point Likert scale, and 30.5% said they felt “little” amounts of autonomy under NCLB. In response to the job variety question, 36.1% of the 83 respondents reported “moderate” levels of job variety and 26.5% reported that there was “little” job variety under NCLB. Finally, when asked about their feelings of significance or importance, 29.8% of the 84 respondents reported “moderate” amounts of significance and 25% felt “much” significance under NCLB.

## Empowerment and Decision Making Ability

Respondents were given three questions related to the level of empowerment they felt under NCLB and two questions dealing with the amount of decision making ability they have under NCLB. Reporting the most significant responses, 22% of the 82 special educators that responded find their capacity to influence student achievement under NCLB “satisfying” while 20.7% found it “somewhat satisfying,” on a the 7-point Likert response format. Of those 82, 22% gave the neutral response to the “capacity to contribute to the whole school process under NCLB” question while 20.7% found that capacity “somewhat satisfying.” Similarly, 23.2% of the 82 respondents gave the “neutral” response when asked about their capacity to change pupil’s behavior under NCLB while 17.1% find that capacity to be “satisfying.”

Similar results were found with regards to the two questions meant to measure special educator’s decision-making ability under NCLB. When asked about opportunities to exercise leadership under NCLB, 22.7% of the 83 participants gave the “neutral” response on the 7-point Likert while 21.7% were “somewhat” satisfied with those opportunities. The “neutral” response was also given by 26.5% of the 83 respondents when asked about their opportunity for

involvement in school decision-making while the next highest response given, 22.9%, revealed that special educator's are "somewhat" satisfied with that opportunity.

### Qualitative Responses

This study's survey included an option to provide comments on the NCLB related questions, and while qualitative results can be less precise than quantitative statistics, it is included here only to include how the teachers feel in their own words. The first questions gave teachers a chance to provide one specific change to the NCLB legislation. The modification most often expressed by SETs related to unrealistic guidelines, timeframes, and pace of curriculum for special education students. Many took issue with including special education students in the testing at all. There were a few negative comments directed towards the "highly qualified" requirement for teachers. One teacher found the government imposed agenda "insulting." The majority of the comments criticized "one size fits all" curriculum and called for more flexibility and individualization. One teacher believes we have "tried to make the child fit the program, instead of making the program fit the child." Positive observations of NCLB include the belief that all students "regardless of their disability" should be allowed to participate and succeed in the regular curriculum.

Comments regarding the workload under NCLB overwhelmingly focused on the increase in paperwork. NCLB gives "extra work" to an already overworked teacher, "doubles workload," and "triples paperwork." Many commented on how the increased paperwork and preparation cuts into their instruction time. The requirement for special education teachers to become "highly qualified" was also specifically mentioned as increasing workload. One teacher took a positive stance, saying that the workload is worth it when you see "how you are able to affect your student's life."

Responses on stress levels were also generally negative. The majority again pointed to the increased paperwork as the main driver behind their increased stress levels. One found the

decision on whether to “teach or do paperwork” the most stressful. Many teachers cited curriculum requirements and deadlines as most stressful. One teacher stated they did not feel much stress because the “programs yield positive results.” Taking an opposing view, another teacher found it stressful to “watch children struggle when they’ve been set up to fail.”

Both stress and paperwork were cited when teachers were asked to comment on NCLB’s affect on their ability to teach. According to one educator, NCLB makes it hard to “meet individual needs effectively,” and another states that it offers fewer opportunities for “creativity toward enhancing learning.” On the other hand, one educator feels it forces you to be more “creative and resourceful.” Most of the comments focused on the amount of time SETs are forced to teach “to the test” and the increased time it takes to actually test.

The final NCLB related question gave teachers the opportunity to comment on how they feel NLCB is affecting their students. Many of the comments echoed the sentiments of the above responses. A number of educators voiced positive feelings with regards to NCLB giving special education students the same opportunity as others. Others voiced opposition saying that the high stakes testing hurts poor performing students the most and many students are further marginalized.

