

Administrators' Perspectives of the Impact of Mandatory Graduation Qualifying Examinations  
for Students with Learning Disabilities

Lynn Clayton-Prince

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Dr. Susan Magliaro, Chair

Dr. Thomas Williams

Dr. Carol Whitaker

Dr. Rosalie Martin

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(ABSTRACT)

In Virginia students with learning disabilities, as well as students in general education, are required to pass the Virginia Standards of Learning test in order to receive a diploma from high school. Currently there are 20 states that use exit exams with five more states anticipated to start by 2009 (Center on Education Policy, 2005). The purpose of this study was to identify the perceptions of Virginia Special Education Directors, Principals and Lead Teachers regarding the impact of the state graduation requirements on the educational experiences of and outcomes for students with learning disabilities. This study was adapted from a similar investigation conducted from Indiana and applied to survey Virginia administrators. Additionally, the study was used to identify the changes Virginia administrators perceive are needed in order to best support students in meeting those requirements.

The target population of participants of this study consisted of three groups of educators: (a) Directors of Special Education; (b) Principals; and (c) Lead Teachers of Special Education in Virginia public high schools. A survey research design was employed for this study. The instrument included 70 Likert type items, with one demographic item. A total of 510 surveys were sent through email to administrators in the state of Virginia; 148 were returned with incorrect addresses. A response total of 104 emails were received: Directors of Special Education, 26.9%; Principals, 56.7%; and Lead Teachers, 16.3%. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. A descriptive summary of responses for respondents was developed using

mean and frequency percentages. Inferential statistics was used to answer the research questions presented in this study. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to determine if there was a significant difference between the three groups regarding high stakes testing of students with learning disabilities. Significance ( $p \leq .05$ ) was not noted in any areas when comparing administrators perspectives of graduation requirements that impact educational experiences and outcomes of students, however the area of changes that administrators perceive are needed in order to best support students in meeting these requirements, significance ( $p \leq .05$ ) was noted.

Findings indicate that administrators felt that as a result of the graduation requirement, it is important for special education students to be included in general education classes and exposed to the general education curriculum. They also agreed that special education and general education teachers need to be exposed to professional development to help students be successful in high stakes testing. Another finding from this study was administrators felt that including greater use of practice materials and instruction in test taking would also be needed to help students be successful.