“Who Really Gets Left Behind?”
The Impact of “No Child Left Behind” on Special Needs Services at a Hartford School.
“No Child Left Behind”

• The “No Child Left Behind Act” (NCLB) is a federal law that was passed in 2001.

• Objectives:
  - Success for all.
  - Improve school performance of public schools.
  - High expectations, goals and standards.
  - Use of standardized achievement tests.
  - Federal funding determined by outcome of achievement tests.
Research Question:
How has the “No Child Left Behind” Act impacted services for special needs students?

- The NCLB Act is up for reauthorization by the end of 2007.
- Research focused on how government policy affects the programs and services for special needs students.
- Why special needs?
Previous Research & Literature

• Fore and Voltz (2006)
  - Study: impact of standard based curriculum and assessment implemented by NCLB.
  - Findings: “It is antithetical to the idea of individualized goal setting to require that all students study the same thing at the same time.”
  - “Some students with disabilities require content that is typically not part of general curriculum and that is not reflected in accountability assessments.”
  - “Rigidly tying IEPs to grade level expectations may undermine the individualization that has served as a cornerstone of special education.”
Research Context

• Research was done at Nodding Elementary* a local Hartford school.
• Currently “failing” under the assessment of NCLB.
• School Statistics: According to the 2005-06 strategic school profile:
  - 15.4% of the students were in special education.
  - 25.5% of the students received bilingual education and/or ESL services.
  - 73.3% of students qualified for free or reduced meals.

* Pseudonym used
Research Methods

- **Observation** - Total of 10 hours over a 5 week period. Extensive notes were taken upon departure of the school.
- **Interviews** - approximately 30-45 minutes each. Most extensive with special ed coordinator. Interviews were transcribed for analysis.
  - Special Ed Coordinator
  - One 6th Grade Teacher
  - Paraprofessional
  - Social Worker

Ethical Guidelines: Informed and written consent was used.
Thesis & Evidence

- **Research Question:** How has the “No Child Left Behind” Act impacted services for special needs students in an urban public school?

- **Thesis Statement:** I argue that the demands of the reform “No Child Left Behind” have resulted in insufficient provision and implementation of services for special needs students in “failing” schools.
Findings

• Observation:
  - All special ed students have been mainstreamed in Hartford, meaning they are in the regular classroom.
  - All special ed students are to spend 60% of their time in the general classroom.
  - Observation of Eddie with obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) in the 6th grade classroom → appropriate services were not provided.
  - Services for children with OCD: behavior management or cognitive behavioral management.
Interview with Ms. Smith, special education coordinator

“There is no cure for children who are labeled as “emotionally disturbed” because of that there is resistance to label them as that” - Ms. Smith

“If someone is emotionally disturbed do we really want them in the police force with a gun. If a child is ED they need to be labeled as that, and get counseling instead of masking it with LD.”- Ms. Smith
Conclusion

• Implications of Research:
  - To shed light on the impact that policies such as NCLB have on the students of urban public schools.
  - Findings could be used by administrative personnel in making decisions about appropriate areas to place funding.
  - Findings could also be useful to policymakers deciding whether to reauthorize NCLB or enact similar legislation.
Significance

• Researching the impact of NCLB on special education is particularly important.
• Special needs students are often the most vulnerable, especially within urban public schools.
• If special needs students are not receiving appropriate services because of the demands of the NCLB Act, than who is to blame for these students not reaching their highest potential?