

Students with Disabilities and Accountability Reform: Findings from the Texas Case Study

Katherine M. Nagle
University of Maryland

Margaret J. McLaughlin
University of Maryland

Victor Nolet
Western Washington University

Kimber Malmgren
University of Wisconsin, Madison

Educational Policy Reform Research Institute

The Institute for the Study of Exceptional Children and Youth
University of Maryland
1308 Benjamin Building
College Park, Maryland 20742-1161

March, 2007

Funding for this research work was provided by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (Grant #H324P000004). Opinions expressed in this paper are those of the authors, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Department of Education or the Office of Special Education Programs.

This paper is one of four individual case study reports presenting the qualitative findings from a five-year investigation of the impact of accountability reform on students with disabilities in four states, eight districts, and twenty schools. During the late 1980s and 1990s, many states passed legislation requiring school systems to be more accountable for students' learning. However, the impetus for the most recent changes in state accountability systems originated in state responses to federal concerns about the quality and equity of public education. These concerns can be considered as the next phase of the standards-based reform movement.

The standards-based reform movement, which began during the 1970s, has been integrated into federal education policy, most notably the last two reauthorizations of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), and has become increasingly focused on holding schools accountable for the academic performance of all their students. The drive for greater accountability and educational equity is embedded in the 2001 reauthorization of ESEA, known as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). NCLB aims to increase student achievement, improve schools, provide parents and the community with better information, and close some long-lasting and troubling achievement gaps between disadvantaged students and their peers (Cohen, 2002, p. 61).

The new requirements for standards and assessments are rigorous and largely build on the existing Title I requirements promulgated under the Improving America's Schools Act of 1994. For most states however, *performance-based* accountability requires them to chart a course into new and unfamiliar territory. Particularly controversial is the requirement that the *same* annual academic achievement objectives be established, met, and reported for specific subgroups, including most students with

disabilities, racial/ethnic minority groups, and students with limited English proficiency (LEP).

This case study report presents qualitative data collected over a four-year period—2001-2004—from three levels of the public education systems, and provides an analysis of the impact of accountability reform on students with disabilities in one of our participating four states. The following three research questions guided this component of the project:

1. How do broad education policies that incorporate high-stakes accountability include consideration of students with disabilities?
2. How are students with disabilities affected by education accountability reforms?
3. What impact have educational accountability mechanisms had on students with disabilities at the system and individual student level?

The remainder of this report is divided into five sections. Section I contains information regarding the methodology used to collect and analyze the state and local data presented in this report. Section II is an overview of the assessment and accountability systems in Texas, including changes resulting from NCLB. In Section III we provide demographic information on each of the study sites. In Section IV we present our research findings at the state, district, and school level, and in Section V we present a discussion of the major findings for each embedded case study and address cross site themes.

I. METHODOLOGY

Identification of Study Sites and Data Sources

The Education Policy Reform Research Institute (EPRRI), funded by the United States Department of Education's Office of Special Education Program, was established in 2000 to investigate and describe the impact of including students with disabilities in new state educational accountability systems as required by the 1997 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 1997). EPRRI researchers adopted an empirical approach to answering the research problem, the case study method, and specified a priori the levels of analysis, participants, and questions to be pursued. One prerequisite for selection was the requirement that study states have high quality data collection systems that could provide disaggregated data for students with disabilities.

Four core study states agreed to participate in the five year study: California, Maryland, New York, and Texas. Within each state, EPRRI staff and core state representatives identified and secured the participation of two school districts in the study. The four selected states varied across several key accountability features, including high-stakes versus low-stakes accountability consequences, recentness of reforms, stability versus instability of reform efforts, participation of students with disabilities in all accountability reports, and use of alternate assessments. In addition, the sites also reflected geographic and demographic diversity. It is important to recognize that in December 2001 the policy context surrounding this study changed substantially with the passage of NCLB and as a result the study sites became more homogeneous in their key accountability features. Unfortunately, due to our initial study design we had already

selected sites and participants on an a priori basis (versus selecting them purposively and serially over time) and it is possible that we limited our opportunities to study relevant issues that only became apparent after NCLB and over the course of the study. Despite these reservations, we are confident that our analysis of data obtained from selected states, districts, and schools reveals important issues and “key” challenges as states, districts, and schools nationwide work to meet the ongoing requirements of NCLB.

EPRRI researchers used two complementary strategies to collect qualitative data: analysis of documents and in-depth interviewing (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). The use of two methods of data collection and multiple data sources allowed for triangulation by data source. EPRRI staff developed a sound understanding of the history and context of educational reform in each of the study sites by ongoing reviews of state and district policies available online or obtained directly from the participants. Examples of the types of state documents reviewed include Board of Education policies and minutes, strategic plans, reports from Superintendents and Commissioners, and state Education Department letters to districts. We also reviewed state-consolidated applications for federal funding under NCLB and state accountability plans submitted to the U.S. Department of Education to comply with NCLB. In addition we collected press releases and letters issued by the Secretary of Education, and speeches by the President and Secretary that were obtained from the U.S. Department of Education web site. We also reviewed reports issued by the U.S. General Accounting Office on NCLB, journal articles and local newspaper articles from across the four sites. Finally, we monitored state Web sites for information on evolving state efforts to implement NCLB and for state policy documents developed to meet the NCLB requirements.

The guiding questions for the research came directly from the Office of Special Education's grant priority, but were further broken into subheadings and sample issues/indicators. In February 2001, the state-level participants and EPRRI staff together reviewed and revised a draft template of research questions. This template is available on the EPRRI website, www.eprri.org. This process led to the development of 10 individual interview protocols focused on the areas of accountability, assessment, monitoring, curriculum and instruction, special education, teacher certification, professional development, Title I, transition, and parent viewpoints. In October 2001, the same process was used to develop interview protocols at the district level. Individual school level protocols were developed for the school principal, regular education teachers and special education teachers in late 2002.

Selection of participants at the state and district level was done purposively with the support and cooperation of the state and district directors of special education, who acted as gatekeepers. At the state and district levels, the special education director participated in the identification, initial contact, and interview arrangements with key personnel. Knowledgeable personnel from the following departments in each SEA and LEA were interviewed: special education, accountability, testing, special education monitoring, Title I monitoring, curriculum, teacher certification, and professional development.

EPRRI was specifically concerned with identifying schools within its study sites that were high performing for students with disabilities compared to other schools in the same district. However, the term "high performing" is used relatively, as in general the performance of students with disabilities lagged behind that of students without

disabilities by an average of 30 percentage points. We used one of two ways to identify each high-performing school: (a) its school performance index (SPI) or (b) district recommendation.

School Performance Index. The SPI allowed a closer examination of the elementary schools in our participating districts and identified schools that were relatively high performing for this population. Several factors were considered important in the creation of this index. First, we wanted to capture performance across multiple years – to minimize the chance of misinterpreting anomalies in performance data. Fluctuation in data is especially an issue when examining performance trends in schools with low numbers of special education students. In addition to considering performance over more than one year, we wanted to include performance across more than one grade level and across both reading/language arts and math. By including multiple indicators of success, we created an index reflective of “high performance” with respect to multiple domains. Most importantly, the index allowed us to identify schools that demonstrated some degree of success with all students over a minimum of two successive school years.

The first step in creating the school index was to sum the performance data for the various performance variables described above. In this manner, performance data for students with disabilities were weighted equally to performance scores for students in general education. We viewed this as appropriate given our specific interest in pinpointing and examining schools that demonstrate some level of relative success for students with disabilities *in addition* to some level of overall success. Summed performance scores were then standardized to allow for comparison across states.

Recognizing the strong correlation between socioeconomic status and performance on standardized assessments, we wanted to take the overall socioeconomic status of each school's population of students into consideration when we examined index scores. Therefore, a variable reflecting each school's socioeconomic status (School-SES) over the data collection years included in each state's school performance index was also created. The "School-SES" variable was operationalized as the mean percent of students receiving free or reduced price meals at each school over the two data collection years included in the school performance index, which was then standardized and reported as a *z*-score. Schools with performance index scores above the mean (i.e., *z*-scores at or above zero) that were also above the trend line reflecting the overall correlation of school SES to performance were selected for interviews. Schools in Maryland, New York, and Texas were selected in this manner.

Overview of Data Collection Procedures

During this 5 year multi-state study we conducted 35 interviews at the state level and 44 at the district level. State level interviews occurred between October 2001 and January 2002 and district level interviews took place between April and June 2002. Once we had identified the schools, the special education director from each LEA facilitated the initial contact and we worked closely with the school principal to determine when it would be convenient to visit. School visits occurred between December 2003 and June 2004. We conducted in-depth interviews with special and general educators and the school principal from 20 elementary schools. We requested that the individual school principals select teachers for interview based on the following criteria: (a) he or she had worked in the school for two or more years; (b) he or she worked with students in the

grades assessed by their state for the purpose of accountability; and (c) the general education teacher had students with disabilities in his or her classroom during the current academic year.

The interviews at all levels of the education system were between one and two hours in length and adopted a semi-structured approach with the interview protocols acting as rough guides. Interviews were also audiotaped with the participants' consent so that they could take the form of a conversation. Finally, the interviews were conducted by multiple researchers (Eisenhardt & Bourgeois, 1988), allowing the researchers to overlap data analysis and data collection, as recommended by Glaser and Strauss (1967) as well as Van Maanen (1988). The use of multiple investigators provided complementary insights, added richness to the data analysis, and enhanced confidence in the findings (Eisenhardt, 2002).

Data Analysis

EPRRI researchers followed the qualitative data analysis procedures recommended by Miles and Huberman (1994). After each interview field notes were written-up by individual researchers, while the taped interviews were transcribed by graduate students. At each level of the system individual case study data analysis began with the creation of a contact summary sheet to develop an overall picture of the main points of each interview. The graduate assistant who first transcribed the interview then read each contact summary sheet to identify bias and selectivity. We developed detailed descriptive write-ups for each site, based on the field notes, the contact summary sheet, and the document reviews. This step in the data analysis is central to the generation of insight and helps researchers to cope with the enormous volume of data (Miles &

Huberman, 1994; Pettigrew, 1988).

We then, entered the transcripts into a qualitative software program, *Ethnograph*, which allows for the analysis of text-based data into codes and categories of meaning. EPRRI researchers adopted a coding approach partway between the a-priori and inductive approaches discussed by Miles and Huberman (1994). A general coding scheme, based on that developed by Bogdon and Biklen (1992), was created to provide a structural, conceptual, and coherent order to the emerging codes. This particular coding scheme was based on the general domains covered by the research matrices and the interview protocols and allowed codes to develop inductively, while at the same time enabling the researcher to “think about categories in which codes will have to be developed” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 61).

We created clear operational definitions for each code so that the codes could be applied consistently. Code names closest to the concepts being described were applied to the chunks of data. Initial coding of the data corpus was performed by the first author and a team of graduate research assistants, who read and reread each interview line by line and coded the sentences or phrases relating to the participants’ perceptions of the effects of accountability on students with disabilities and the systems that serve them. EPRRI researchers followed the recommendations of Miles and Huberman (1994) for check-coding. Two researchers separately coded the first 8 pages of the opening interviews from each level of the system and reviewed the coded sections together. Intercoder reliability was determined using the following formula:

Reliability = number of agreements / total number of agreements + disagreements.

Initial intercoder reliability at each level ranged from 79 to 83 percent and rose up to between 91 and 93 percent after the differences were clarified. A further check was performed two thirds of the way through the data analysis. A conceptually clustered matrix was developed during the early analysis based on the interview protocols. The following decision rules were applied as themes were identified: (a) first, a theme was coded as present for a participant if it was mentioned repeatedly or with strong emphasis during the interview; and (b) second, a theme was coded as present for a study site if it was mentioned by 2 or more participants.

The second step in the analysis was to put the data back together again in a new way to reveal themes and stressors related to the impact of accountability at each level. This process is similar to axial coding in grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), as it involved grouping and comparing the initial codes with each other and merging similar concepts together into larger encompassing themes. During this process, all key ideas, findings, and interpretations were presented and discussed by the EPRRI staff and, at the state and district level, with study participants (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Original transcripts were used as evidence to support the emerging themes, and at all times the researchers searched for examples that would contradict key findings (Yin, 1989).

II. TEXAS ASSESSMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEMS

Each of the four states that participated in this research has a unique accountability system to determine the academic achievement of their students. Information about each state's assessment system was retrieved from policy documents and other sources, primarily the Internet. Examples of the types of documents reviewed include Board of Education policies and minutes, strategic plans, reports from

Superintendents and Commissioners, Department of Education memos, policies relating to standards-based reform, assessments, and accountability documents, as well as press releases, and other reports. Following is a description of the assessments and accountability systems in place in California, Maryland, New York, and Texas at the end of 2003-04 school year.

