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A Step Forward: A Study of The Practical Application of the No Child Left Behind Act

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Abstract

This thesis analyzes teachers' perceptions of the impact NCLB has on classrooms every day. It begins with a brief literature review analyzing and synthesizing editorial articles that discuss perceptions of the successes and shortcomings of NCLB. It then describes and discusses a survey study conducted amongst teachers in Southern Virginia. Thirty teachers from three counties were surveyed, and, as expected, when given space to respond freely, they responded with negative comments toward NCLB. However, when asked to rank the impact of the No Child Left Behind Act on student success and teacher effectiveness the surveyed teachers expressed a neutral impact. These mixed results indicate a need for further studies.

A Step Forward: A Study of the Practical Application of the No Child Left Behind Act

One of the most important pieces of legislation for teachers to understand and implement in classrooms in the United States today is the No Child Left Behind Act, commonly abbreviated as NCLB (2001). This act requires states and districts to create highly structured standards of learning in math and reading, to conduct standardized testing to measure students' mastery of the required curriculum, to achieve adequate yearly progress (AYP) in all student sub-groups, and to ensure that a minimum of 70 percent of all students pass the standardized tests each year. The act was passed in an effort to ensure that all students receive a valuable education, rich in math and language arts. Its authors also sought to ensure that every child, regardless of background, economic status, gender, race, or exceptionalities, would receive the same level of education and have the opportunity to attend the same quality schools.

This thesis focuses on the implementation of the aforementioned No Child Left Behind Act. It begins with a brief discussion of the literature available on teachers' perceptions of NCLB and covers agreements and disagreements on the subject from various sources. The literature review then supports the researcher's hypothesis regarding a survey of Southern Virginia teachers' perceptions of NCLB in their classrooms. The thesis then discusses the subjects, the survey, and the methods of data collection and ends with a discussion of the results, limitations, and suggestions for improvements and future research.

Review of the Literature

This portion of the thesis will be used to discuss the foundations for the study and will review the literature already available on perceived impact. Unfortunately, the available literature discussing perceived impressions of NCLB tends to be overwhelmingly negative. There are positive articles available, and several are referenced below, but positive responses are much rarer than negative ones and therefore much of this literature review will be spent addressing perceived inadequacies in NCLB and some time will be spent in praise of perceived success.

NCLB was designed so that no child would be left behind in any classroom, but according to the opinions expressed in the literature, the act actually hinders some students. Most notably, gifted students are neglected by NCLB. The act defines gifted students as students for whom the schools cannot “ordinarily provide” appropriate services and activities. Gessner (2008), in his article “Gifted Express”, asks why the schools cannot provide for the gifted students. In answer to his own question, he argues that, because minimum proficiency standards are the goal of NCLB, the focus is only on the children who are performing poorly. He concedes that it is good to give proper attention and encouragement to underachieving students but he believes that NCLB provides no support for the students who can achieve much more than the standards require (Gessner, 2008).

Gessner (2008) argues that the solution to this problem is tracking, an educational system, which has lost general appeal in recent years. In a tracking system, classes are divided based on the ability levels of students. He argues that gifted students can only

achieve their fullest potentials when the classmates that surround them are peers of similar intellectual ability. Since tracking has come to be regarded as an outdated method, teachers have compensated by using methods such as differentiation (the practice of individualizing instruction based on varied ability levels within the same class) and cooperative learning (a teaching method using group-learning and peer-tutoring). According to research by Carol Mills of Johns Hopkins University these techniques, cooperative learning in particular, are unsuccessful with gifted students. To Gessner, when thinking about the No Child Left Behind Act, “the image that comes to mind is of a train pulling out of the station and a gruff conductor grabbing any wandering children on the platform and stuffing them onboard. They were not left behind, but were they on the right train?” (Gessner, 2008, p. 28).

One may be tempted to think that Gessner is alone in his assessment of NCLB’s treatment of gifted students. One may even be tempted to say that the gifted students can do well enough without specific focus from NCLB, but the *American School Board Journal* stated in February of 2008 that 20% of high school dropouts tested in the gifted range. The journal stated that programs for gifted education are losing significant amounts of funding because school boards are taking their focus away from promoting enrichment and refocusing their attentions on getting students with lower performance to pass the tests. Without challenging curriculum, the gifted students are left bored, which may lead to such a high percent of gifted students dropping out (*American School Board Journal*, 2008). These statistics are simply unacceptable. A school’s gifted students should be challenged and encouraged. These students could be the Albert Einsteins of

our future, but without structure, enrichment, and academic rigor, they will inevitably become bored, disinterested, and waste their vast potentials.

Lower income areas are also at a disadvantage under NCLB. These areas naturally cannot afford the training, tools, materials, and other benefits that wealthier areas can obtain easily (Smyth, 2008). In addition to their natural shortage of funds, “NCLB is seriously underfunded — with the cumulative shortfall between the amounts actually appropriated and the amounts authorized in the law exceeding \$56 billion over six years” (Packer, 2007, p. 266). These areas are most impacted by funding shortages and are most in need of the services that appropriate funding would provide.

Another group negatively affected by NCLB is the schools with high concentrations of students with limited English proficiency (LEP). “Is This What Failure Looks Like” discusses the impact of the standardized tests on the students of Napa High in California. The school is full of newly immigrated students and most speak little to no English. The teachers were quoted saying that the LEP students were tested too early. One said, “It’s like “Bienvenidos a los Estados Unidos! Now let’s take the test!” (Jehlen & Flannery, 2008, p. 26). This policy cannot benefit the student. How could a standardized test, written in English be an appropriate assessment for a student who does not speak or read English?

In addition to the effects that NCLB has on specific student groups, there are many effects on schools and students in general. Students seem to be experiencing increased levels of anxiety due to the high-risk testing associated with NCLB. School districts are forced to narrow curriculum so that the topics covered by standardized tests

are given maximum attention. According to the NEA, since the passage of NCLB, 71% of school districts have reduced the amount of time devoted to history, music, and other subjects to make more time for reading, language arts and math (Packer, 2007). Also, teachers often resort to “drill and kill” methods of instruction that focus much more on rote memorization than on comprehension and higher-order thinking (Smyth, 2008).