Overall, both positive and negative perceptions of NCLB were expressed. Many of the comments fell on opposite sides of the spectrum, but some encapsulate what seems to be one of the most difficult facets of this debate when the fine line walked by special educators was illustrated. Special education teachers have expectations of student success, hold high standards, and want their students to have opportunities to succeed. Setting benchmarks and mandating accountability certainly has positive consequences. Special education students however, also presents unique challenges that call for increased individuality and flexibility in the classroom. Perhaps more research into balancing these two realities is needed.

## Hypotheses Results

H1 produced the only statistically significant results in this study.

For H1: The ANOVA revealed the relationship between special education teachers'

(SETs) impressions of NCLB, as measured by their response to the NCLB related question, and overall job satisfaction, as measured by the overall score on the Brayfield-Rothe Job Satisfaction Index (JSI), was statistically significant ( $F=4.70$ ,  $p<.05$ ).

Tukey's test = .01.

For H2: The ANOVA revealed the relationship between the amount of autonomy SETs

feel under NCLB, as reported by the autonomy related question from the Job Diagnostic Survey (JDS) and overall job satisfaction, as measured by the overall score on the JSI was not statistically significant ( $F=.88$ ,  $p=.48$ ).

For H3: The ANOVA revealed the relationship between the amount of job variety SETs

feel under NCLB, as reported by the variety related question from the JDS and overall job satisfaction, as measured by the overall score on the JSI was not statistically significant ( $F=2.03$ ,  $p=.10$ ).

For H4: The ANOVA revealed the relationship between the amount of importance SETs feel

under NCLB, as measured by the significance related question, and overall job satisfaction, as measured by the overall score on the JSI, was not statistically significant ( $F=1.30$ ,  $p=.28$ ).

For H5-H7: The ANOVA revealed the relationship between the level of

empowerment SETs feel under NCLB, as measured by the empowerment related questions, and overall job satisfaction, as measured by the overall score on the JSI, was not statistically significant ( $F=1.58$ ,  $p=.17$ ;  $F=1.1$ ,  $p=.37$ ;  $F=.99$ ,  $p=.44$ , respectively).

For H8-H9: The ANOVA revealed the relationship between the amount of decision making ability SETs feel under NCLB, as measured by the decision making ability related questions, and overall job satisfaction, as measured by the overall score on the JSI, was not statistically significant ( $F=.97, p=.46$ ;  $F=.7, p=.65$ , respectively).

## Discussion

The majority of relationships explored in this study were not supported, which counters previous research that establishes links between job stress (Snelgrove, 1998; Rayle, 2006; Hayes & Weathington, 2007) and increased workload (Ogden, 2002; Nehring, 1999; Howard, 2003) to job satisfaction or dissatisfaction. While the results of this study clearly show that NCLB increases both stress and workload, it also shows that participants were on average, more satisfied than dissatisfied with their teaching job. Other factors established in the literature review as having a direct impact on teacher's job satisfaction, such as autonomy, job variety, feelings of importance, empowerment, and decision making ability showed no sign of significantly lowering or raising teacher satisfaction in this study. With regards to autonomy, job variety, feelings of importance, and decision-making ability, a moderate or neutral amount was revealed by participants' responses. Two of the three questions concerning sense of empowerment also revealed a neutral amount, and a majority of respondents were satisfied with their capacity to influence student achievement under NCLB.

Statistical significance was found only between teachers that would "entirely do away with NCLB" (JSI mean= 54.17), and those that would "Leave NCLB in place, but make specific changes with respect to NCLB" (JSI mean=58.41). The third group, those wishing to "keep NCLB in place as it is" fell in between (JSI mean=56.91), more satisfied than those wishing to do away with the legislation, but less satisfied than those wishing to make specific changed. This trend was consistent across all five NCLB related questions. In the case of NCLB affecting their ability to teach, those stating that it "positively affects" their ability to teach showed a lower overall job satisfaction score than teachers stating that NCLB has a "negative affect" on their ability to teach. Again, those responding that NCLB has a "positive impact" on their special education students showed a lower overall satisfaction score than teachers stating that NCLB has a "negative impact" on their students. In other words, participants that believe NCLB should stay

in place as it is and that NCLB has a positive impact on both their ability to teach and their students are on average less satisfied with their jobs.

