

DIRECTORS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND ACT AND  
THE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES EDUCATION IMPROVEMENT ACT  
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There have been several revisions since the passage of the original *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA) of 1965 and the *Education For All Handicapped Children Act* (EHCA) of 1975. The current version, entitled the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) of 2002, is based on four common sense pillars: accountability for results; emphasis on doing what works based on scientific research; expanded parental options; and expanded local control and flexibility. The NCLB influences the collective body of elementary and secondary student population. Conversely, the *Individuals With Disabilities Improvement Act* of 2004, formally EHCA, is individual in design, implementation, and outcomes. It emphasizes eligibility of children as a single disaggregated group. It creates individual entitlement, with individual enforcement. The challenge for school districts has been balancing the collective mandates of making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and meeting the 100% Highly Qualified Teacher (HQT) requirement by 2006 with the individual rights of a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) protected by the Individual Education Program (IEP).

The purpose of this study was to describe qualitatively how the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2002* (NCLB) and the *Individuals With Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004* (IDEIA) influenced Directors' perceptions of students with disabilities specific to meeting the Adequate Yearly Progress and the Highly Qualified Teacher requirements. A constructivist paradigm was used to reconstruct each district's unique reality, along with leadership theory and literature on perceptions in education reform. Inductive analysis was utilized with data collected through individual interviews with Directors, newspaper articles, emails, Continuous Improvement Plans, annual report cards, participation and achievement scores of students with disabilities, performance index scores, Adequate Yearly Progress scores, and highly qualified teacher information in order to identify themes and patterns aimed at answering the research questions. The findings of this study indicated that the beliefs held by each Director influenced how both Acts were perceived relative to students with disabilities for the AYP and HQT requirements in a number of ways. Additionally, the pressure to meet AYP presented a conflict between the philosophical intent and the daily operations of each district. While each Director viewed students with disabilities as part of the school system, each set of perceptions either advocated for all students collectively or all students separately.