The assessment of Adequate Yearly Progress, better known as AYP, also provides a disservice to students and schools. AYP requires that schools demonstrate improved test scores in all student subgroups (race, gender, LEP, etc) from one year to the next. Callender argues in *Value-Added Student Assessment* that AYP should be compared to the progress of each individual student from the beginning of a year to the end, not the improvement of an entire program from year to year (Callender, 2004). Each year, programs contain different students and those students may not perform on the same level as those who came before. Focus should be placed on the individual students’ progress.

Non-traditional schools are not given appropriate assessment through NCLB. Schools like the Frank M. Tejada Academy are given failing scores by the Department of Education because their students cannot graduate in four years. The school’s focus is on students who cannot complete a traditional high school experience, and most of those students have trouble with the standardized tests. Any student who wants to attend can. They are given unlimited second chances. Many are unwed mothers who work multiple jobs in the evenings and on weekends, and others are older students that are returning to school after dropping out. These students need extra attention and extra time, but according to NCLB, the school is a failure (Jehlen & Flannery, 2008).

According to Roxanna Popescu's article *No Child Outside the Classroom*, schools across the nation are severely limiting class field trips or eliminating them all together. Principals argue that they cannot approve such a loss of classroom instructional time, and argue that every minute counts toward preparing students for the standardized testing. The real shame of students losing the opportunity to go on field trips is not the loss of a fun outing. It is because many of the experiences are ones that cannot be fully experienced in a classroom (Popescu, 2008).

Richard Simmons, the fitness guru, has become an advocate of increased physical education in schools. Simmons is quoted saying, in response to NCLB, that "It's left our children's behinds behind! And that's wrong!" (*NEA Today*, 2008, p. 15) Many schools have shortened or eliminated physical education and recess in favor of more classroom instruction in math and reading. Simmons is countering that trend by pushing for 150 minutes of physical education per week in elementary schools and 225 minutes per week for high schools (*NEA Today*, 2008). He wants NCLB to encompass more than just mental exercise, because physical education is just as important as intellectual education.

In addition to physical education, some educators believe that the No Child Left Behind Act also neglects students' moral and social educations. Barrier-Ferrieira (2008) argues in his article "Producing Commodities or Educating Children" that part of education should be social in nature, "focusing on the shared human experience" and interacting with one another. He provides an example from his own teaching career in which the demands for traditional classroom instruction conflicted with an opportunity for social, moral, and emotional growth. In the article, he concedes that there is a very

strong necessity to spend time in the classroom, but he also argued that the social development that the students received, which would never be measured on a standardized test, was of equal or greater value to the students' long term education than the fifteen minutes of lecture that could have been in its place.

Despite what it may seem, not all articles about NCLB are negative. In *Attainable Goals? The Spirit and Letter of the No Child Left Behind Act on Parental Involvement* Epstein applauds NCLB for containing portions on parental involvement in their children's educations. She does argue that the act was unclear in several areas, such as parent-teacher compacts, but she states that with well-structured high-quality programs NCLB's requirements of parental involvement can be achieved effectively. She provides several examples such as "Second Cup of Coffee," a forum for parents and teachers to discuss homework, student progress, and upcoming assignments (Epstein, 2005).

On another positive note, some schools really are achieving success under NCLB. *Thoughts on Teaching: Twisted NCLB or Twisting NCLB* highlights one particular school that can only be described as an oasis of learning. The classes were student-centered, creative, and effective. All teachers received valuable professional education, and were excited about their work. One of the faculty members was quoted stating "We really know the research ... and we use that research to create child-centered learning environments ...because we study everything and then we twist NCLB in ways that make it work for our kids" (Starnes, 2007, p. 315).

Other schools achieve success in different ways. Most have low student to faculty ratios with many faculty members serving as aids or specialists. Some schools use

standardized, pre-formulated, reading and math curriculum, like Saxon Math and Open Court Reading, which are scripted for each teacher. These schools tend to have stressed-out teachers that work to the bone until testing, and then seemingly explode with a burst of creativity once tests are finished (Glazer, 2008).

Educators and politicians generally have different theories on how to improve NCLB most. Teachers generally agree that the people formulating plans like NCLB should be teachers not politicians. They argue that legislators are trying to fix a problem that they do not understand (Ohanian & Kovacs, 2007). Because of this lack of understanding, inadequacies are unavoidable; however, uncovering the solutions is a bit more elusive.

The roundtable discussion that developed a proposal for the dismantling of the No Child Left Behind Act listed 16 points detailing the inadequacies of NCLB. Among other arguments, the teachers state that NCLB ignores inadequacies of “top-down” control by taking instructional decisions out of the hands of teachers, principals, and school districts. They argue that NCLB allows life changing institution shaping decisions to hinge on single measures of effectiveness. They argue that NCLB drives many subjects out of the curriculum, and neglects the teaching of higher-order thinking skills. The proposal mentions a lot of problems with NCLB, but the worst offense is the misdiagnosis of poor performance which leads to excellent schools being labeled as failures.

Unlike the teacher roundtable, the NEA supports modification of NCLB over its repeal. They say that there is no way that Congress will repeal the act, and that the best

way to improve the situation created by NCLB is to work with it. Essentially the difference is that the NEA wants to modify it, not remove it. However, the NEA does agree with the roundtable that NCLB is in need of reform, and it states that there is virtually no evidence that NCLB directly contributes to higher scores (Packer, 2007). Therefore, rather than focusing on sanctions, the NEA argues that a better NCLB would be should be focused on “systematic changes to remedy deficiencies.” Also according to the NEA, eventually most schools (75% to 99%) will fail to meet AYP, so rather than placing injunctions against the school, such as the threat of closure or restructuring, NCLB should be focused on support and assistance to schools (Packer, 2007).

The differing opinions on NCLB are not just between teachers. Politicians are arguing over the subject too. In the article *Election 2008*, the democratic representative, Christopher S. Lehane, supports alternate credentialing programs for future teachers and a national education plan. He argues that teachers should be paid more (a proposal any teacher would approve). He suggests that public schooling should be extended to include pre-K and college. He places a lot of faith in the public charter school models, and suggests that they should be replicated if found effective. On the other side of the fence, his republican counterpart, David Winston, supports NCLB as is (Lehane & Winston, 2008).

Hypothesis

Based on the literature discussed above this author expected the surveyed teachers to express:

- overall negative perceptions of NCLB.

- slightly positive perceptions of NCLB on teachers' ability to teach curriculum effectively.