The common features of standards-based reform are at the heart of the Texas strategy for school improvement. These features include (a) requiring that teachers provide instruction in a set curriculum, (b) regularly assessing student progress, and (c) publicly holding schools and districts accountable. According to a study conducted by Achieve Inc in 2002, while the state set out expectations for students that were not very difficult to reach, it also made it abundantly clear that the bar would rise over time and laid out these expectations well in advance so that districts and schools knew what was expected of them. This strategy had both its supporters and its detractors. For example, other studies of the Texas accountability system have been critical and suggest that the state set school and district performance so low as to be meaningless (Anderson, 2001; Jerald, 2001; McNeil, 2000; Valencia, Valenzuela, Sloan, & Foley, 2001).

Texas State Curriculum

The earliest state curriculum was known as the Essential Elements and was replaced in 1998 with a new curriculum known as the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). The TEKS comprised two curriculum areas: *Foundation* and *Enrichment*. The Foundation curriculum included English language arts and reading, mathematics, science, and social studies. The Enrichment subject areas consisted of languages other than English, fine arts, health, physical education, technology applications, and career

and technology education. All of the subjects in the Foundation curriculum were mandatory for state graduation credits. Under the Enrichment curriculum, health, technology applications, and physical education were required for state graduation credits and the remaining subjects were recommended.

In the Foundation curriculum, districts were required to provide instruction in the essential knowledge and skills of the appropriate grade levels, whereas in the Enrichment curriculum, districts were expected to use essential knowledge and skills as guidelines for instruction. It was expected that most students with disabilities would receive instruction in the TEKS at their individual instructional level. The only exceptions to this were students with severe disabilities who were provided with a functional curriculum, as determined by their Admission, Review, and Dismissal (ARD) committees, which were similar to IEP teams in other states. However, it is important to note that individual ARD committees had considerable discretion in determining the educational experience and academic opportunities available to students with disabilities, having the final decision on the grade level content, the assessment instrument, and the level of achievement acceptable for each individual student with a disability.

Texas State Assessments

From 1980 to 1984, Texas assessed minimum basic skills in reading, writing, and mathematics with the Texas Assessment of Basic Skills (TABS), which later (1985-1990) became the Texas Assessment of Minimum Skills (TEAMS). Changes in state law resulted in a new assessment, the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS), which was first administered in 1993. The TAAS was a criterion-referenced test designed to measure whether students had met the content standards in reading, writing, and math

that were covered in the statewide curriculum. The TAAS was used to assess school districts and schools on the TEKS. Student scores were reported on school report cards as the percentage of students who earned a passing score on the TAAS. Prior to September 1, 2004, students were required to pass the TAAS to meeting graduation requirements.

In 1999, the Texas Legislature mandated that the TAAS be replaced by a new assessment system known as the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS). The TAKS was administered beginning in the school year of 2002-03. The TAKS measures the statewide curriculum in reading at grades 3 through 9; writing at grades 4 and 7; English language arts at grades 10 and 11; mathematics at grades 3 through 11; science at grades 5, 10, and 11; and social studies at grades 8, 10, and 11. The Spanish TAKS is administered at grades 3 through 6. There are three performance categories for students on the TAKS: *Commended Performance*, which recognizes high level performance; *Met the Standard*, which means the student passed the test; and *Did Not Meet the Standard*, which means the student failed the test. Satisfactory performance on the TAKS at grade 11 is a prerequisite to a high school diploma and satisfactory performance on the 3rd grade reading portion of the ELA assessment is necessary for promotion to 4th grade. Students graduating in 2004-05 or later were required to pass the TAKS to meet graduation requirements.

When TAAS was still in effect, Texas statute specifically allowed for the exemption of students receiving special education services from taking the TAAS. Instead, students receiving special education services were to be assessed at their appropriate instructional levels, as determined by their ARD committees, rather than at their assigned grade level. The student's ARD team then determined whether a student

would take one, more than one, or none of the TAAS subject tests. This decision was to be documented in the student's IEP. The student's IEP was also supposed to document any accommodations and/or modifications that the student would use on either the TAAS or the alternate assessment.

However, in 1997 the Texas Education Code was amended to address the assessment of students receiving special education services. These amendments were enacted to allow for the greater inclusion of students with disabilities in the statewide assessment system by introducing a standardized multi-grade level alternate assessment for students receiving instruction in the general education curriculum on or below grade level. This assessment, known as the State Developed Alternate Assessment (SDAA) was for special education students in grades 3-8 who received instruction in the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). Each instructional level has three achievement levels—Level I minimal knowledge and skills, Level II adequate knowledge and skills, and Level III strong knowledge and skills. The SDAA also met the later IDEA 97 alternate assessment requirements. A second generation of the alternate assessment, the SDAA II was first administered in 2005.

The SDAA assesses the areas of reading, writing, and mathematics and measures individual students' academic growth from one test administration to the next. It is administered on the same schedule as TAKS and is designed to measure annual growth based on appropriate expectations for each student as determined by the student's ARD committee after review of multiple pieces of evidence. In making the assessment decision, the ARD committee first considers the TEKS instruction that the student is receiving, the student's current IEP, his or her confidential student report, and input from

parents and other professionals. Each subject area is considered separately when making assessment decisions. If a student is receiving instruction on or near grade level it is expected that he or she will take the general assessment unless a necessary accommodation requires the student to be assessed by an on-level SDAA. For students with disabilities who will be assessed on an SDAA, the ARD committee must set an expected level of achievement that is based on individual student growth expectations

A small number of students with disabilities, usually those with the most severe cognitive disabilities, may be exempted from both the general assessment and the alternate assessment if the ARD committee determines that neither of these is an appropriate method of assessing a particular student's progress. In these situations each individual ARD committee decides how the student will be assessed, an option known as a Locally Determined Alternate Assessment (LDAA). Beginning with the 2000-01 school year, local school district reported the results of students grades 3 through 8 who were assessed on an LDAA to the Texas Education Agency. Students tested on LDAA in 2003 were not included in the AYP calculations—but the state began to collect an evaluation of LDAA performance results for AYP for the 2004 school year.

Texas Accountability System

Texas has had an accountability system in place for more years than most other states. The state statutes in place during the 1990s required annual district and campus (i.e., school-level) performance ratings of “Exemplary,” “Recognized,” “Academically Acceptable,” and “Academically Unacceptable.” Ratings were based on TAAS scores disaggregated by subgroups (e.g., African American, Hispanic, White, and Economically Disadvantaged) and dropout rates. Over the period of time that TAAS was used, a

number of changes were made to the rating criteria. For example, in 1999, a rating of “Academically Acceptable” meant that at least 45% of "all students" and each student subgroup must have passed each section of the TAAS. In 2000 the standard for the “Academically Acceptable” rating was increased to require that 50% or more students pass the TAAS. However, it was not until school year 1999-00 that TAAS results for students with disabilities were included in the accountability rating system (2000 Texas Accountability Manual).

Prior to NCLB, if a school district or campus received the lowest accountability rating of “Academically Acceptable,” a peer review team was sent to visit the site(s) to determine any deficiencies. Then a preliminary report of the peer review team’s findings was written and sent to the district from the Texas Education Agency (TEA). Next, the district and campus would develop and implement an improvement plan to address the area(s) of poor performance. The district and/or campus were required to provide written evidence of the improvements made in the areas of deficiencies to the TEA. The TEA would then determine if additional corrective measures were needed or if the file should be closed. If a school district or campus received the lowest accountability rating for two or more consecutive years, the level of state intervention would increase. In 1995, the Public Education Grant (PEG) was created to allow parents with students attending poorly performing schools to transfer their students to schools in other school districts that had higher performance results.

In response to the NCLB requirements, Texas created an Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) Plan to operate alongside its own accountability system that would annually evaluate all public school districts, campuses, and the state as a whole for NCLB

purposes. The Texas AYP Plan was conditionally approved by the United States Department of Education (USDE) in June 2003 as meeting the NCLB requirements. However, subsequent problems arose relating to the inclusion of scores from the SDAA and the LDAA. Students with disabilities who participated in the SDAA in 2003 were included as non-participants for calculating AYP. As a result, many schools and districts would have failed to meet NCLB participation requirements for students with disabilities if the state had not applied a “Hold Harmless” waiver allowing those schools and districts to make AYP if they met the other requirements. A proposal to evaluate the SDAA II participation and performance results for AYP was submitted to USDE in April 2004. In August 2004 USDE responded to the state’s proposed changes and allowed the state to count as participating those students who were assessed on the SDAA and the LDAA. However, USDE denied the requested timeline extension on implementing the December 2003 regulation limiting the use of proficient scores from alternate assessments to no more than 1% of the total number of students assessed.

After the implementation of NCLB, Texas made the decision to keep its state accountability rating systems and to add federal AYP requirements; as a result, each public school district and campus receives two accountability ratings: a state accountability rating and an AYP status label. In Texas, if a *student group*, within a district or campus, consists of 50 or more students (summed across grades 3-8 and 10) and makes up at least 10% of all test takers in the subject *or* consists of 200 or more students, even if it does not make up 10% of test takers in the subject, the student group meets minimum size criteria and is evaluated against performance standards. If the performance standards are not met by the *all student* group or a separate *student*

subgroup, sites must show any improvements on the other measure(s) *and* show that there was a 10% decrease in the percent of students not passing the Met Standard performance standards on TAKS.

III. STATE AND LOCAL DISTRICT LEVEL DEMOGRAPHICS

Basic demographic data for the states and two participating school districts are provided in Tables 1 and 2. These tables include only data from the 2000-01 school year because the observed within state and within district differences across the three years of data collection were minimal. States and districts varied in terms of enrollment, ethnic composition, percentage of students who were economically disadvantaged, and percent of students who were receiving special education or bilingual/English as a Second Language (ESL) services. Throughout this report, all state-level data appear in bold print on the tables. The information about the two districts in each state appears in regular type directly beneath the state figures.

Texas State and District Demographic Data

In the school year of 2000-01, Texas enrolled 4,021,641 students and identified about half as economically disadvantaged. Approximately 12% of Texas' students received special education services and 13% for English learners. About 40% of Texas' students were Hispanic, 42% were white, and the remaining 17% were African American, Asian, and American Indian. The student to teacher ratio was 14 to 7 and the average operating expenditures per pupil were \$5,923, the lowest among all four study states included in these analyses.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

[Insert Table 2 about here]

Cypress-Fairbanks School District is located in a rapidly growing suburban area of Houston. At the time of the study, about 20% of Cypress-Fairbanks' 63,497 students were economically disadvantaged, a much lower percentage than that of the state of Texas overall. In the same time period, about 11% of Cypress-Fairbanks students received special education services and about 10% received ESL services. Over half of the students were white (59%), about 23% were Hispanic, and 10% were African American. The number of students per teacher (15:5) was slightly higher than the Texas overall average, and the operating expenditures per pupil (\$5,674) were slightly lower than the state average.

Garland School District is located on the outskirts of Dallas. At the time of the study, it was slightly smaller than Cypress-Fairbanks with 50,312 students. About one third of the students in Garland were economically disadvantaged, a lower percent than that of the state as a whole. Thirteen percent of the students in Garland received special education services and the same percentage received ESL services. Nearly half of the district's students were white (49%), 29% were Hispanic, while African American students represented 17% of the total student body. The number of students per teacher was 16, which was higher than the state average. The operating expenditure per pupil was \$5,006, much lower than the state average.

IV. EMBEDDED STATE, DISTRICT, AND SCHOOL FINDINGS

State level interviews took place in November of 2001, district interviews took place in June of 2002, and school interviews took place in October of 2003. EPRRI staff interviewed twelve individuals at the state level. In Cypress Fairbanks we interviewed six district personnel and twelve school level personnel (three principals, five regular

educators and four special educators), and in Garland we interviewed nine district personnel and nine school level personnel (three principals, three regular educators, and three special educators).

The Texas findings are arranged into three broad topical areas: (a) including students with disabilities in the state accountability system, (b) improving the quality and increasing the quantity of educators, and (c) making accountability work for students with disabilities. Within each theme were related sub-themes that varied according to the time period and level from which data were collected. In each broad area, the data will generally be presented hierarchically starting with the state, then district, and finally the local campus (or school) level. The significant conceptual themes that emerged from these three levels will be illustrated by a small number of exemplar quotes. Each quote was chosen to be representative of many such instances, or because it was an extreme instance or the sole instance, or because it represented two contrasting properties of the conceptual theme under discussion.