Specifically to the significant findings, perhaps those with constructive criticism or suggestions on ways to make the policy better are in some ways more invested in their job, the factors that impact it, and ways to make it better. Teachers wishing to do away with it completely may be operating with a certain amount of frustration-induced apathy. Long's (2004) study focuses on new and energetic teachers becoming disillusioned with the amount of energy it takes to challenge the status quo. That being said, it would be hard to argue that a special education teacher was not concerned with the well being of their students and the things that affect them.

In either case, the responses to the NCLB related questions certainly reveal some dramatic problems with the policy in general. Specifically, the majority of participants reported that NCLB has a negative impact on both their ability to teach and their special education students. In addition to the majority stating that NCLB increases both their stress levels and workload, what is most striking about these two issues is that not one respondent stated that NCLB reduces their stress level or workload. Coupled with the findings of above average job satisfaction, these results speak volumes about the character of special education teachers in East Baton Rouge and their resolve to make the best of any situation.

#### Study Limitations

Although the study attempts to explore whether or not special education teachers are satisfied with the changes made under the NCLB act, there are multiple factors that are beyond the realm of this particular review. For example, the study takes a broad sample of SETs without taking the different socioeconomic or structural differences related to: school size, salary, and the different degree of disability served into consideration. In addition, the email

surveys were sent out during the summer break, which goes some way in explaining the low response rate.

Additionally, a restriction on attaining test scores from the respective East Baton Rouge Schools posed further limitations on examining whether relationships between test scores and SETs perceptions on a host of factors exist. Initially, the author hoped to attain test scores from schools in the EBR district and compare them to teacher satisfaction levels. However, the East Baton Rouge Office of Accountability, Assessment, and Evaluation informed the author that the test scores would not be ready for this study. As a result, the study was conducted at an anonymous level wherein the Special Education Teachers' input was of primary interest rather than aggregate outcomes of school based tests. In some ways, it provides more of an intimate view of educators' beliefs rather than attempting to bridge a relationship between stressors and perceptions and score outcomes.

It is worth noting that the Center on Education Policy (CEP, 2008) released Louisiana state test score trends for reading and math since 2002, the year that NCLB was implemented, and special education students showed moderate gains. In terms of the achievement gap for reading, according to the CEP's report, there was a small narrowing in fourth grade special education students, it widens slightly in eighth grade, and narrows again somewhat by grade ten. For math, the gap narrows slightly in grade four, but is widened somewhat in both eighth and tenth grade. However, by tenth grade, only 21% of special education students are performing at a proficient level in math and 13% are proficient in reading (CEP, 2008). More research is needed on the benefits of NCLB to the field of special education in many areas in terms of improving student learning.

#### Policy implications

Further exploration of educators' feelings about their role as related to the school based performance, wherein standards based education implications can be unearthed, is promising,

and may be compelling for policy makers to consider in amending, implementing, or changing decisions related to the controversial NCLB policy. Many policies, despite best intentions, have unforeseen consequences and one important fact to remember when crafting them is to keep in mind the population that will most be effected. In this case, the responsibility of implementing educational policy falls on superintendents and administrators, but the actual effects of the policy are felt the most by teachers and in turn, students. For example, Bridges and Watts (2008) offer specific questions such as how well teachers would be prepared to implement the changes and what resistance may be felt from teachers in response to a change as important to consider when crafting educational policy.