The overall negative perceptions would be related to the impact of a testing emphasis on their ability to teach creatively, the punitive consequences of low test scores, the inclusion of LEP and special education students scores in a school's pass/fail rate, and the ability to encourage growth from gifted students. The positive perceptions of effectiveness would be related to student achievement before and after the implementation of NCLB, and day-to-day instructional efficacy. Regardless of the responses in the previous sections, in the free response portion of the survey, the author was hopeful to see creative methods of "twisting" NCLB to make it effective for each school

Method

Subjects

The participants of this study were teachers in public elementary schools in Southern Virginia. Principals were contacted in three counties surrounding the researcher's place of residence. In these counties, eight principals agreed to conduct the survey in their schools. The study participants were the consenting teachers within those eight schools. All subjects were over eighteen years of age and had been professional educators for a minimum of one full year.

Apparatus

The researcher created a consent form (Appendix A) and a survey (Appendix B) to assess teachers' impressions of the impact of NCLB on their effectiveness in the classroom. This survey is based on the information reviewed in the literature review portion of this paper. The survey reflects the impressions expressed in articles that NCLB and associated requirements may hinder gifted students and may create a stressful, high-stakes, testing-focused environment that stifles creativity, and that teachers may feel that the inclusion of test scores from some sub-groups may negatively impact the passing/failing scores for a school's accreditation.

The first page of the survey contains yes/no questions and questions using Likert scale responses. These questions relate to the specific impacts they see from NCLB act and the mandates associated with it. The questions cover a range of possible impacts, such as the opportunity for gifted students to excel, the emphasis on standardized testing, the inclusion of LEP and disabled students' test scores in the scores that qualify a school for accreditation, as well as questions related to overall effectiveness. The second page consists of three free-response questions related to the subject's own personal experiences. The first question asks the subjects to explain the positive and negative effects they have seen from NCLB in their classrooms. The second asks the subjects to explain how they have implemented NCLB's requirements in their own classes. The final question addresses creative applications of the act's requirements.

The consent form was created in compliance with the template provided by the Liberty University Institutional Review Board. It provides a very brief overview of the

purpose of the study and its future benefits. It also explains the voluntary nature of the study. Participants had the opportunity to refuse participation at any time without repercussion, as stated in the consent form. In addition, the form explains that all documents would be kept confidential and anonymous. The researcher and her thesis committee chair would be the only individuals to view the completed surveys and that no names of individual participants, schools, principals, or school districts would be disclosed.

Additionally, the researcher created a form for principals to sign, granting the researcher permission to conduct the survey (Appendix C). This document was also based on the consent form template provided by the Liberty University Institutional Review Board. This particular document was an abbreviated version of the consent form provided to the participants of the study participants. It explained the voluntary nature of the study and assured the principal that all information obtained from the survey would remain anonymous and confidential. The form specifically granted permission for the researcher to conduct the survey and publish its results in this thesis.

Procedures

In the spring of 2008, the researcher began to contact principals in Northern Virginia and Southern Virginia to discuss the possibility of conducting the survey described above (Appendix B). Thirty principals were contacted. Very few responses were received and all of the principals who responded stated that because the request was placed so late in the school year, they would be unable to agree to participate.

Because the schools are closed for summer break between early June and mid-August, the researcher was unable to conduct the survey during these months. Due to this setback the researcher reevaluated the scope of the study and considered modifying or eliminating portions of the study. After much consideration, the researcher decided to abbreviate the study to focus more closely on schools in Southern Virginia.

In August of 2008, after teachers and principals returned for the upcoming school year, the researcher again contacted principals in Southern Virginia by phone and email. The researcher contacted the principals by phone to discuss briefly the purpose of the study and to inquire if the principal was interested in participating in the study. If the principal was interested, the researcher emailed copies of the permission to conduct survey form, the consent form, and the survey. If the principal ultimately agreed to participate, he would then forward the consent form and survey on to his faculty. Approximately twenty-five principals were contacted and of those twenty-five, eight agreed to forward the survey and consent form on to their faculty. A total of thirty teachers completed the surveys and returned them to the researcher through the principals.

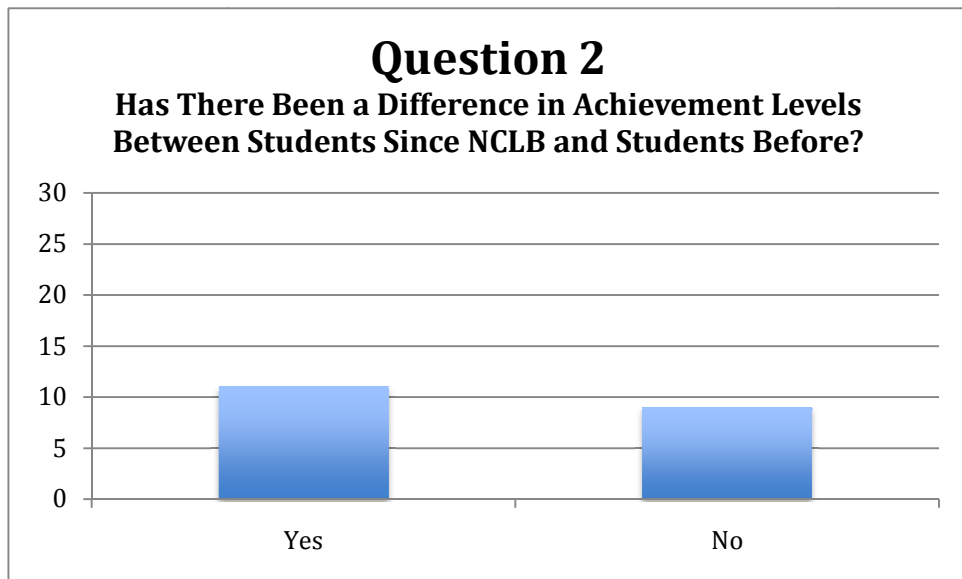
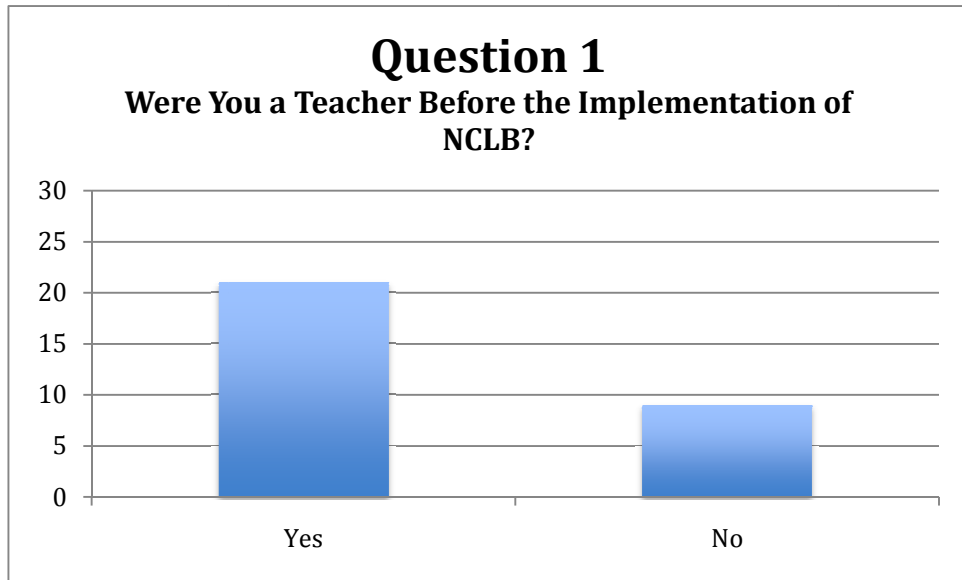
Results