Including Students with Disabilities in the State Accountability System

At the time our state level interviews took place, the state's education accountability system was already undergoing substantial revisions mandated by the Texas legislature. Some of these changes specifically focused on students in special education and the need to adapt the established accountability system to include consideration of students with disabilities in state reform policies. These changes related to (a) the need for closer collaboration within TEA, (b) changes in the accountability ratings criteria, (c) setting performance standards and implementation of the SDAA, and (d) changes to the state's graduation and grade retention policy. As this section will show,

students with disabilities had not previously been considered in the Texas accountability rating system and the changes discussed above resulted in significant tensions between major stakeholder groups at the state level. In addition, these tensions created significant dilemmas for schools and local district administrators who acted in ways that protected their school and district rating. However, these actions were not necessarily the best educational decisions for individual students receiving special education services.

Our policy analysis of the Texas accountability system provided strong evidence that, at best, the needs of students receiving special education services were largely forgotten when Texas' accountability system was first developed. Indeed it could be argued that this population was deliberately excluded from the high-stakes accountability system. For example, although mandatory statewide testing of students began in Texas in 1980, Texas law allowed ARD committees to exempt students receiving special education services from participation in the TAAS. In addition, if students receiving special education services did take the TAAS, their scores were not counted in school and district accountability ratings.

In practice, for over 15 years the assumptions underlying standards-based reform that are at the heart of the Texas accountability system, namely measuring results and holding students and school systems accountable, did not hold for this population. However, after 1995, under pressure from disability advocacy organizations, the need for greater inclusion of this population in the accountability system became a high-profile issue in the Texas legislature, which led to a number of significant policy changes by the legislature and corresponding changes within TEA and the school systems.

Increasing collaboration with TEA. An important feature of the Texas standards-

based reform strategy was the recognition that the schools and districts needed additional support to meet accountability requirements. TEA implemented several initiatives, for example an early literacy initiative to provide support for educators in areas that were assessed by the TAAS. Comments from several participants indicate that special education was rarely included in these initiatives and that some individuals at TEA were slow to recognize and react to the need to change this situation. The following comment from an informant within the Office of Special Education illustrates the view that as late as 2001 special education remained on the fringes of state accountability reform:

Our goal has been to try and latch onto many of the initiatives that are going on for all kids, but there are still some folks that don't get it. It's not that we are an afterthought; we're not a thought at all.

Changes in the accountability ratings criteria. As discussed above, the exclusion of students with disabilities from the Texas accountability rating system became a focus for disability advocacy groups and the practice was subsequently changed. However, the timing of the decision to include TAAS scores from students receiving special education services in accountability ratings unfortunately exacerbated the significant tension between TEA and the local districts on the one hand and the disability advocacy community on the other.

According to documents from TEA and our informants, the practice of excluding scores of students with disabilities from accountability ratings was established to provide districts with an incentive to include more students with disabilities in the statewide assessment program (TEA, 1997). However, this practice may also have had the unforeseen consequence of encouraging over-identification of students as being in need of special education services, as a way of protecting schools' and districts' ratings from

the negative impact of lower-performing students. TEA itself concluded that in 1995-96, if the TAAS results from special education students had been included, the ratings of 789 campuses would have been lowered and the ratings of 19 campuses would have been raised.

Unsurprisingly, a review of policy documents from the period revealed that there was considerable debate over proposals to expand the statewide assessment program to include more students with disabilities and to include their test results in the accountability ratings. TEA concluded that “TAAS participation by students receiving special education services has increased in recent years. However, including TAAS results in the accountability system could reverse this trend” (TEA, 1997, p. 15). TEA clearly recognized that once the TAAS scores counted then schools and districts might respond by encouraging ARD committees to exempt students receiving special education services from participation in the TAAS if they thought that they would not reach the state’s passing standard on TAAS. However, the decision to develop an alternate assessment for students receiving special education services who received instruction in the TEKS solved the problem because the SDAA passing standard was determined for each individual student by his or her ARD committee rather than by the state board of education. The performance result for an individual student on the SDAA indicated whether or not he or she had met the achievement expectations set by the ARD committee.

As the following comment illustrates, the initial plan was that the inclusion of the TAAS scores of students receiving special education services would coincide with the first administration of the SDAA: “We had planned to include the general assessment

results for special education students in 2001, exactly the same year the alternate assessment was available and would be administered statewide.” Thus any student receiving special education services could be assigned to an SDAA on their instructional level, would not be required to take the grade level TAAS, and consequently would not be a potential threat to the school or district rating. However, as the same respondent explained:

We had to include special education students prior to the alternate assessment and we were sure that exemptions on the state assessment would go up because the districts were testing students generously on the state assessments and they would interpret that more strictly if it was going to affect their campus ratings.

According to our informants, the impetus for this change of plan was extensive lobbying on the part of powerful disability advocacy groups: “Advocacy groups pushed for including those students. They wanted them included in 1998 and they were included in 1999 as a compromise on the part of the Commissioner.” According to several participants, the success of the Texas model in increasing the academic achievement of students in regular education prompted disability activists to demand that the scores of students with disabilities be included to ensure that schools and districts were accountable for this population also: “The advocacy groups were looking at the increases in regular students’ percent passing and they wanted the same kinds of numbers for special education students.”

A review of the Texas data indicates that TEA’s prediction proved to be correct as special education exemptions did in fact increase the first year that the TAAS scores of students receiving special education services were including in the rating system.

Comments from our informants can be categorized as defensive of district reactions, with several individuals arguing that because of the high-stakes nature of the Texas accountability system, districts really had no choice but to act this way even though the district knew it was not in the best interests of students with disabilities.

In 1999, the special education exemption rates rocketed. You might interpret that as, well, they are trying to hide their special education students, or they are not trying to do what's best for them. They make a strong case; we have the best interests of the child at heart, but now you are forcing us, because of our district rating, to protect ourselves instead of doing what's right for students.

The above quote also provides some indication of the criticisms leveled at the districts when the increase in exemption rates was noted. It is very possible that districts did face accusations that they were acting to protect themselves and their ratings by "hiding," that is exempting, too many students who received special education, and making poor educational decisions. However, that is one of the consequences of having a high profile, high-stakes accountability system (Linton, 2000). The following quotation is representative and highly illustrative of this unintended impact:

It's a balance all the way along. I don't think they're deliberately out there trying to hurt students. Now we've got a very high-stakes accountability system and when push comes to shove, they chose their district rating over their philosophy of doing what's best for students.

In both of our study districts, rates of exemption from the TAAS for special education students increased for the 1999-00 administration from around 1.4 percent and 3.5 percent of the total number of students assessed in Garland and Cypress Fairbanks in

previous years, to 7.1% and 5.3% of the total number of students assessed, respectively. Although we discussed the increase with our district participants when we visited the districts in June 2001, our informants commented that exemption rates increased because the SDAA was not ready and disagreed with the suggestion that the ARDs may have been reacting to pressure at the campus level. The following quotation is illustrative of several comments on this issue: “Well, the alternate wasn’t ready and the ARD committees did not want to test kids on the TAAS because they wouldn’t get any useful information.” Not surprisingly, participants stated that although “other districts” acted to protect their ratings, their district did not. We did not discuss the increase in exemptions for the 1999-00 school year at the school level due to amount of time that had passed and the singular nature of the event.

Setting performance standards and implementation of the SDAA. Several of our informants discussed the tension concerning the issue of standard setting between the disability advocates and other stakeholders on the steering committee that was established to develop the SDAA. As the following comment illustrates, disability advocacy groups did not want achievement levels on the SDAA to be linked to IEP goals; rather, they wanted the state to determine what would be an acceptable level of achievement. According to this informant, disability groups took this stance because they believed that schools would not provide a challenging program unless the state set the standard:

It was not a unanimous decision to use the ARD goals. Some of the advocates wanted the state to tell the schools how well the students should do, because they believe that the special education program in schools is so bad that unless you force them to do it right they won’t.

Interestingly, some of the concerns of the advocacy groups were shared by several of the state level participants. As one participant explained, there was a risk that ARD committees would choose an SDAA grade level that was below the instructional level of the student: “The ARD may set the goals and objectives at the 4th grade level, but then specify a 3rd grade SDAA for assessment.” Another state participant explained that according to the TEC, each student was expected to demonstrate at least a year’s growth—which meant that expectations for each student were different. This informant was concerned that ARD committees may be tempted to set low standards that the students would meet easily, so schools would not be penalized:

The language of the law is in terms of one year’s growth, but essentially that’s very much an individual student decision. We are concerned that local ARD committees will set that standard to be so easy that the number of students meeting proficiency by achieving ARD expectations will be too high. Given the high-stakes nature of accountability you have to be careful not to drive behavior in certain ways. Schools would not want to penalize themselves, so they would set a standard that students could meet.

A year later, during our visits to the local districts, several informants explained that their special education coordinators had identified several students who did much better than their ARD committees had predicted: “What we’re concerned about and looking at right now is that some students with disabilities did much better than their ARD expectations.” Both the districts we visited intended to investigate the decision-making process at the individual campus and student level by sitting down with the school principal and other instructional leaders:

We sit down with the Principal and the instructional leadership and talk about

their assessment decisions for students with disabilities and how well those went and whether the student should take something else, especially if they knocked the socks off it.

The district informants we spoke with dismissed the suggestion that ARD committees deliberately set lower standards to make the school look better. Instead, rather than a particular score signifying that a student had failed to meet grade level, the SDAA demonstrated improvement:

This is where I see the real benefit of SDAA. It's not that you can test the kid at the lower grade level because maybe that might make us look better. It's when we get to know that the kid's score is not just about how badly they did on that 3rd grade level, it will be how much they have improved from 2nd grade.

At the school level, several special education teachers reported that it was difficult to set the appropriate SDAA level for some students, especially those students between instructional levels. One participant commented: "If you have one of those kids that is in between levels, it's hard. Which way do you go? Do you want them to do really good on a low one or struggle with the high one?" Another special education teacher explained that she may expect too much at times, but that she believed that the quality of assessment decisions had improved: "I mean, there are times when I think I'm expecting a little bit too much from them. But we're getting better at what level to choose from them, and what to expect from our students." Another special educator from our other district explained that at the minimum they wanted to see a year's growth, but that it was hard to predict six months in advance what the student could do: "You know, we want to see, at a minimum, a year's growth, but the flip side is that I am looking six months ahead and setting my instruction six months ahead."

Another serious challenge identified by state level participants in 2001 was that the high-stakes nature of the accountability system may tempt districts and schools to assign students with disabilities to the SDAA when they should take the regular assessment:

Some of our future challenges with the new system will be the need to monitor those decisions about how many students tested with the general assessment and how many tested with SDAA. We worry about the impact at the local level, given the media attention and the high-stakes nature of the accountability system, that too many students will be tested with the SDAA that really meet the board's requirement to take the general assessment.

When we conducted interviews at the district level a year later an informant explained that the district investigated when students with disabilities were assigned to an on-level SDAA, as this meant that they were working on grade-level and should take the general assessment:

We are watching who is taking an on-level SDAA and there may be very good reasons for it. But let's find out and talk about why to the campus people and make sure we understand why those decisions are made.

When we visited the Texas schools in October of 2003, several special education teachers told us that they had been told by district personnel that students with disabilities who had previously taken an on-level SDAA should take the general assessment unless there was a very good reason: "This year we have been told by the district that if a student is taking an on-level SDAA we want them to try TAKS. And you better have a really good reason if you choose not to." The school level personnel we spoke with

emphasized that in *their* schools students with disabilities who were working on or close to grade level always took the regular assessment:

Our policy, from the five years I've been here has always been that students that are on grade level or on grade level with just a little bit of help need to be taking the regular. I think it's just the higher expectations we have for them.

However, this special education teacher explained that in some schools even students who were classified as “speech only” were given the SDAA and not the regular assessment: “Well, I do know in a lot of schools, even their “speech only” students, are taking SDAA.” Another participant from this district told us: “I know at some schools—not here—but in some schools, if a child is labeled special education then the teachers automatically just think, ‘Oh, well they can take SDAA and I don't have to worry about that.’”

The practice of moving “borderline” students on to the SDAA was also discussed in our other district, again in the context of “other” schools. To illustrate, a special educator told us she had heard that students who were struggling a little in class would be moved to SDAA, when in her opinion they should be given the chance to take the TAKS:

But there are a lot of kids that are right there on the line and you've got to give them a chance. I will hear people in other schools say that they have passed TAKS for two years but they're struggling a little bit in class so we are going to put them on SDAA. They shouldn't, you know—if they passed for two years in a row, there's no reason for you to be pulling them out.

