

Education Senior Seminar

Teacher Opinions on MCAS testing of Special Education students

Research Question & Significance

- ◆ Do the opinions of mainstream teachers regarding MCAS testing of special education students differ from those of special education teachers?
- ◆ Importance into looking at these two distinctive groups of teachers who work within the institution of education

MCAS Testing

- ◆ The Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) is a standardized test which measures the performance of students, schools and districts in accordance to the Education Reform Law of 1993.
- ◆ These tests are required not only as a way of standardizing the curriculum in public schools but also as a graduation requirement of the students.
- ◆ Students are tested in the 10th grade in the subjects of Math, English and Science & Technology.
- ◆ Test contains multiple choice, open response, short answer and writing prompts

Existing Literature

- ◆ Focus on standardized testing for all students
- ◆ Focus on inequality in school system
- ◆ Focus on student and parent reactions to the mandate of MCAS.

Methodology

- ◆ Received permission from IRB to conduct interviews with school teachers.
- ◆ Interviewed at a Massachusetts suburban school which houses a learning center based Special Education program.
- ◆ Interviewed 9 teachers. All from the same school, similar backgrounds being that of white and affluent. The 9 teachers are made up of 4 special education teachers and 5 mainstream teachers in the fields of English, math, and science.
- ◆ The teachers were selected based on availability of their schedule in accordance to my schedule as well.

Themes

- ◆ **Policy on Accommodations**
- ◆ **Graduation Requirements**
- ◆ **Appropriateness**
- ◆ **Exemption & Accommodation**

Policy on Accommodations

- ◆ What are the school policies of MCAS testing of SPED students in regards to the accommodations?
- ◆ 1 out of 5 mainstream teachers knew one of the policies on accommodations for SPED students
- ◆ 4 out of 4 special education teachers knew about school policy regarding accommodations for SPED students

Graduation Requirements

- ◆ Do you think that the graduation requirement of the MCAS testing is fair?
- ◆ 2 out of 4 mainstream teachers believed that the graduation requirement was unfair.
- ◆ 2 out of 4 mainstream teachers believed that the accountability was necessary
- ◆ 4 out of 4 SPED teachers believed that the graduation requirement was unfair

Appropriateness

- ◆ Do you think that the materials on the MCAS are appropriate for the special Ed students? Do you think that they are a good assessment of their abilities?
- ◆ 4 out of 4 SPED teachers feel that the MCAS are neither appropriate nor a good assessment of special education students' abilities.
- ◆ 5 out of 5 mainstream teachers believe that the MCAS is appropriate and a relatively good assessment of the SPED students ability.

Exemption & Accommodation

- ◆ Do you think that SPED students should be exempt from MCAS, be allowed more accommodations or are the accommodations appropriate for them?
- ◆ Neither SPED teachers nor mainstream teachers believe that SPED students should be exempt from the MCAS test
- ◆ 4 out of 4 SPED teachers stated that SPED students needed more accommodations on the MCAS test, similar to their IEP
- ◆ 4 out of 5 mainstream teachers felt that the accommodations allowed were adequate

Thesis Statement

- ◆ While examining school policy, accommodations, graduation requirements, and appropriateness of standardized testing, special education teachers and mainstream teachers hold extremely different opinions about MCAS testing of special education students.

Importance & Summary

- ◆ Overall, the differences between the teachers opinions of MCAS focus on the individual for the SPED teachers and contextual for the mainstream teachers.
- ◆ Differences between mainstream teachers & SPED teachers : entire class vs. individual
- ◆ Importance of accountability
- ◆ Change in Special Education laws over the years.