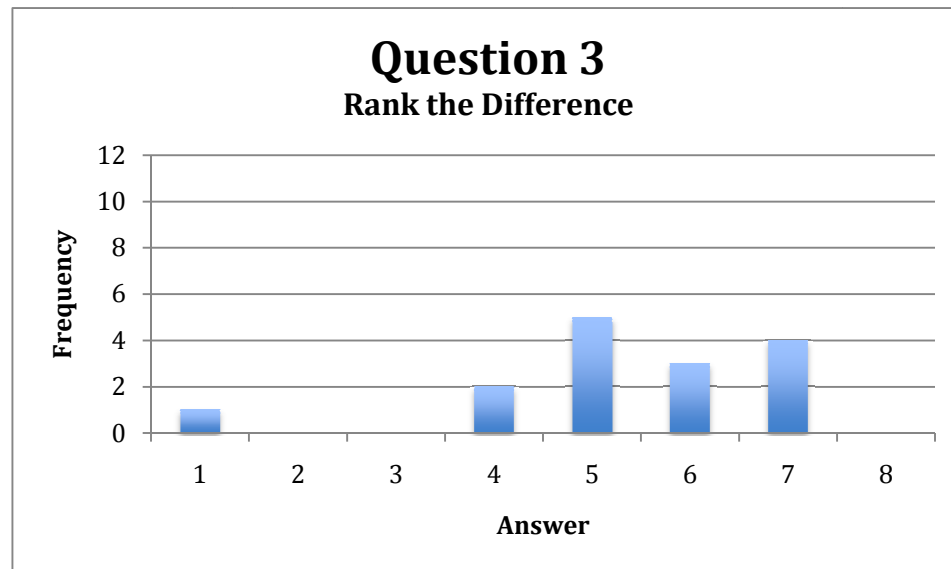
Thirty teachers from eight schools in three counties returned completed surveys. The surveys were returned with signed consent forms from each participant and signed permission forms from the principals. Since the survey was unmonitored, several participants omitted responses or responded with answers outside the parameters of the survey (i.e., a handwritten response rather than a circled number). However, most

completed the survey completely according to directions. The data from the first half these surveys was compiled in frequency charts and the data from the second half was summarized.

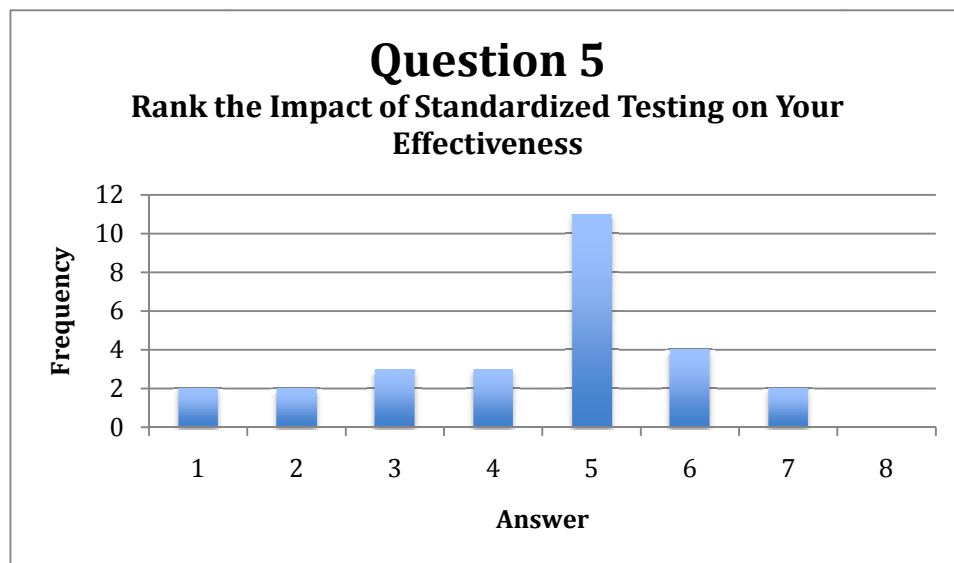
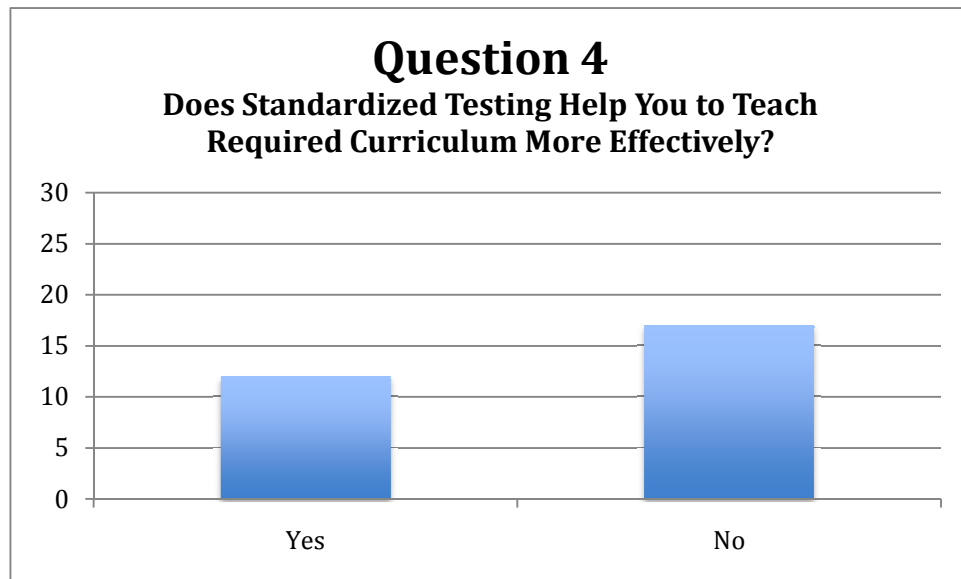
Constructed Response