The teachers we spoke with differentiated sharply, though, between students who were on or just below grade level (content mastery students) and those who were more

than two grade levels behind their classmates (resource students). These educators, who were responding to the requirements of NCLB, did not believe that resource students whose instructional level was several grades below their enrolled grade should take a grade level test. To illustrate, a regular educator told us:

Well, if the kids are going to content mastery and not resource, then they are taking the TAKS test pretty much in the regular classroom. When they are working on a 1st grade level or a 2nd grade level in 4th grade, I don't think it is fair to ask them to take a 4th grade test.

However, the high degree of local control in setting cut scores, and the fluidity of the SDAA mechanism in Texas, have the potential to limit the effectiveness of the accountability system for students with disabilities. A student with a disability can take a mixture of SDAA and the general assessment one year, all SDAA the next, and all general assessment the next:

Students with disabilities have been working on the general curriculum and they can move across and take all the tests in one area, that is they can take all in our alternate, or they can take all general assessments, they can take part of our alternate, part general then they can take alternate one year and move into general the next year and then if they need to move back into alternate they can. It's a very fluid system.

A special educator from this district confirmed the flexibility of the system. According to this participant, students who have trouble reading may take SDAA in reading, but would take TAKS mathematics because they could have a reading accommodation: "If they are working on grade level math and say they have resource reading, we will make the accommodation where the math can be read to them and they'll take the regular test." The ability of ARD committees to vary cut scores for

individual students and switch students back and forth among tests from year to year violates the accountability logic of NCLB in particular, and also the IDEA requirement that students with disabilities be fully included in the state accountability system, because the terms on which students with disabilities are included are not uniform.

More rigorous promotion/graduation requirements. Enacted by the 76th Texas Legislature in 1999, the Student Success Initiative (SSI) grade advancement requirements apply to the Grade 3 reading test and the Grade 5 reading and mathematics tests. The SSI requirements will be phased in for the Grade 8 reading and mathematics tests beginning in the 2007-08 school year. As specified by these requirements, a student may advance to the next grade level only by passing these tests or by unanimous decision of his or her grade placement committee that the student is likely to perform at grade level after additional instruction. Beginning with the Class of 2004-05, students must complete the required coursework and pass all parts of the exit level TAKS in ELA, mathematics, science, and social studies in order to receive a high school diploma. As this state level participant explained, the changes would come as a shock to the system after 12 years of stability: “When you raise the standards after 12 years it is a significant emotional shock to the system. There is a big systemic change in store for Texas.” However, students with disabilities were protected from the new exit level requirements because the ARD committees determined graduation requirements for individual students and could even revisit the decision if the student failed to meet these requirements, in which case the student could graduate with a standard diploma:

One of the graduation options is that they can graduate by passing the TAAS or the TAKS and by completing all those State-required credits. But even if they take TAKS and they fail, the ARD Committee can come back and say we made a

big mistake on this one, we thought he could do it and he can't, so we're going to re-adjust their graduation options.

We discussed the impact of the increased graduation requirements a year later with our districts. Our informant raised the issue of "11th hour" referrals to special education for regular education students who failed the exit level assessment and could not graduate. Referral and identification as a student with a disability enabled such students to graduate with a standard diploma by meeting ARD requirements and not the state requirements. However, according to this participant, the state had tried to prevent this potential abuse by introducing a requirement that if a student failed the regular assessment and then qualified for special education services, the ARD could not immediately exempt them from the exit level requirements. First the school had to remediate and the student had to retake the assessment. If the student again failed then the ARD could exempt them from the graduation requirement. According to this participant the district did not have many referrals at the high school level now:

Right at the beginning, when some regular education kids failed, they tried to say it was because the students were closet special education. You know an 11th hour referral to special education. I understand having a kid in your office and they have tried and tried and tried their best and they aren't going to pass the test. But we tell them that it doesn't mean that this child is going to graduate if they qualify for special education. They have to come back and take some classes to remediate and take the assessment again and then we'll exempt them. Usually that puts a damper on that. We usually don't see a whole lot of new referrals at the high school level.

As discussed above, the Texas legislature also made changes to student promotion requirements. At the state level, participants explained that there was a risk that more students would be referred to special education as schools tried to exempt them,

If you don't pass a test at a certain age you don't get promoted to the next grade and I do worry. When a snake eats a rat, and it travels down the body, right now the rat is somewhere between 4th and 5th grade as to when we get most of our referrals to special education. I don't want that rat moving into 2nd grade because they're afraid of the test and they can exempt them to the alternate and they'll set a low performance standard—they'll pass and our special education numbers jump back up.

A year later participants at the district level were also concerned that referrals to special education would increase as a result of the new promotion/retention policy, especially at 3rd grade. As the following quote illustrates district personnel were concerned that teachers would begin to refer low performing students to special education rather than trying to remediate and give the student more time:

I'm concerned about it, I really am. I think that— and I'm concerned about it most for the 3rd grade. We see our biggest number of referrals probably at the 4th, 5th grade levels, because schools don't like to refer students too early. This 3rd grade retention is going to force them to refer and not be as likely to try an intervention.

A participant from our other district reflected similar concerns about the retention requirement: “Yes we are concerned about referrals increasing at 3rd grade, very concerned.” She also described academic support initiatives designed to help at-risk students: “We beefed up the entire reading program from K to 3 this year. We know how

many students fail reading each year (300+ in the district) and we know how many of those are special education.”

When we visited the schools in October 2003 there was still concern over the promotion requirements. As the following quotation illustrates, schools concentrated their resources on reading in the early grades due to the promotion requirement at 3rd grade:

The focus so far has been primarily on that situation in 3rd grade, where if the child fails reading, then there are implications. Because of that, most of the funding and resources, etc., have gone into making sure they get every opportunity to be successful on TAKS.”

In this section we have discussed the impact of state policy decisions to include students with disabilities in the already established accountability system and the tension that these decisions created or exacerbated within public education. Most notable is the role of disability organizations in both the timing of the decision to include special education scores in the accountability system and in the determination of standard setting on the alternate assessment. These two instances reveal significant discontent on the part of advocacy groups. Another important finding relates to attempts by TEA to prevent schools and districts from using special education status to avoid the negative consequences of the high-stakes accountability system by assigning students to the SDAA, setting low ARD expectations, and referring students who do not meet graduation or promotion requirements to special education. The extent to which the state is able to limit such abuses of the system at the school level is hard to determine. Although informants report that no such abuses occur in their schools, they provided ample anecdotal evidence that they occur in other schools.

In the following section we present our second major theme—that of state and federal efforts to improve teacher and administrator quality. However, as the following section illustrates, few informants focused specifically on special education personnel needs. Indeed, there is considerable evidence that teacher reform in Texas has had the result, whether intentional or not, of blurring the distinction between special educators and regular educators.

Improving Educator Quality

In Texas, as in most states, the twin issues of teacher quality and quantity are of longstanding concern. As early as 1995 the Texas legislature addressed the issue of teacher preparation with the establishment of the State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC) and the formation of the Accountability System for Educator Preparation (ASEP). Prior to this, educator certification and investigations were handled by TEA. Interestingly, at the time of writing this report, the state legislature decided to reunite the two state agencies and from September 1 2005 SBEC became a part of a new TEA department called Educator Quality and P-16 Initiatives.

The certification board was organized into four broad areas: educator preparation, assessment and accountability, certification, and professional discipline. In the area of educator preparation, the certification board works primarily with entities preparing educators for certification in Texas. The board served 70 universities, 16 community colleges, 30 alternative teacher certification programs of which 7 are private companies, and 11 alternative administrator certification programs.

Texas state law requires that prospective teachers pass examinations in the areas in which they seek certification. SBEC manages the development and administration of

these examinations and also issues educator credentials. After completing a program of preparation, teacher candidates typically take the Texas Examinations of Educator Standards (TExES), which includes a Pedagogy & Professional Responsibilities test and additional tests in the academic disciplines in which they seek certification. These tests assess the prospective educator's knowledge of academic content and teaching, including understanding of diverse learners.

SBEC also monitored the quality of educator preparation at university and alternative certification programs through the ASEP and used educator passing rates on TExES assessment data to determine program quality and issue annual accreditation reports according to minimum acceptable performance levels established by the Board. SBEC intended to include teacher performance profiles in ASEP but this has not happened.

As part of Texas' overall reform of the educational accountability system, SBEC made some sweeping changes and attempted to move teacher certification from a process-based system to an outcomes-based one that was firmly grounded in academic content and pedagogy. These changes created a series of tensions that threatened the autonomy of different constituents in the reform process including teacher preparation programs, districts, and individual teachers. It is important to point out that it was clear that these tensions affected all educators, including special education teachers, whose knowledge tradition may have been particularly questioned by the movement toward a more generalist approach. In this section, we discuss (a) changes to the certification structure, (b) improving beginning educator standards (c) teacher shortages (d) changes in teacher skill requirements, and (e) alignment of state and federal policy reform initiatives.

Changes to the Certification Structure.

According to several informants at the state level, the changes to educator preparation were implemented for two primary reasons: (a) to create better teachers who understood how to integrate content, and (b) to better meet the needs of school administrators, especially at the middle school and high school level. At the middle school and high school level teachers who were only certified in one content area could only teach in that one area, whereas if they had multiple subjects administrators could move them where they were most needed. The following quotation from a state-level informant makes this reasoning explicit:

The reasons were twofold: to make teachers better prepared to teach in American schools, able to understand the cross-over of content, the integration of content areas and to address administrators' needs in placement, particular in grades 6 and above.

To these ends the SBEC reduced the number of content-specific teaching certificate options available and created more generalist certificates that include common cores of knowledge in key academic disciplines. According to one informant, "two years ago we had something like 100 certificates, different ways and combinations of certificates, and now we're trying to reduce it to a generalist certificate at grades 4-8 with a common core of math, science, English/language arts, and social studies." This approach was also adopted at the high school level as the TCB created combinations of content areas on a single certificate. To illustrate, the above informant explained:

English/language arts and reading were combined at the high school level, and physics and chemistry are now in physical science in one certificate. In social studies we used to have psychology, sociology, economics, and government. You could get any one of those certificates. Now, it's only history or social studies.

As part of the standards overhaul, special education teacher standards were also addressed. Consistent with the approach used toward general educator standards, the aim was to produce educators with a range of skills. As the following quotation illustrates, for special education teachers, the intent was to produce educators with special education expertise coupled with content area knowledge: “The new standards for the special education credentials had reading, math, and behavior embedded in them, so that whoever came out with a special education degree could teach reading, math, and could manage behavior in an effective way.”

Comments from our state level informants indicated that there was some opposition to the changes in the certification structure. The committee established by the legislature initially recommended four levels: Early Childhood-3, 2-6, 5-9, and 8-12. However according to an informant: “The TCB ruled that out quickly, because they wanted to fill the gap for middle grades, strengthen the curriculum, make sure teachers know what the curriculum is in 4-8, and get teachers who want to be there.” The same informant added: “We don't know if this will work, but we're willing to try it. Public acceptance of the middle level is difficult.” According to this informant, these changes raised three concerns. First, teachers were required to obtain content area knowledge beyond their own specialty area. For example, if someone wanted to teach geography they also needed to pass the TExES in history; culture and society; government and citizenship; and economics. Second, upper elementary grade teachers were required to have the same mix of content area knowledge as middle school teachers. Finally, once certified 4-8, a teacher could be moved out of an elementary school into a middle school or more unlikely vice versa if the district wanted to. As this participant concluded:

“People are disturbed by this, but it remains to be seen.”

Improving Beginning Educator Standards.

The SBEC required the development of new teacher standards aligned with the TEKS curriculum and teacher assessments in every subject area including pedagogy. The new standards and tests were to be implemented in Fall of 2002. SBEC implemented ASEP to (a) try to ensure that all beginning teachers, regardless of their method of certification, had the knowledge and skills they needed to teach in Texas public schools and (B) hold teacher preparation programs accountable for the quality of their graduates. When first implemented, ASEP had two components: (a) assessment of beginning educator knowledge of the TEKS and (b) performance-based assessment. However, due to budget problems, only the second component was put in place.

Impact on teacher preparation programs. SBEC established achievement standards, based on passing rates on TExES assessments, in order for teacher preparation programs to be accredited. According to our informant, in the first year the passing standard for teacher preparation programs was 70 percent. Texas state law also required that passing rates be disaggregated by demographics and gender, and requires programs to meet the standard of 70 percent for the target groups as well.