Strong policies on paper and on the floor of the house and senate may not necessarily translate to positive outcomes in practice. Policies that directly impact the children of this nation carry relatively more weight, and the research and thought that goes into them should reflect that fact. Bridges, Smeyers, and Smith (2008) argue that the communication link between policy makers and teachers needs to be strengthened for teachers to take ownership of any policy. Callejo Perez (2008) points out that those shaping policy often make decisions mainly on anecdotes or their constituency's opinions rather than actual research from the education community. This study, although small in scope, reinforces that there may be some shortcomings of the NCLB Act. Any educational policy should put considerable time and effort into assessing its impact on the teachers that must work under it, because as former President George W. Bush stated, "The effectiveness of all education reform eventually comes down to a good teacher in a classroom."

President Barack Obama has committed to keeping NCLB in place and made reforming the Act a top priority according to the White House's website (2009). Like former President Bush, President Obama recognizes the importance of teachers. Specifically in terms of teacher quality, his goal is to recruit new educators and develop better ways to reward good teachers for

their hard work, and to ensure that teachers are supported in the classroom. In addition, states are challenged to remove a teacher if he or she is ineffective. Although these are positive steps towards a more comprehensive reform, a look through the lens of this study suggests that more needs to be done in terms of the frustration faced by many teachers specifically in terms of the workload and stress they face. This study aims to provide a window into the minds of the educators themselves. Further research into specific ways to support teachers is needed. One suggestion of this study is to strengthen the role of school social workers.

### Implications for Social Work

To expand the above conclusion, this study also aims to further explore additional keys to educational reform, mainly the contribution from the field of social work to special educators and their students. This study previously cites the positive impact that school social workers can have (Edmonds-Cady & Hock, 2008; Pryor, Kent, McGunn & Leroy, 1996; Altshuler, 2007). Social workers are often on the front line of issues associated with special education students (Edmonds-Cady & Hock, 2008). Rosenkoetter, Hains, and Dogaru (2007) address the particular help a social worker can offer in terms of helping students with disabilities during difficult educational transitions. Rosenkoetter, Hains, and Dogaru remind the reader how well social workers are suited to help young children with disabilities make positive and effective transitions into the school system.

Pryor, Kent, McGunn, and Leroy (1996) point out the knowledge that school social workers should possess in terms of the educational rights of special education students. Along that same vein, Altshuler (2007) highlights the important advocacy role that school social workers play in making sure the rights of children with disabilities are upheld. Palley (2008) also brings up the important roles that school social workers play in the advocacy of children with disabilities. In particular, the responsibility of social workers to understand the laws, NCLB and IDEA, that impact special education students.

Lander (2009) looks at the important role of school social workers in facilitating a healthier student teacher relationship. Social workers are equipped to not only understand the unique challenges faced by special education students, but also to assist and advocate for positive outcomes, specifically when a child lives in a negative environment at home. One of the specific roles of the school social worker, according to Altshuler and Webb (2009), is to address barriers from outside of the school system. In other words, school social workers are equipped with the skill set to reconnect the teacher, student, and their family. This researcher would argue that the bridge between home and school is paramount to truly improving our educational system. In order to provide a complete solution, the relationship between parents and teachers and the parent and child must be addressed. In addition, school social workers are in a good position to deal with the factors impacting a child at home that could spill over and cause issues to arise at school. Altshuler and Webb (2009) also purport the importance of increasing the legitimacy of school social workers by firmly establishing their role. Perhaps increased collaboration between special educators and social workers can provide some of the time and energy that a teacher cannot spare and help special education students be better prepared to succeed. In addition, school social workers can help re-build the connection between schools and parents and also help address negative environmental factors faced by children in their homes.

## **Conclusion**

As previously mentioned, this study is not intended to argue for or against NCLB, but only to show how the legislation is affecting special education teachers and their classrooms. In principle, setting standards and mandating accountability are necessary components of a successful education system. One of the main arguments against NCLB is not its content, but rather its implementation, specifically the funding, or lack thereof. My criticism stems from ways in which the program affects the teacher. The success of NCLB hinges upon the teachers and it seems like more could be done to involve them in the planning and drafting process.