Out of the thirty teachers surveyed, twenty-one had been teachers before the implementation of NCLB. Nine had not (Question 1). Of the twenty-one teachers who had been teaching since before NCLB, nine reported no difference in the achievement levels of their students and eleven reported a difference. One teacher left this question blank (Question 2). When asked to rank that difference, all eleven reported slightly improved achievement since before the implementation of NCLB and the one teacher who left question 2 blank also reported a slight improvement in student achievement. One teacher responded that there was not a difference in achievement levels, but answered question three with an impact ranking of 1, which indicates significantly lower achievement. It is unclear if this was the respondent's intended answer. The mean of these responses was 5.3, indicating a perception of slight improvement. The mode and median were both 5, also indicating very slight improvement (Question 3).



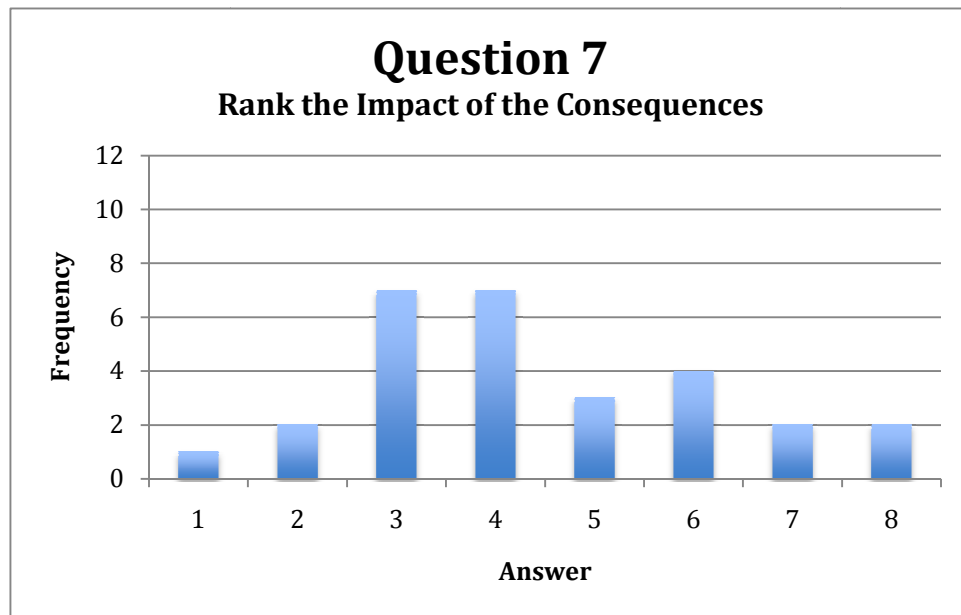
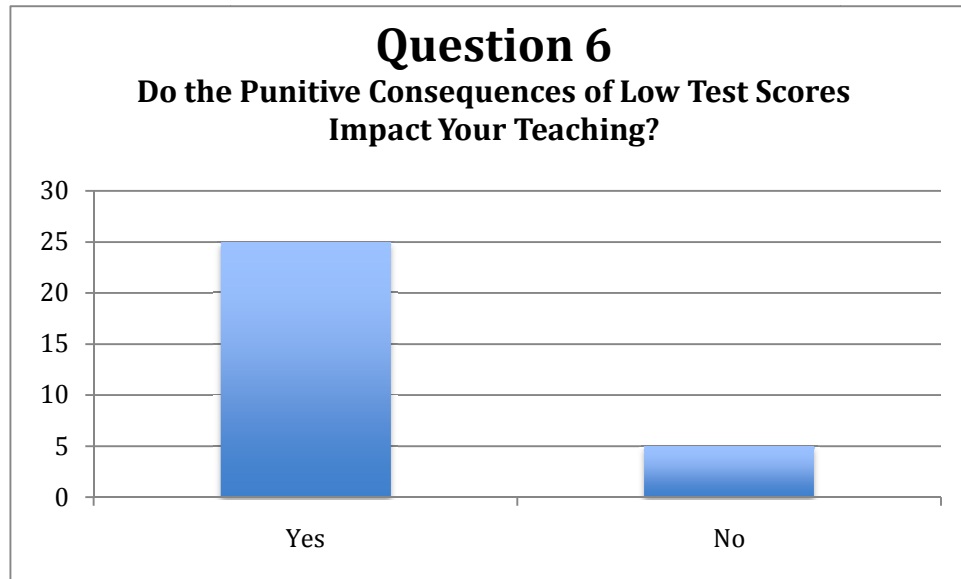


Respondents were split when asked if the mandatory testing required by NCLB helps them teach more effectively. Twelve responded yes and seventeen responded no. One teacher did not respond (Question 4). When asked to rank the impact of the testing on their effectiveness, participants were again split. The median and mode of the responses were both 5, which indicate slightly improved impact, but the mean of the responses was almost exactly in the middle at 4.7. In this question, the participant who failed to respond in question 4 also failed to respond to question 5 (Question 5).