Teacher Standards are now based on the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). The TCB set the passing rate, but it is law that they have to break out their pass rates and meet the standard according to race and gender. Every program must meet that standard at 70% for first year pass rates, and 80% for cumulative. Each group has to meet the standard either in the first year or cumulatively (2 years).

Our informants identified several obstacles to the full implementation of ASEP.

Funding the teacher performance component was especially challenging, but participants also discussed validity concerns related to rater subjectivity of teacher performance. As the following quotation illustrates, SBEC required quantitative data on which to base its accreditation decisions:

Performance-based assessment has been problematic to implement. We need hard data, quantitative results. We had doubts that you could train people to observe teachers in the classroom and get consistent quantitative results. It is summative for the program and high-stakes because it's in accountability. The activity profile for ASEP hasn't been pursued, so the accountability system relies only on TEKS data right now.

It was clear from our informants that the stakes for teacher preparation programs could become very high indeed and that the system posed a threat to the autonomy of these programs if they didn't achieve the required standard. The teacher preparation programs were free to choose how they prepared their students, but as the following quotation emphasizes, the programs would be held accountable on the state's terms, which did not always sit well with higher education:

It is entirely up to the teacher preparation programs how they prepare the students, but the programs are now held accountable for their candidates' performance on the TEKS. Administrators like this system. Mostly higher education wasn't sure how to meet that challenge and wasn't too happy either. But to their credit when forced to meet it, they did.

At the district level there was considerable support for ASEP. When we visited them a year after we had talked with the state level personnel we raised this issue. The following quotation is representative of several comments indicating that the TExES served a weeding-out function: "I do think the requirement of passing the state test has

made the quality better, as it has weeded out some people that probably didn't need to be in the field.”

One of the consequences of a program's not meeting the required passing rate was that it would then receive an on-site review by experts in the field who would make recommendations to improve the program. As our informant pointed out, the review was designed to help the program rather than punish it, but if the dean of the preparation program did not cooperate, under Texas state law he or she could be removed. As a final consequence, the whole program could lose its accreditation status:

Failing programs will be visited by an over-site team of peers, directors, deans, and professors who make recommendations of how to improve. They don't want to be seen as a threat, not as police, but as advisors offering assistance. If the program is not cooperating or fulfilling any of the recommendations, the second year they'll get another visit, then by law the education director can appoint a new dean of the teacher preparation program. Eventually, its accreditation can be revoked.

All teacher preparation programs, traditional and alternative, participated in ASEP and we were very interested in gaining insight into how the two types of programs compared in terms of the quality of their graduates. According to a state-level participant, the pass rates of candidates from alternative and traditional certification programs varied across skill areas; content area pass rates were higher from alternative route candidates, whereas pedagogy pass rates were lower: “In terms of pass rates, alternative programs have varying rates of success. Some are quite high, some not as high. Their content pass rates may be higher than undergraduates, whereas their pedagogy rates might not be as high.” One factor involved in the disparity is that candidates who take an alternative certification route are required to have a degree in the subject that they wish to teach, but

their access to pedagogy may be limited depending on the requirements of the program.

Given the current debate in the field of education surrounding the effectiveness of ACP compared to traditional university programs TUP, we pursued this topic with the districts when visited in June 2002 and with the schools in October 2003. Findings at the district level were largely consistent with each other, as participants from both districts commented that the quality of the graduates varied depending upon where they studied, and that they had hired excellent graduates from both ACPs and TUPs. Comments also supported state level perceptions that TUPs produced graduates with strong pedagogical skills, but that their content area knowledge remained superficial:

My assessment of the quality of people coming out of the traditional university program is that the pedagogy has improved because of the impetus on the students spending more time in classrooms. What they are still lacking to some extent is the breadth of content background.

However, on balance, informants from our two districts perceived that traditional programs produced graduates who had a better understanding of what being a teacher is all about because of their exposure to schools and schooling over the long term. Comments from several informants indicated that teachers from ACPs were either excellent or mediocre. Indeed, this participant explained that the special education teachers who were not offered a contract were generally from ACPs:

We found alternate certified teachers who are phenomenal or they're not the strongest teacher that walks in. When we look at our new teachers when their contract's not renewed, from the special education side it's mostly the teachers who are alternative certified.

A key strength of many TUPs is their year-long teaching practice requirement.

The quotation below is just one example of many from the district level interviews that reinforced the importance of prolonged exposure to the field that TUP teachers enjoyed.

I think that the teachers coming through the traditional program have a better understanding of schools and the way they work. I think the student/teacher component and all the observation time that they do as part of the traditional track is very beneficial.

The following quotation is an example of comments about the perceived downside of ACP:

The significant downsides to the alternative certification program are that they're either in the summer or at night and prospective teachers are going to work all day and then come to the classes at night. There is no real student teaching, which is to me another downside, because that is such a valuable experience.

We received more varied opinions at the school level on ACP teachers compared to TUP teachers. Interestingly we found that principals, although concerned about the content knowledge and instructional skills that prospective employees presented with, were looking for two other characteristics: (a) teachers who understood how schools worked and (b) teachers who would fit in with the existing school staff. The majority of principals we spoke with believed that TUPs provided prospective teachers with a better understanding of the ways schools worked. The following quote is typical of many we heard

The teachers that I hire out of 4 or 5 year institutions are well-qualified. I cannot say the same about the alternative certification program because they have no background whatsoever as far as the classroom, even what you do on the first day.

Several principals expressed particular concern over the fact that ACP candidates basically learned "on the job" and were the teacher of record the moment they were

assigned. The following quotation highlights these concerns, especially for first year teachers:

I am concerned about their having to learn on the job, especially concerned about that first year of teaching. I do feel like the kids probably don't get as much from those inexperienced teachers as they would from a traditionally certified teacher who knew how to organize the classroom, knew how to structure the curriculum.

We received many similar comments, such as the one that follows from our other district, indicating that this is not an isolated concern:

I think it's very hard to be teaching while you go through that process because they're not only going to school a couple nights a week and so on, they're being held responsible for curriculum and so they get gyped out of that student teaching because it's not really a student teaching experience. They're held accountable.

The second characteristic that principals looked for was how well the new teacher would fit into the school. As the following quotation illustrates, this principal was primarily concerned with the personality of a teacher candidate:

I think that you have to start with the person. There are things that you can't teach a person to have or do, like the will to want to work and be persistent no matter the obstacles that come in your path. We find those core ideals that we feel like are a good fit and a good match to what we are trying to do here.

This view was stated repeatedly. The following two quotations are exemplars of the comments we received:

I think that what you're looking for when you're looking for a good teacher has more to do with their knowledge of children, their love of children, their intuitiveness when it comes to being able to make decisions based on what's best

for children. The other things you can usually teach them and get them the experience.

I want a teacher who's going to commit to our mission here at our school and a teacher who is a self-starter, an organized person, a person with knowledge, a person who is open to exploring new ideas, a person who works well with a team, is a good communicator.

Teacher Shortage Issues

There is an inherent tension between policies designed to increase educator quality and the need for more people to enter and stay in the profession. This tension was very much apparent in Texas, especially at the state-level. The following quotation is illustrative of the concerns at the state level that requiring teacher candidates to pass more rigorous exit examinations may have the negative effect of reducing the number of individuals wanting to enter the profession: "I don't know what will happen with the new tests in 2002. Some people predict we'll be losing teachers because the tests will be harder and they encompass more content areas."

Other comments from districts and schools strongly suggest that when we visited in 2002 and 2003 respectively, there was a shortage of certified teachers, but not of people who wanted to be teachers. The following two quotations, one from a district informant and one from a school principal, clearly illustrate the situation: "I mean, there are still shortages of certified people, but there are not shortages right now of people who want to teach." "What I've noticed in the last few years is there are not as many well-qualified people that are applying for teaching positions. We have applications from a lot of people probably who had lost their job or been displaced because of the economy."

Like many states, the shortage of teachers was particularly acute in specific skill or content areas and was in actuality less a problem of finding new teachers and more of

retaining them in the profession. The following quotation from the state level is illustrative of the comments we received on this issue:

Texas is experiencing a teacher supply problem in the areas of special education, foreign language, math, and science. It is at a critically low level. It's more a problem of retention than of supply. One-third leaves after three years and 50 percent after five years.

When we visited the districts a year later individuals confirmed that retention was the main issue for them, too. A participant explained: "We're really trying to focus a whole lot on retention in order to hold people."

To address the issue of retention, the state had implemented a beginning educator support system called the Texas Beginning Educator Support System or TEXBESS, which supported 10% of the state's new teachers. TEXBESS was originally financed through federal funds; the state was investigating ways to continue and expand the program. As one participant pointed out, similar support programs have been successful in reducing teacher attrition: "In California their support program has clearly worked. If we can support even half of the teachers, the retention rate is above 90% right now for us after 2 years, but without TEXBESS only 30-40% after two years." One of our study districts participated in the TEXBESS pilot program and the following quotation indicates that the support program was successful: "We participated in TEXBESS and I think it is very effective. With this approach we keep the person for three years, fully supported and they are more likely to stay."

When we visited the schools in October 2003, all the principals we spoke with told us that their own staffs were very stable and that they did not have to hire large

numbers of new teachers. For example, one principal reported: “My staff is very stable. Last year I had one that retired; one that stayed home because she had a baby.” Another principal said: “I feel we are very stable. We hired eight new teachers this year, the same as last year.” Finally, a third principal told us:

I have a very stable staff. I have an older staff so every couple of years we always lose a number because of retirement. I hired four last year, but there have been several years since I’ve been in this building that I’ve hired only one.

Increase in State Involvement

There is considerable evidence to support the conclusion that the Texas state legislature and TEA itself have become much more involved in the internal workings of the public school system, including providing training to every teacher and mandating that general education teachers receive training in special education. To illustrate, informants at the state level described two initiatives by the state legislature to improve the quality of reading instruction and mathematics instruction. As the following quotation indicates, these initiatives were directly tied to the accountability system: “The legislature understands that in order to pass a test, students needed trained teachers. They understand that the students are at the mercy of the teachers who teach them.” The scope of the initiative in reading was K through 3rd grade, with the intention of training every teacher and of providing a stipend. A state level informant commented that another purpose of the reading initiative was to reduce the number of students identified as needing special education because of reading problems: “One hope is that the reading initiative will lower the number of children coming into special education at 3rd grade because they don’t know how to read.”

Informants at the state level also described a legislative action designed to

increase the skills of general education teachers in special education: “A new law was passed just this spring that for the first time beginning in the 2002-03 school year, districts are required to provide annual training in special education and target it specifically to general education teachers.” When we visited the districts in 2002, comments indicated considerable support for this initiative. The following quotation was one of several indicating a belief that regular education teachers needed a better understanding of the impact of a disability on student learning:

Last legislative season they passed a bill that general education teachers would receive training in special education related issues. I think they’ll be thankful for it, because many times they don’t understand the and so they don’t understand why a student isn’t doing something or why they do so well here and not so well here.

Alignment of State and Federal Policy.

During a federal review of the Higher Education Act (HEA), concern about the quality of teacher education emerged. As a result, Congress created a new teacher quality section in HEA known as Title II, which established grant programs for partnerships between K-12 schools and institutions of higher education, and for states to improve teacher quality. It also established new accountability requirements for states and teacher preparation institutions. Congress mandated through Title II that any institutions preparing teachers that received funds through HEA, and any states that received HEA monies, submit annual reports on their efforts to improve teaching quality. These provisions gather information on teacher preparation institutions and rank them within states. Strong sanctions are associated with Title II for institutions that do not submit

reports or provide inaccurate information. States must compile all data submitted by colleges and universities and present information on licensure and certification (Earley, 2001). During our state-level interviews, SBEC was aligning the state system, ASEP, with these new federal Title II requirements.

The alignment of the ASEP with Title II foreshadows the situation that subsequently developed when Texas began to align its existing accountability system with the requirements of NCLB. Comments from several participants indicate that the state did not wish to adopt the federal Title II requirements, preferring to maintain its own system. For example, one participant said:

In Texas we have own accountability system, in fact we strongly requested not to be forced to use Title II requirements, but the Secretary of Education couldn't waive it for us. By law we have to use Title II requirements so we made changes to the accountability system to complement Title II.