The results of this study showed that special education teachers are passionate about education and are generally satisfied with their jobs, but are frustrated with the policies they must operate under. Statistically significant findings revealed teachers who would get rid of NCLB totally are on average less satisfied than those who would make specific changes to NCLB. Perhaps most compelling was the responses to the workload and stress questions in relation to NCLB. One could argue that an aim of educational policy should be to help teachers by reducing their already demanding workload and stress levels. In this study, not one teacher responded that NCLB reduced either their workload or stress level. This researcher acknowledges that NCLB should not be focused solely on making teachers job easier, as educating America's youth is no easy task. Admitting that standards and accountability are needed to improve our educational system and our children's performance, there must be a way to balance that with the needs and concerns of the teacher.

One additional contribution this study hopes to promote is the unique nature of the field of special education. With sweeping national educational policy, some students are bound to fall through the cracks. This researcher understands the need for uniform standards and requirements, and rather than debating the merits of implementing a blanket policy meant to apply to and support all children, the need for flexibility, especially in special education should

be mentioned. Not all children learn the same way and our educational system, by its very nature, can make it very hard for some to succeed. An important component of special education is recognizing the uniqueness of each child and not wasting time by trying to fit a “square peg into a round hole” so to speak. Increasingly, special educational policy trends point towards inclusion, establishing standards, and increasing accountability. It is the hope of this study to further the discussion of the need for both thoughtful and practical solutions to some of the problems facing our educational system today.

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**Question #3:** In general how significant or important is your job under NCLB? That is, are the results of your work under NCLB likely to significantly affect the lives or well-being of your students?

Not Very Significant 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Highly Significant  
(The outcomes of my work under NCLB are not likely to have important effects on my students) (The outcomes of my work under NCLB can affect my students in very important ways)

**Feeling of Empowerment and Decision-Making Ability  
(Please circle the number that best describes how you feel)**

**Note: All questions on this page will be answered using a 7 point scale**

- 1 - highly dissatisfying
- 2 - dissatisfying
- 3 - somewhat dissatisfying
- 4 - neutral
- 5 - somewhat satisfying
- 6 - satisfying
- 7 - highly satisfying

**Question A – Empowerment: Feeling of power to impose change**

How satisfying do you find your capacity to influence student achievement under NCLB?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

How satisfying do you find your capacity to contribute to the whole school progress under NCLB?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

How satisfying do you find your capacity to change pupil behaviors under NCLB?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

**Question B – Teacher opportunities for decision-making**

How satisfying do you find the opportunities you have for exercising leadership in your school under NCLB?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

How satisfying do you find the opportunity for your involvement in school decision making under NCLB?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

**Brayfield-Rothe Job Satisfaction Index**

1. My job is like a hobby to me.
2. My job is usually interesting enough to keep me from getting bored.
3. It seems that my friends are more interested in their jobs.

4. I consider my job rather unpleasant.
5. I enjoy my work more than my leisure time.
6. I am often bored with my job.
7. I feel fairly well satisfied with my present job.
8. Most of the time I have to force myself to go to work,
9. I am satisfied with my job for the time being.
10. I feel that my job is no more interesting than others I could get.
11. I definitely dislike my work.
12. I feel that I am happier in my work than most other people.
13. Most days I am enthusiastic about my work.
14. Each day of work seems like it will never end.
15. I like my job better than the average worker does.
16. My job is pretty uninteresting.
17. I find real enjoyment in my work.
18. I am disappointed that I ever took this job.

## **Vitae**

Joseph M. Abel was born in Montgomery, Alabama and grew up in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. He received his Bachelor of Arts degree in religious studies in 2004 from Louisiana State University. Before returning to Baton Rouge to begin the graduate program in social work at Louisiana State University, he worked in the public education field in Asheville, North Carolina. Since returning to Baton Rouge, his professional interests and experience have centered around social policy research.