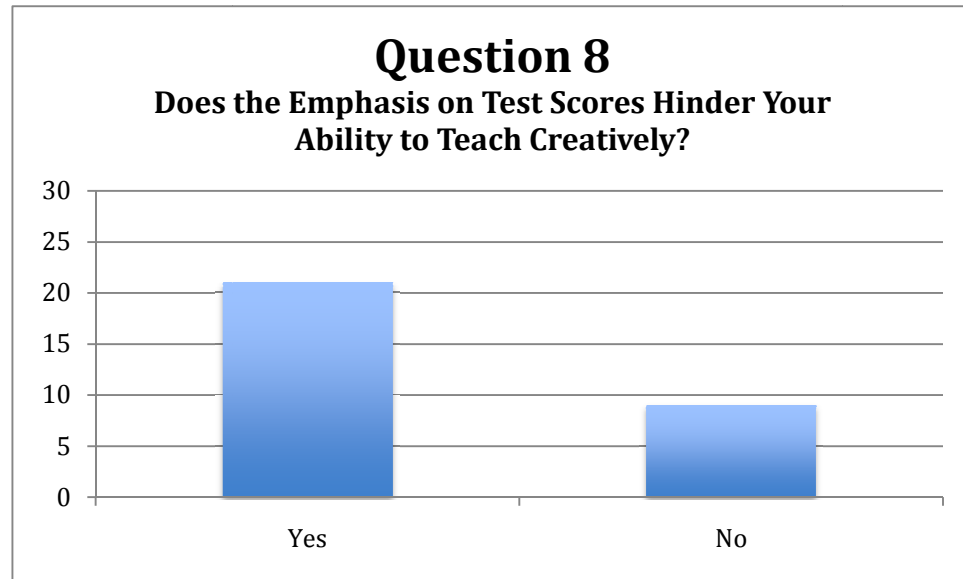
When asked if the punitive nature of test scores impacts the participants' teaching, almost all responded in the affirmative. Twenty-five of the participants responded yes and only five said no (Question 6). When asked to rank the impact of those consequences, however, the teachers were mild in their ranking. The results were bimodal with the most frequent participant responses at 3 and 4. The median was also at

4, indicating negative results stemming from the punitive consequences, but again, the mean was almost exactly in the middle at a 4.3 (Question 7).

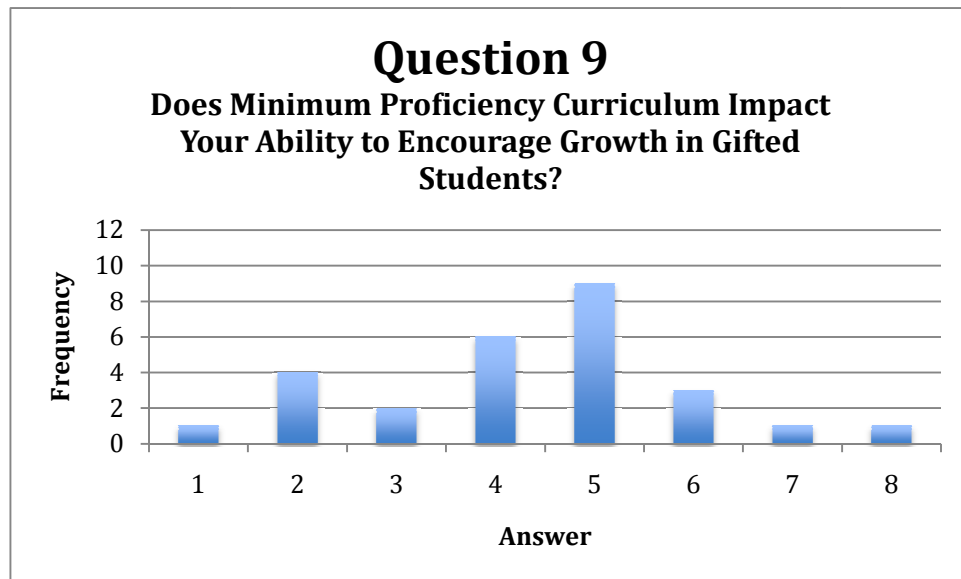


The next question asked participants if the emphasis on testing hindered their abilities to teach creatively nearly two-thirds responded affirmatively. Twenty-one

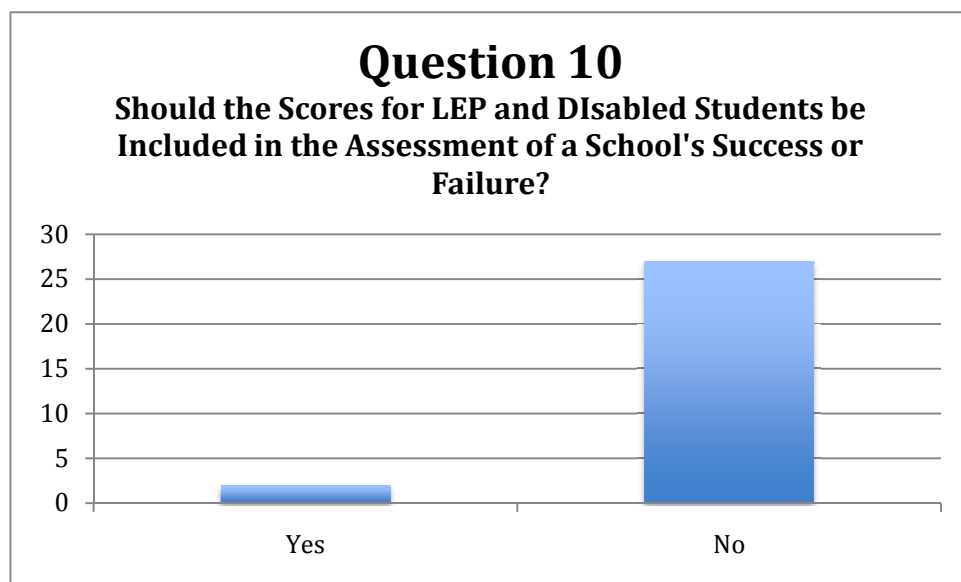
responded yes. Nine responded no. There was not a question that asked teachers to numerically rank the impact on creativity (Question 8).



Next, responders were asked to rank the impact of minimum proficiency standards on their ability to encourage the fullest growth potential in their gifted students. The rankings of impact were scattered across the scale with some reporting that minimum proficiency standards significantly help, some reporting that the standards significantly hinder, and some reporting a neutral impact. One teacher did not respond and one responded with an invalid answer of 4.5, written between the provided numbers. The mean of all the responses was 4.3, right in the middle, the median was at 4.75, and the mode was at 5, again all indicating neutral or slightly improved impact (Question 9).