In this section we have discussed the state's efforts to reform the teaching profession, which were integral to its overall efforts to improve the public education system. Like K-12 reform efforts, the approach adopted rested heavily on standards-based reform and performance-based accountability. In developing new state-determined teacher standards, aligning assessments with those standards, holding all programs accountable, and instituting sanctions, the state established its control of teacher preparation programs and altered the balance of power between the state and teacher preparation programs, especially in institutions of higher education. However, as we have also seen in this section, the federal government's influence over the public education system also increased, creating areas of misalignment between the existing Texas

accountability systems for higher education and for K-12 education. In the latter, much of the tension revolved around students receiving special education services.

Making Accountability Work for Students with Disabilities

The logic behind policy initiatives such as those adopted by Texas, and later by NCLB, rests heavily on holding high expectations for all students, providing access to a challenging standards-based curriculum for all students, making timely interventions and supports based on research-based practices available for to all students, and establishing punitive consequences for schools that do not make the required progress. In the following section we present data on the extent to which these tenets were followed for students with disabilities.

High expectations. One of the main premises of performance-based accountability is the requirement that schools hold high expectations for all students. Informants at the state level commented that, in general, teacher expectations for students with disabilities were too low, but that it was difficult to change attitudes: “You know when the legislature asked me what causes poor performance for students with disabilities, I said it’s a lot of things, especially low expectations of general education. How do you write a policy for teacher bias?”

However, most of the teachers and principals we talked with emphasized that high expectations for students with disabilities were a part of *their* school culture. As one principal further explained, giving a child a label did not excuse the school staff from trying its best and that all the staff shared this belief:

One of the things that I believe philosophically and I think that the staff here believes is it that we are accountable for all children. That every child has to have

the same level and quality of education, and giving them a label doesn't give us permission to do any less than our best. I feel very strongly that my teachers believe that with all their heart. I think it's proved by the fact that we have very few children who take the alternative state-developed test.

The following quotations are also illustrative of the nature of the comments we heard at the school level. In one school, all three staff members interviewed emphasized high expectations. The principal stated: "We've always had very high expectations for our special education students;" and a special education teacher echoed: "My students, I don't want them to ever think that they can slack off and that the expectations are going to be any lower." Finally, a regular education teacher said "We really, really want to challenge them."

On the other hand, several teachers acknowledged that when students with disabilities were not part of the accountability system, expectations were lower:

In the first three or four years that I taught these children, we were not held accountable because they were exempt from everything. So, there was that slacking off, they didn't have to do what all these other kids were doing. And then all that changed.

Access to challenging standards-based curriculum for students with disabilities.

When we visited the state in November of 2001, informants discussed the recently introduced TEKS curriculum, reporting that it was much more rigorous than the Essential Elements. The TEKS lays out in detail the knowledge and skills Texas students are expected to have and public schools are expected to teach. However, the responsibility for delivering the curriculum rests with individual schools and teachers, and there has been some concern that students in special education do not have the opportunity to learn

the general curriculum. In this section, we report our findings from the district level interviews and the school level interviews on how access to the curriculum for students with disabilities, including those placed in separate settings, was provided.

Our informants reported that regular and special education teachers were expected to know and to teach the TEKS, “We tell all the teachers if you teach the TEKS you don’t have to worry about the TAAS or any other test. Teach the TEKS and the rest will come.” A representative from our other district told us virtually the same thing: “In the core areas, math, science, social studies, and English language arts, we are all mandated to teach exactly what the state curriculum is.” However, another representative from the same district confirmed that though everybody knew and taught the TEKS, special education teachers modified the TEKS to the instructional level of the child:

The special education teachers are very familiar with the TEKS. The TEKS is universal in Texas everybody knows about them and follows them. When they write their IEPs, teachers look at those TEKS and modify them depending on the instruction level of the students.

However, one of the potential consequences of this practice is that some students with disabilities receive a watered-down version of the TEKS and are thus denied access to a challenging curriculum.

There was considerable evidence that special education teachers were using the TEKS to develop academic outcomes-based IEPs for students with disabilities, and that this practice provided increased access to the general education curriculum. For example district level participants from both district sites emphasized that IEPs were part of providing access to the curriculum, as teachers were able to link individual goals to a curriculum--first the Essential Elements and later the TEKS: “The biggest impact on the

quality of IEPs in Texas was the Essential Elements, and now the TEKS. Teachers have something to grip onto and many times there's a string that goes through all grades.”

Another respondent told us that IEP goals were more measurable and achievable than ever before. In the past, goals were often broad and unfocused:

We are seeing a big improvement in our IEPs. They're becoming more measurable, they are becoming more specific; goals and objectives are getting tighter and they are more achievable within a year. Some of them, you looked at it and it says the student will improve reading. Well, you could drive a truck through that one and it would follow you through the rest of your life.

The impetus to improve IEPs in this district was the IDEA 97 requirement that IEPs include annual measurable goals. According to this participant, the district had recently given intensive training to special educators to help them write tighter goals and to link the goals to the SDAA results:

The IDEA requirements say that goals need to be more focused and measurable, and achievable within a year, so we've been working our campuses towards that and this past year-and-a-half we've done a real organized concerted effort.

Despite the fact that all teachers were supposed know the TEKS, both districts we spoke with admitted that delivering content area knowledge to students with disabilities could be problematic because special education teachers did not know the content area as well as did regular education teachers. An additional problem was that regular education teachers did not always have the knowledge and skills in remediation and classroom management to successfully deliver the content to students with disabilities in the regular classroom. As one participant pointed out: “There had to be more of a partnership because the special education teachers had knowledge and understanding that the regular

education teachers didn't have, and the regular teachers had content that the special educators didn't."

In part to try and solve this dilemma, one of our districts adopted the co-teach model, which is an in-class support model designed to keep students with mild disabilities in the general classroom yet still provide the necessary instructional and behavioral supports. When we visited the schools in October 2003, the principals and teachers we spoke with supported the model, but pointed out that careful implementation of the model and planning within the co-teach pairs was essential. The following quotations are typical of many we received and reflect the views of the teachers and principals in this district. One principal told us:

The honest answer is that it depends on who's doing the co-teaching. If you have a teacher with experience that has done the co-teaching before and the special education teacher comes in it is one of the most incredible things I have ever seen, because both teachers are teaching all the kids.

Another principal emphasized that with careful planning of the co-teach situation, they were able to keep most students with disabilities in the classroom:

We find with expertise of the special education teacher as well as the expertise of the teachers trained in that specific curriculum, we have a really good marriage when it comes to working with students and it has been very successful with those children as a result. It truly is mostly co-teach and is supported in a regular classroom with the special education teachers blending in with the rest of the staff and providing support in that way.

We also spoke with a special education co-teacher from the school. This informant told us that she had been with one co-teacher for three years and this year was with a brand new partner at a different grade level:

I co-taught with one teacher for three years and it was great. This year I am teaching with a brand new teacher to this school and I moved up to 5th grade. So the curriculum is new for me also. I haven't worked with her before, so I was kind of worried about how it was going to work out. I didn't know if she'd co-taught before. But what we do, it is just great. It works out great.

A regular education teacher commented that all the students in her class benefited from the co-teach model. This teacher also stressed that having a good relationship between the co-teachers was important.

Not only, does it benefit the "special ed" kids. But it helps the regular education kids as well because it's not like the special ed kids are all in one group, they're all intertwined and it's great. I have nothing but praise to say about co-teaching. But I've been fortunate because the co-teachers I have worked with, we get along well. Now, it could be if you don't really care for your co-teacher I could see where that would be a conflict.

One of the by products of the co-teach approach was that it provided special education teachers with exposure to the full curriculum. In addition it provided special education teachers with a realistic picture of where students in resource were compared to their peers in the general education environment. To illustrate, a special education teacher reported

This is the first time I have been able to be out there with the general education kids. I am exposed to the full 4th grade curriculum. I get to see all different levels of children and how different kids perform. You know, it really opened up my

eyes to see where these resource kids needed to be and how hard we needed to push for them to get there.

According to several participants, the co-teach model was adopted because students with disabilities were included in the accountability index: “When the focus is on all kids and everybody is accountable for them, then this gets students with disabilities into the classroom where the general education teachers can teach them.” However, a different informant explained that the district needed to get more children with disabilities into the regular classroom because they were on the Office of Special Education Program’s list of districts with least restrictive environment (LRE) problems:

We were on OSEP’s LRE list for about three years, and it was a list we didn’t want to be on. We were very much supported by our superintendent and Board in getting off it. We’ve been refining and revising the co-teach model and it is really working.

However, informants from this district still had concerns about access to the curriculum, particularly for students in self-contained settings. This district level participant explained that the district wanted students in self-contained settings to have access to the TEKS, and encouraged collaboration and the sharing of lesson plans between regular and special education staff:

Now if you’re talking about students with emotional disturbances, we encourage the teachers of the self-contained classes to get lesson plans and materials from the general education teacher. We want them to be learning the TEKS, so those teachers pick a content area and they go to the content area staff development.

The same participant went on to explain that if access to the general curriculum was not provided to these students they fell further and further behind and may be unable to participate in higher-level courses in high school:

We find it's hard to move the students out if we don't look at the TEKS because then they become what you call lifers. They fall further and further behind in the curriculum and by the time they reach high school you could never get them to Algebra I.

Participants from our other study district described a more traditional model with pull-out support either by content-mastery teachers or by resource teachers. Students with content-mastery services were generally around or just below grade level and remained in the regular class for teacher-directed instruction, but they might receive additional help in the content-mastery center in the subject specified by the ARD committee. The district also had special education "helping teachers" who assisted teachers in the general education classroom working with at-risk students. These "helping teachers" were based at the district offices and visited individual campuses with materials and teaching strategies for both regular and special education teachers.

According to the principals and staff we spoke with in this school district, special education teachers were typically assigned to particular grade levels and were given the same planning time as the regular education teachers in that grade level. As the following two quotations from school principals indicate, this approach created opportunities for special education teachers to be connected to the general education environment:

I try to make it so that my content-mastery teachers are able to specialize because I know it's just really hard. They basically will take the same conference period as their regular education grade. So they always know what is being taught and can sit in on the team meetings and so they can get lesson plans and so forth.

A second principal explained:

The special education teachers who work with the kids on that grade level have the same planning time and communicate and actually plan with the teachers whose kids they are getting out of the classroom. There's a lot of two-way communication between the special education teacher and the regular classroom teacher.

Another principal reported that the practice of grade level specialization had encouraged special education teachers and regular education teachers to work together to such an extent that a quasi "co-teach" situation had developed:

When there's "down time", those teachers too have been in the classrooms walking through and helping. So by assigning special educators to grade levels they're able to work as teams and then those regular teachers become more comfortable with the skills of that special ed teacher, who becomes part of the 3rd grade team whereas before she was the special ed teacher.

We did not talk with a content-mastery teacher in this school, but a resource teacher confirmed what the principal had told us. This informant explained that the content-mastery teacher would come into resource and describe what the regular education teacher was doing so that the resource teacher could work on the same areas:

Now we do have our content mastery teacher and she is able to go in and assist the teacher. That's really good because a lot of times she can come back and say, well, I noticed 3rd grade is doing regrouping and it kind of gives me an idea too of how to keep that child, if I possibly can, at least on some of the things that they are doing in the classroom.

Timely interventions and supports based on research-based practices. Access to remedial support is a necessary component of standards-based reform, and educators

from both districts reported that they provided numerous interventions and supports for all students who were struggling. One risk in high-stakes accountability systems that do not have sufficient supports in general education is that referral rates to special education soar. According to the school personnel with whom we spoke, referral rates had not increased in their own schools. Moreover, several educators stated that special education referral rates decreased because students who were struggling to meet standards received interventions in regular education. The following quotation from a special education teacher is illustrative of several comments we received:

For me the pre-referral strategies have helped enormously. We have after-school tutorials, some during-the-day tutorials, reading enrichment, and math tutorials. We mentor the kids before TAKS. We will have a list and anyone who is kind of on-the-iffy side with their scores, teachers will come down and sign their names up. They pull them, they stop by. They chat with them. Give them some strategies, kind of, a pat on the back.

The following quotations from two school principals are included to illustrate the comprehensiveness of the pre-referral services provided in both districts. The first quotation describes a two-level support system: (a) At Risk Meetings and (b) Targeted Student Assistance (TAT) that had been utilized before a referral to special education was considered:

Once every 6 weeks we sit down with teachers and do what's called an At-Risk meeting. If a child has been brought to the at-risk meeting several times and the teacher is very concerned, they have the option to also bring them Targeted Student Assistance, which is a little more in-depth. We don't just automatically jump to the conclusion that a child needs a special program. We look at all the data that we can get on that child and we form a committee. The assistant principal and myself talk about that child and try to build a picture of that whole

child and what kinds of things do we need to look at for them. If this doesn't work then we can refer and have a lot of information already collected.