The last question asked participants if they thought the test scores from students with learning disabilities or limited English proficiency (LEP) should be included in the pass/fail scores of a school or district the teachers almost universally said no. Two participants responded yes and twenty-seven responded no. One teacher responded with a written response rather than with a circled one and one failed to respond (Question 10).



Free Response

In question 11, when the participants were asked to report the positive and negative effects they saw in their classrooms from NCLB on a regular basis, there were myriad results reported. Some were duplicated frequently but participants mentioned many of them only once or twice. The most frequently mentioned effects were standardization of curriculum, the tests discriminating against certain groups of students, and increased levels of stress and pressure for students and teachers.

All of the teachers that mentioned standardization of curriculum considered it to be a positive effect. They noted that all students in Virginia would be studying the same curriculum in the same grade and teachers would be held accountable to teach the same curriculum to all students. In addition to standardization of curriculum, teachers mentioned many other positive effects from NCLB, such as consistency in expectations placed on teachers, a system of accountability for teachers and school districts, task-oriented focus and increased diligence from students, an emphasis on shrinking achievement gaps, and encouragement to spend more time with lower ability students in remediation and review. One teacher also noted that there is a better continuity between grades when pacing guides and standards of learning are in place.

Unfortunately, the positive effects were tempered with negative responses. The increased amount of time spent with lower ability students in review and remediation takes time away from enrichment for higher ability students. Also, the increased levels of stress and pressure, mentioned earlier, were mentioned in six different surveys and implied in others. They stated that students and teachers are simply being overworked

and cited increased amounts of time spent on paperwork and standardized test preparation that could be spent on lesson planning and review.

Additionally, the observation that standardized testing discriminates against particular groups of students was mentioned eleven times. The groups commonly mentioned were LEP students, students on low reading levels, and students with disabilities. One teacher also included the comparison between “late bloomers” and “early bloomers” as unfair treatment. Yet another teacher compared NCLB to a factory stamping “equal” on children’s heads and pushing them down a conveyor belt to learn at the same rate when in reality they could not. Still others stated that a focus on single-test performance is unfair to a wide variety of students.

More teachers complained that the curriculum is not always age- or ability-appropriate. They stated that it stifles creativity, limits instruction on the arts, and leaves little time for fun. Two participants also added that the standardized curriculum prevents teachers from using “teachable moments” to incorporate local and topical lessons into their yearly curriculum. One teacher went so far with her criticism as to say that NCLB stops students from thinking and encourages them to memorize everything. Many expressed frustration over lack of flexibility in pacing guides leading to stifled creativity.

Question 12 asked teachers to explain how they incorporated NCLB’s mandates in their classrooms and if their methods were effective. Teachers did not respond to this question as thoroughly as the last but all of the participants wrote something. The most common responses were sticking to the district/county pacing guide, which had mixed results, teaching only the material that students would be tested on, which none of the

teachers liked but some found effective, and making full use of teachers' aides, student teachers, and special education teachers in inclusive classrooms, which was universally seen as beneficial. Participants also mentioned after school tutoring programs, which, according to the teachers, led to over-worked, over-stressed students and teachers.

Teachers sometimes saw success with VGLAA and individualized instruction for low-level students and frequently did see success with extensive test review (before and after all assessments), SOL specific questioning, Title 1 reading programs, cooperative learning, and lots of practice. Along similar lines, one teacher mentioned the addition of Nine-week Assessments in her district to mirror the Standards of Learning tests (SOLs).

In question 13, the participants were asked to make suggestions that would improve the effectiveness of NCLB in their own districts. Many participants left the question blank or stated that they did not see a way to improve it. Three stated that they thought their counties were doing as good a job as possible. Four teachers said to eliminate NCLB all together or as one of them wrote, simply "SHRED it."

The helpful suggestions that were recorded included a vote for smaller class size and more faculty members to help students in a one-on-one setting. Two teachers suggested a move toward individual achievement models of assessment and measures of individual improvement rather than a standardized test. One of those two also suggested portfolios as a method of assessment. One art teacher suggested more collaboration across disciplines. Another teacher stated that he would like to see more technology and Internet resources available for students to use in preparation for testing and in daily learning. One last teacher suggested that teachers should be more involved in creating

spacing guides and determining what curriculum is appropriate for which age. That teacher also suggested that there should be fewer objectives in the standards for each year so that students would have more time for concept mastery and enrichment.

Discussion

The researcher's hypothesis, as previously stated, was two-fold. The researcher expected participants to express an overall negative perception of the impacts of NCLB and to express a neutral or slightly positive perception of NCLB's impact on student achievement, as measured by standardized tests, and overall instructional effectiveness in meeting required standards. The results collected from the survey were mixed with strong opinions expressed in the free-response portions and widely ranging opinions expressed in the constructed-response portion. These results do not form neat conclusions for themselves.

With the first hypothesis, the researcher expected negative perceptions of NCLB as a whole. This hypothesis seemed to be supported strongly by the free-response questions. The teachers provided many more results of NCLB that were perceived negatively than were perceived positively. Overwhelmingly, teachers responded that the mandates of NCLB stifled creativity and rushed students. Many stated that after-school remediation sessions, high-stakes testing, and fast paced learning lead to high stress levels in teachers and students alike. While the participants did have positive perceptions of the increased time and effort given to help lower-level students achieve success, they also stated that gifted students did not receive as much instructional time for enrichment. The teachers' perceptions ranged widely regarding the impact of NCLB on gifted

students' achievement, but lack of attention from the instructor is never a positive effect. To reference Gessner, perhaps these gifted students have been forced on the wrong train. If these students were provided more one-on-one time with an instructor in a class geared toward their particular needs, then they would have more opportunities for enrichment.

In the second hypothesis, the author expected to see responses indicating neutral or slightly positive perceptions of the NCLB's impact on student achievement. This was supported by question 2 of the survey. The participants indicated a very small difference in student achievement since the implementation of the NCLB. Just over half noted improvement in students since NCLB as compared with students before NCLB, however, even among those who perceived improvement, it was only a slight improvement. The hypothesis was also supported in regards to teachers' perceptions of NCLB's impact on their abilities to teach required curriculum effectively. A little less than half responded that NCLB helped them teach the required curriculum more effectively, but the rankings showed an average neutral impact.