A special education teacher from this school emphasized that the teachers wanted to try multiple options before referring a student to special education:

There is a push to try everything we can before we even think about referring. Other teachers say 'Have you tried this? Have you tried that?' And they kind of have to go back and try everything possible. I think that helps, too, because these students can be successful with just a few classroom modifications, the after-school tutoring and the reading enrichment.

In our other district, the model used by one of our study schools had been implemented district-wide and consisted of discussions with the principal, the creation of a school-based team, documented general education interventions, and the collection of effectiveness data before a referral was made to special education. This principal described the process to us:

Normally, if there is a problem, most teachers will come and talk to me a little about the problem and what they have tried. Then we decide whether or not at that point we need to have student support team (SST). The SST is an actual committee of people that sit down and look at the child, at his folder, at all the test scores, at the performance in the classroom, and they look to see whether this would be somebody we would want to refer for special ed services or any other type of program that we would want to offer that child. This has now been adopted district-wide. We go through this because we don't want to just refer any child that has been having maybe minor problems in the classroom.

Consequences for school districts and schools

District and school personnel we spoke with were generally supportive of the concept of accountability reform, whether the impetus was from the state or from the

federal government. At the time of our district level interviews, in June 2002, the dispute between the state and the U.S. Department of Education over the SDAA had not yet arisen and personnel were complacent and confident about their ability to meet federal AYP requirements, with many pointing out the similarities between the Texas system and the requirements of NCLB. The following quotations, one from each district, are illustrative of comments we heard. It was clear that at the district level participants we spoke with regarded their state accountability systems as the forerunner of NCLB and did not express at that time any concerns regarding alignment between the two systems. For example, this particular district level informant commented that she liked NCLB, and felt that major parts of the legislation were modeled on Texas. Although this participant acknowledged that some low-performing districts would be punished, she believed that they deserved those consequences:

Well being here in Texas I actually like No Child Left Behind because it meshes very well with what we have been doing. Some parts could be punitive for districts who aren't performing and probably should be. I think the No Child Left Behind Act is going to be a wonderful thing for a lot of students.

A participant from our other district voiced a similar view, commenting,

You know, No Child Left Behind really hasn't had a huge effect on Texas. It's just a new name for something we were all ready doing. We all ready had all the accountability testing and doing the interventions and using all the data and things like that.

However, as time passed the implications of NCLB became clearer and the differences between the Texas accountability system and the federal accountability system became problematic, especially those regarding students with disabilities and the

high percentages of such students who participated in the SDAA at their instructional level. The SDAA was designed to meet state requirements and also met IDEA 1997 requirements; however it did not meet NCLB requirements in terms of alignment with the general education curriculum. Moreover, as an alternate assessment the SDAA was designed for a broader group of students than allowable in the final regulations. To date, the U.S. Department of Education and the state of Texas are still in negotiation and the issue is far from resolved.

At the school level, visited in October 2003, participants were in general still supportive of NCLB. The following two quotations are typical of many that we heard, with informants pointing out that federal legislation was very similar to Texas's own Student Success Initiative. A principal commented: "It's not like it was a red flag sent up. I think because of what we were already doing in Texas and because of what we were already doing in this school. Forget No Child Left Behind." Another principal pointed out

We had a state level No Child Left Behind. It was just called something different. There has probably not been as much of a major emphasis on No Child Left Behind in Texas, because we already had the Texas Student Success Initiative.

Another principal from this district told us that the accountability system in Texas had improved the quality of instruction in the classrooms by requiring principals to take a leadership role in hiring quality teachers and removing the poor ones. In the opinion of this informant, students benefited from accountability reform because it provided a more equitable opportunity to learn:

Since I've been in Texas I've watched the changes in the accountability system and I can say without a doubt that it has definitely improved the quality of instruction in the classrooms. Is it perfect? No. Can it be changed? Can it be

improved? Yes. But it has gotten principals to take a leadership role in hiring teachers who can provide a quality instruction in the classroom and it also helped principals make decisions about teachers who should not have been in the classroom. The winners in all of this have been children. Making sure that every child has the opportunity to have an equal education—accountability does that.

A small number of informants did express reservations and concerns about high-stakes accountability systems. Areas of concern were (a) comparable improvement requirements, (b) the “snapshot” nature of school effectiveness, and (c) impact on students with disabilities.

Comparable improvement requirements. Both the Texas accountability system and NCLB required disaggregation by significant subgroup, however only NCLB identified students with disabilities as a target group. As the following quotation exemplifies, some principals had concerns about the effect of disaggregating subgroup scores, likening the act to “peeling away the layers of an onion.”

But if you think of it like an onion and you start to peel back layers. There are very telling stories. Just the same as any other campus you’re going to find African-American boys do not do as well as our white population, Hispanic boys do not do as well and the economically disadvantaged do not do as well. We’re just really taking an honest look at the facts that we have here. We can celebrate our white scores all day long, but you know I tell the teachers “y’all don’t have to do anything and they’re going to pass.”

The negative impact of subgroup performance on a school’s rating was also shared by other individuals we spoke with. A principal from our other district reflected that some schools were probably very worried about disaggregating their data, because it would show where their problems were: “I can see why some schools are very worried

because when you disaggregate their data you're going to find where their problems are and yes, they should be worried." There were also similar concerns at the district level. This district participant commented that comparable improvement was a challenge, but that the district was striving to meet it. Not surprisingly, the performance gap between White, Hispanic, and African American students was highlighted as a concern:

We certainly see NCLB's comparable improvement requirement as a challenge, but we strive to meet that goal. The larger sub groups that count—Hispanics and Blacks. They are both concerns as they are going to be lower than the Anglos, but we are closing the gap—not just a little bit— we made great strides. That's been statewide and our district has certainly made that a real priority.

"Snapshot" performance based accountability. The following quotation represents the concerns of a small number of informants who questioned the logic behind current accountability reform initiatives that relied on a "snapshot" to determine school effectiveness, when factors beyond the control of the school were involved with performance. This principal pointed out that poverty remained a leading determinant of performance and described her own previous experience working in a Title 1 school. This quotation also reveals the pressure felt by principals in a state with a high-stakes accountability system:

I think if we are not exemplary, I would be run out of town. It would be horrible. You know, those are the kind of things that can keep you up at night worrying about how you are going to do. I guess that's probably the toughest thing about accountability, the way it is now, it is really a snapshot of one day. I came from a school that in my last year there was recognized. We celebrated like we were the number one school on the planet because we had never been anything but acceptable. It wasn't that we didn't have good teachers and a good administrative team and people that were willing to work, there were so many other factors that

led into what the scores come out to be. I cannot say enough about economics being a huge player in that.

Impact on students with disabilities. When addressing NCLB specifically relating to students in special education several principals, from both districts, expressed concerns and frustration over the Department of Education's decision that year not to allow Texas to count students with disabilities who participated in an off grade level SDAA as participants for AYP purposes. One principal in particular responded strongly to the decision not to count the SDAA, commenting that this was unfair to students with disabilities and was sending the wrong message to them:

I just think it's a slam to special education kids. I think it says if you can't do the regular test, you don't count. I hope they'll decide to accept the SDAA next year. It's like everything else, a few abuse it and everyone else is penalized. So if there are some districts or schools that are abusing it, then address it with them. But to say that they didn't participate and those little kids have worked their fannies off and they have taken every benchmark and they have tried their hardest and to say they didn't participate, it's not right.

A principal in our other district commented that she did not know whether or not the SDAA would count for AYP the following year either. She was aware that the state was in negotiation with the U.S. Department of Education: "Our state is saying wait a minute, we're going to fight for this one because we've developed this test for IDEA and state law. But we don't know how it's going." A second principal pointed out that the situation could be reduced to a numbers-game and that it would be better for AYP to make all students take the TAKS even if they failed:

The crazy thing is this is a numbers game. In certain respects you are going to be better off having a kiddo take the TAKS and fail it because our performance is

still going to be fine and we will get our participation too. You know, is that what they really want? No.

Other informants expressed additional concerns about the impact of accountability reform on students with disabilities. This district level participant pointed out that as academic performance became the sole focus there were some students whose needs would be ignored because the attention of the community, the state, the parents, and the newspapers was on academic performance:

The one negative thing I see on high-stakes testing is we go more and more in the academic direction and those kids that actually don't fit into that don't get as much attention. I would like to see more vocational opportunities and community opportunities to do work-related skills. I have seen all districts pull back from vocational skills more and more because that's not where the focus is, I mean that's not where the scores, the parents, the newspapers, the accreditation, and the extra monies are concentrated.

Several principals also expressed concerns that focusing too much on academic performance could isolate struggling students as performance demands increased. Although this informant was cautiously optimistic that teachers would be able to improve the performance of struggling students, she was concerned that those students would be separated from the higher achieving ones:

The only thing that scares me when you focus more on upping standards is that some students will struggle—I'm thinking about those average and lower kids that struggle. It just means they're going to struggle more and be separated more and that scares me a little bit.

A special education teacher from this district also expressed concerns about the impact that a poor test-score would have on the child.

I see our children moving in the right direction and I think we have a long way to go but I still don't feel an overwhelming sense of burden from No Child Left Behind. Not as a teacher and not on what I do in the classroom. I do have concerns about the child's life. It's beautiful in theory but in practice I do have concerns about test scores and how a test score will be used and how that information will help or hurt a child. A poor test score in the 5th grade and what it will do to that child. I feel in my heart that a test score is a snapshot and you know I wouldn't want you to see a snapshot of me 15 years ago. I stand ready to be accountable, but I also think that there's another side of the coin and I do think that if we push full steam ahead, looking at our test scores and accountability, that's fine, but if we don't look at the other side of that coin, we're going to really have a problem here.

In this third and final section we have presented our findings on the extent to which the central tenets of standards-based accountability reform—high expectations for all students, access to a challenging standards-based curriculum for all students, timely interventions and supports, and consequences for schools that do not make the required progress—are applied effectively for students with disabilities in our Texas study sites.

Informants stated that they held high expectations for students with disabilities in their schools and districts and teachers did not expect any less of a student in special education than they did a regular student. There was evidence, though, that including students with disabilities in the state accountability system had focused teachers more on the needs of this population. Our study districts and schools reported that this population had access to the TEKS and that mechanisms were in place to make sure that special education teachers know what was being taught in the regular classroom. One district had adopted a co-teach model that had the effects of keeping student with disabilities in the classroom, increasing the knowledge and skills of regular and special education teachers,

and increasing collaboration. However, there was also evidence that only students who were on or just below grade level had full access to the curriculum. For students who were two or more grade levels behind, the teacher modified the TEKS. Providing access to the general curriculum for students in more restrictive settings remained a problem.

Schools in both districts reported that they had effective pre-referral services and interventions in place that they believed had prevented an increase in special education referrals. The purpose of these systems was to provide help to struggling students as soon as a problem occurred. This help included tutoring services, mentors, and after-school programs. In both school districts, the school principal was an integral part of the pre-referral system and monitored student progress on a regular basis.

When we visited the districts in June 2002, the majority of informants were very supportive of both their state's accountability system and the federal NCLB accountability system. Many believed that the federal system was very similar to their own state's and did not foresee any problems meeting NCLB targets. However a small number of individuals at the district level did express concerns that an overemphasis on academics might reduce vocational opportunities for some students with disabilities. At the school level, informants were still mostly supportive of accountability reform, but several did raise concerns about the comparable improvement requirements and the impact that school demographics could have on how a school performed on assessments.

V. TEXAS CASE STUDY DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In the previous section, we presented qualitative data, collected over a four-year period—2001-04—from three levels of the public education system on the impact of accountability reform on students with disabilities in Texas. State level interviews took

place in November of 2001, district interviews took place in June of 2002, and school interviews took place in October of 2003. The sequential nature of data collection enabled us to study the impact of state accountability reform on students with disabilities and to follow the concerns identified by state level policymakers through to the districts and to the schools. However, collecting data in this way meant that we were unable to obtain the views of state-level personnel on the impact of NCLB, signed into law after the completion of the state level interviews, or to study the further development and refinement of federal accountability policy at this level.

EPRRI staff interviewed a total of 48 individuals: 12 individuals at the state level, 15 individuals at the district level, and 21 at the campus level. Three broad themes emerged from the data: (a) including students with disabilities in the state accountability system, (b) improving the quality and increasing the quantity of educators, and (c) making accountability work for students with disabilities.