In addition to the two formal hypotheses, the author also hoped to see creative methods of "Twisting NCLB" to make it more effective in the districts represented by the survey. The author was very disappointed to see how few of the participants responded to the question asking for creative applications of NCLB within their districts. Maybe the participants were tired of writing by the time they reached the end of the survey. Of the teachers who did respond to the question, several provided answers that were unusable like "shred it" or "I don't see much room for creativity," but some did provide helpful ideas. Two teachers agreed with Callender's ideas of value-added student assessment.

They argued that portfolios or some other form of assessment that would follow the individual student's progress would be a more meaningful measurement of student progress. Another teacher proposed more interdisciplinary instruction to make the lessons and units more multidimensional. Yet another teacher suggested rerouting funding into more faculty members for one-on-one instruction and smaller class-sizes. Still another teacher echoed the teacher round-table discussion referenced above by suggesting that districts involve more teachers in the creation of pacing and curriculum guides.

Limitations

This survey, as any other survey, has limitations. The sample size was very small, and the scope of the survey was small as well. All fifty states are under the mandates of NCLB, but this study focused on only three counties in Virginia. Even for the small area, the number of participants was low. A sample with fifty or a hundred participants would have yielded more meaningful results.

In addition to the limitations of size and scope, the method of distribution also led to limitations. More teachers completed the survey than were included in this data, but the surveys were not returned to the researcher. Future studies would benefit from delivering the survey in person to participants and collecting completed forms at that time. Administering the survey in person could also help prevent participants from omitting answers or responding to them in an invalid format, which were other limitations on the data included in this study.

Finally, one participant stated that the questions with Likert-scaled responses were difficult to answer, and that she wished they were asked in a different format. The teacher was the only respondent from her school, and the principal from that school did not exhibit a positive attitude toward the survey, but agreed to pass it on to his faculty nonetheless. His negative attitude toward the survey may have impacted her views of the survey. On the other hand, despite strong statements in the free response portion of the survey, the Likert-scaled questions reported only slight impact. This may indicate that the Likert scale was a poor formatting choice; however, since only one participant responded in this way it is unclear if this is a valid criticism of the survey.

Future Research

Future studies could take the format of this study with a broader scope and sample size. If the study were repeated in several different states, researchers could determine if the results found in this sample could be generalized to the nation as a whole. If a study such as this were magnified to a national scale, the resulting data could be used to modify and reform NCLB to make it a more useful measurement of student achievement and could lead to a stronger partnership between educators and politicians. The data would speak on behalf of educators who feel unheard in the current system.

To solve some of the data collection problems, the study should also be conducted in person. This would help to alleviate the difficulties posed by blank questions and invalid answers. The data from a more closely monitored survey would be much cleaner and easier to analyze.

Conclusion

After a brief literature review, the author hypothesized that, if surveyed, the teachers in Southern Virginia would report negative perceptions of NCLB and would indicate neutral or slightly improved impacts on student achievement. The author then created a survey based on the reviewed literature and distributed it to three counties in Southern Virginia.

This study has shown that, at best, teachers perceive NCLB as a flawed attempt to achieve a noble goal and at worst, a governmental intrusion in a place it does not belong. Teachers seem to like the accountability that NCLB represents and appreciate the emphasis on student achievement and success. They also appreciate increased focus on remediation and review. Nonetheless, teachers perceive very little improvement in student achievement since the implementation of NCLB. They report increased stress, decreased morale, and students who are being left behind. Most feel that they are left out of the decision-making process and want to become a greater part of it. Some have excellent ideas that should be implemented. So, at the end of the survey, some of the participating teachers provided constructive suggestions for improvement and creative application of NCLB.

The best way for NCLB to succeed with its goals in the future is for the government to begin to collaborate more with the teachers who will be implementing the act's mandates. As demonstrated by this survey, teachers are the ones who can see, each day, which parts of the act are working and which are causing harm. This country's teachers are passionate, driven, and want to help decide what, when, and how they will be

teaching the students they care so much about. Despite its unpopularity and perceived flaws, NCLB can take one giant step forward if teachers are given a place at the table,

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Appendix A

CONSENT FORM

No Child Left Behind Perceived Impact Survey
Senior Honors Thesis
Kathryn Forbes Lowry
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study of teachers and principals' perceptions of the impact of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) on classroom efficacy. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a teacher or principal of a public school in the state of Virginia. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Kathryn Lowry, an undergraduate student in Liberty University's school of Education.

Background Information

The purpose of this study is: to discover the perceived impact of the NCLB on classroom efficacy and determine if there are any ways to make the law a more effective tool for education professionals.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:
Complete the following survey to the best of your ability.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study

Risks are no more than the participant would encounter in everyday life

There are no immediate benefits to participation however, with supplemental research, data collected from this survey could be used to augment the effectiveness of the NCLB and to suggest improvements in implementation for the districts surveyed.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. All records will be anonymous. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers will have access to the records.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or your current school/district. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time with out affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is: Kathryn Lowry. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at 540.729.9632 or email her at kflowry@liberty.edu. Her faculty advisor is Randall Dunn, coordinator of secondary/special education and assistant professor of education, who can be contacted at rdunn@liberty.edu or at 434.592.3716.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), **you are encouraged** to contact the Human Subject Office, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 2400, Lynchburg, VA 24502 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____

10. Should the test scores of LEP students and students with disabilities be included in the assessment of a school or teacher's success or failure rate?

Yes

No

(page break)

11. Specifically, what effects do you see from the NCLB in your classroom(s) on a regular basis? Include positive and negative effects

12. How have you implemented the mandates of the NCLB in your classroom? Have your methods been effective?

13. List any suggestions you have for creative application of the NCLB in order to improve its effectiveness in your district.

Appendix C

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT SURVEY
No Child Left Behind Perceived Impact Survey
Senior Honors Thesis
Kathryn Forbes Lowry
Liberty University
School of Education

I _____, principal of _____ school, give Kathryn Lowry, an undergraduate student in Liberty University's School of Education, permission to administer the No Child Left Behind Perceived Impact Survey to the teachers in my school and to publish the results in her Senior Honors Thesis.

Confidentiality:

I understand that the records of this study will be kept private. Any sort of report that may be published will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. All records will be anonymous. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers will have access to the records.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

I also understand that participation in this study is voluntary. My decision whether or not to participate will not affect my current or future relations with Liberty University or my current school/district.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____