One key finding from this study is that for over 15 years the assumptions underlying standards-based reform that are at the heart of the Texas accountability system, namely measuring results and holding students and school systems accountable, did not hold in practice for students with disabilities. After 1995 and under pressure from disability advocacy organizations, the need for greater inclusion of this population in the accountability system became a prominent issue in the Texas legislature , leading to a number of significant policy changes by the legislature and corresponding changes within TEA and the school systems. The decision to include the scores of students in special education in the accountability rating system created tensions between major stakeholder groups at the state level and required greater collaboration between special education

personnel and regular education personnel.

Our second finding is that in the high-stakes arena of the Texas accountability system, schools and educators are under intense pressure to perform, and some schools acted to protect their rating and evade meaningful accountability for students with disabilities. For example, when the state legislature decided to include the scores of students with disabilities in school ratings a year before the state alternate assessment was ready for use, states feared that their accountability ratings would plummet. There is strong evidence that schools and local districts took advantage of the flexibility granted to individual ARD committees to exempt large numbers of students in special education from the assessments that year. Once the alternate assessment became available, exemptions returned to their previous levels as significant numbers of students with disabilities were assessed only on the SDAA.

In another potential loophole, even before the SDAA was implemented, our state informants expressed concern that too many students in special education would be assessed on the SDAA and that performance levels would be set too low. At the district and school levels, informants reported numerous examples of other school systems exploiting the system by assessing student on the SDAA when they should have taken the regular assessment or setting performance levels too low. This caused the researchers to question whether these practices might be quite widespread and include the districts and schools in which we conducted our interviews.

Our third finding is that Texas special education policy differs significantly from regular education policy. Control of educational decision-making remains vested in local ARD committees. Rather than ensuring students receive full access to the general

education curriculum, ARD committees modify the TEKS for students receiving special education services to match each student's instructional level. In addition, although the SDAA is a standardized assessment, it is administered in a non-standardized way as local ARD committees determine on an individual basis what level of achievement constitutes proficiency for accountability purposes. Finally, local ARDs are able to excuse students in special education from the graduation and grade retention requirements that apply to other students.

The result is that a sizeable number of students with disabilities, not merely those with significant cognitive disabilities, are held to different expectations and standards than students without disabilities and may not have access to the same challenging curriculum as their non-disabled peers. Although, TEA provides guidelines to local ARD committees and both the state and our two districts reported that they were monitoring the SDAA/TEKS situation, the control of the educational experience for students with disabilities is vested in individual ARD committees by the Texas Education Code and not with the state, as is the case for general education students.

A fourth finding was that both state reform policies in higher education and in the K-12 public education system collided with similar efforts at the federal level. We found evidence of tension between the state and the federal government over program accountability, with the state asking to be allowed to operate their own accountability system for Title II. However, the federal government did not grant a waiver and Texas now operates both ASEP and federal Title II.

The fluidity of assessment and accountability options available for students in special education clearly violates the accountability logic of NCLB, a fact that has

contributed to the tension between the state and the U.S. Department of Education. Evidence from the schools and from our continued analysis of policy documents suggests that considerable tension remains between the state and the U.S. Department of Education over the number of students with disabilities who participate in the SDAA, which is a higher number than that envisaged by the federal government.

This tension was clearly apparent at the school level. Although educators and principals we spoke with remained fully supportive of the state system, they were less enthusiastic about NCLB and its accountability requirements for students with disabilities. When we visited the schools in October of 2003, they were just becoming aware that although NCLB was initially thought to be similar to the Texas system, it did not provide the same flexibility for students in special education as the state system did. For example, schools did not know if students who participated on the SDAA could count as participants for AYP purposes. In addition, the number of proficient scores on the SDAA was likely to far exceed the cap proposed by the federal government, with excess proficient scores counting as below basic for AYP purposes. Thus, potentially large numbers of schools who met Texas state requirements would fail to meet AYP requirements.

Our fifth finding is that Texas policymakers recognized the need to improve the knowledge and skills of teachers and this was integral to the overall success of Texas Student Success Initiative. We found that, like K-12 reform efforts, the approach adopted rested heavily on central control of standards-based reform and performance-based accountability. SBEC simplified the teacher certification structure and thereby increased the requirements for content area knowledge for upper elementary grade teachers by

combining certification grade 4 through grade 8. SBEC also developed new teacher standards that were focused on the TEKS, aligned teacher certification assessments with those standards, required teacher preparation programs to meet state determined passing rates, and instituted sanctions for teacher preparation programs that did not meet required passing rates—including the loss of state accreditation. By establishing control of teacher preparation programs, the state altered the balance of power between itself and teacher preparation programs, especially in institutions of higher education.

The state increased its control over professional development by providing literacy training for all teachers grades K through 3 and requiring districts to provide special education training to regular education teachers. The state's efforts to improve the content knowledge and pedagogical skills of educators described above had the result, whether intentional or not, of blurring the distinction between special educators and regular educators. This blurring of the lines met with district and campus approval, as our informants confirmed that they needed special education teachers with stronger content area knowledge and regular education teachers with improved pedagogical skills. Actions at the campus and district level, such as adoption of the co-teach model, joint planning time, and greater collaboration between opportunities for regular and special educators, also contributed to this blurring of identities.

A sixth finding relates to the continued debate over the quality of teachers who obtained their certification through alternative route programs. SBEC implemented ASEP to (a) ensure that all beginning teachers, regardless of their method of certification, had the knowledge and skills needed to teach in Texas public schools and (b) hold teacher preparation programs accountable for the quality of their graduates. There is evidence

from districts and schools that teachers who obtain their credentials through an alternative program do not get sufficient exposure to the field through their student teaching experience, as do graduates of traditional programs. Interestingly, we found that principals, although concerned about the content knowledge and instructional skills that prospective employees presented with, were looking for two other characteristics: (a) teachers who understood how schools worked and (b) teachers who would fit in with the existing school staff. At the school level, we found that the majority of principals we spoke with believed that traditional programs provided prospective teachers with a better understanding of the ways schools worked.

In conclusion, the impact of accountability policy on special education is conditioned by a series of tensions that are exacerbated by the fluidity and flux in federal education policy and local discretion allowed by the state for students in special education. First, there is a tension between Texas education policy for students in special education on the one hand and the appearance of a commitment to accountability on the other. When students in special education are considered, the logic and application of the policy makers' theory is problematic. The theory assumes that publicizing a school's achievement outcomes will make the schools work harder, and the students will work harder when promotion and graduation are at risk. The schools will indeed improve their instruction to improve their scores, but there are many conditions that interfere with the workings of this model, conditions which the model ignores. Several principals pointed out that the imposed numerical systems cannot possibly yield credible outcomes, yet they are used to enforce policy. Linn (2003) showed the substantial variations among labels received by the same school in different years, the poor correlations between labels

attached by state vs. federal criteria, and the huge standard error of measurements of AYP.

The potential for presenting an appearance of a commitment to accountability rather than real accountability or effectiveness exists because schools can change the appearance of effectiveness and the satisfaction of accountability requirements by a variety of means, especially when a numerical standard is used to judge effectiveness. The exclusion of students with disabilities from the testing population, and over-use or inappropriate use of the alternate assessment are examples of this. There is also clear evidence that schools restructure their instruction to target test scores, aiming, for example, intense repetitive instruction toward children known to be at the cusp between meeting and not meeting a numerical cutoff score. It is debatable whether such targeting pays off in terms of long-term, generalized learning on anything outside the test content.

Second, there is a tension between doing good for individual children and doing good for the school and district. Many comments have to do with putting students with disabilities into test situations that are obviously inappropriate for them. Yet if they are excluded from the statistics on school performance, the school fails to satisfy state requirements. In addition, educators discussed the wide-ranging remedial instruction for students who might otherwise be referred to special education, yet to the extent that special education students may be exempt from testing or their test-taking may receive accommodation, then the school's interests are served by referral rather than remediation. Educators expressed, sometimes wistfully, the need to orient schools to meet the needs of each child, yet if they put them into the testing situation and their scores are mixed with those of the rest of the students, then their schools' scores will surely go down. As one

participant said, schools decrease expectations for students with disabilities if they are excluded from regular testing.

This tension exists because most educators experience ambivalence and have multiple intentions, and it is not possible to clearly characterize individuals. One individual might say that her school needs to serve all students in a responsible way, but also that she owes allegiance to her district and it needs to look good in order to avoid punishments associated with high-stakes accountability. If she happens to be a principal, she has no tenure and perhaps her position is contingent on acquiring or retaining a positive label.

Finally, there are tensions of identity and allegiance among educators to the enterprise of schooling in general vs. the separate group of special educators, who have their own specialized knowledge and traditions. If all teachers can learn how to effectively teach children with disabilities, then there is no body of expert knowledge that distinguishes special educators.

In this study, we have presented our findings on the impact of accountability reform collected at three different time periods from three levels of Texas public education system: the state, the district, and the campus. The policy context changed dramatically during the period of study, from one dominated by the state to one initiated by the federal government. Although the state of Texas was ahead of the federal government in putting an accountability system in place, NCLB has driven change for students with disabilities who were largely excluded from the state system until recently. Whether or not students in special education are fully included in the Texas accountability system is open to debate, given the validity and reliability issues

associated with the extent of local variation in assessment options and opportunities to access the curriculum. Another issue that remains open is how Texas and the U.S. Department of Education will resolve their differences over the SDAA.

References

- Anderson, G. L. (2001). Promoting educational equity in a period of growing social inequity: The silent contradictions of Texas reform discourse. *Education and Urban Society, 33*(3), 320-332
- Bogdan, R., & Biklen, S. (1992). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Cohen, M. (2002, February). *Implementing Title I standards, assessments, and accountability: Lessons from the past, challenges for the future*. Paper presented at the conference sponsored by the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, Washington, DC.
- Early, P. M. (2001). *Title II requirements for schools, colleges, and departments of education*. *ERIC Digest*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED460124).
- Eisenhardt, K. M. (2002). Building theories from case study research. In A. M. Huberman & M. B. Miles (Eds.), *The qualitative researcher's companion* (pp. 5-36). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Eisenhardt, K. M., & Bourgeois, L. J. (1988). Politics of strategic decision-making in high velocity environments: Towards a mid-range theory. *Academy of Management Journal, 31*, 737-770.
- Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies of qualitative research*. London: Wiedenfeld & Nicholson.
- Jerald, C.D. (2001) *Real results, remaining challenges: The story of Texas education reform*. The Education Trust (ERIC Document Reproduction Services No. ED 459191)

- Linn, R.L. (2003). Performance standards: Utility for different uses of assessments. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 11(3).
- Linton, T.H. (2000). *High stakes testing in Texas: An analysis of the impact of including special education students in the Texas Academic Excellence Indicator System*. Paper presented at the Texas Assessment Conference.
- Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (1999). *Designing qualitative research* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- McNeil, L.M. (2000). Creating new inequalities: Contradictions of reform. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 81(10), 728-34.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Pettigrew, A. (1988). *Longitudinal field research on change: Theory and practice*. Paper presented at the National Science Foundation Conference on Longitudinal Research Methods in Organizations.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Texas Education Agency (1997). *Expanding the scope of the Texas public school accountability system* (Policy Research Report 9) Available at <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/research/pdfs/prr9.pdf>. Austin, TX: Author.
- Van Maanen, J. (1988). *Tales of the field: On writing ethnography*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Valencia, R., Valenzuela, A., Sloan, K. & Foley, D. E. (2001). Let's treat the cause, not the symptoms: Equity and accountability in Texas revisited. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 83(4), 318-26.

Yin, R. K. (1989). *Case study research: Design and methods*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Table 1.

Selected State and School District Demographic Data: 2000-2001 school year.

State/School District		% Students		Ethnic Group				
		Receiving Special Education Services	% Students Receiving Bilingual/ESL Services	% African American	% Hispanic	% White	% Other	
District	Enrollment	% FARMs	Services	Services	American	% Hispanic	% White	% Other
Texas	4,021,641	49.3	12.0	13.0	14.0	41.0	42.0	3.0
Cypress-Fairbanks	63,497	20.0	11.0	10.0	10.0	23.0	59.0	8.0
Garland	50,312	33.0	13.0	13.0	17.0	29.0	47.0	7.0

2000-2001 Public School Enrolment

Table 2.

Selected State and School District Staff and Financial Statistics: 2000-2001 school year.

State/School District	Number of Students/Teacher	Total Expenditure per pupil for general education
Texas	14.7	5,923
Cypress-Fairbanks	15.5	5,674
Garland	16.3	5,006