***Case Study: A Background on Isaiah***

Isaiah is an African American, seventh grade boy. He struggles a great deal in the classroom and has been tested in all subjects – especially math – to be well below grade level (Grade 3). He has had a pediatric diagnosis of Attention Deficit-Hyper Disorder (ADHD) since early elementary school. In addition to his ADHD, his parents have been struggling to discover what other learning disabilities he has and have been issued a diagnosis of R/O Aspergers, which means without being placed on medication to control his ADHD behaviors, the doctor cannot rule out that he also suffers from Aspergers. However, the parents adamantly oppose medicating their child and will not place Isaiah on medications even for a short period of time to rule out Aspersers. Herein lays the first educational issue with Isaiah.

With Isaiah being so below grade level with ADHD, he qualifies for a 504 plan. This plan provides him with educational interventions such as extended time on tests, use of a calculator on standardized tests, preferential seating, modified workloads and alternative assignments, however, with a 504 plan, Isaiah does not qualify to be placed in a small class, resource room where he could potentially get individualized attention, a highly modified curriculum, and skills that will best help him in the future. Isaiah could qualify for an IEP and receive the small class resource room option with a diagnosis of Aspergers. Without this diagnosis, Isaiah is left to struggle through a general education setting learning little, if any, content. In order to try to find another qualifying diagnosis to establish an IEP for Isaiah, we have been partaking in the MFE process this entire school year.

An MFE is a multi-factored evaluation. The process consists of pediatric reports, interviews of staff, parents and Isaiah, data collection from teachers, IQ testing, profile reports from teachers and the school psychologist, and documentation of interventions. Essentially, these items are needed to prove that though Isaiah does not have a diagnosis that requires an IEP and qualifies him for a resource room; his disability is hindering him enough that an alternative placement such as a resource room will help him academically. Unfortunately, this will only happen if he drops significantly lower than grade level and/or his IQ drops below normal. Essentially, Isaiah needs to struggle long enough to implement the process and then continue to struggle as the process is undertaken.

By being placed in a general class, Isaiah is not taught skills at his level. Though he participates in technology-based alternative curriculums for math and reading, these devices are not utilized for everyday classroom lessons. They are supplemental and Isaiah is still responsible for the regular class work and homework. Because Isaiah I not performing at grade level, the regular assignments are extremely difficult for him and he often fails to complete them because he does not understand them. His lack of completion of assignment is the last area in which Isaiah struggles with due to his current placement.

Homework and class work completion is not only a struggle for Isaiah due to his inability to understand, it is also a direct result of being placed on in-school and out-of-school suspension. Another issue Isaiah must endure without an IEP is his behavior problems being treated like that of any other individual. By being placed in a general education setting, Isaiah must conform to the norms of each classroom. With an R/O diagnosis of Aspergers, Isaiah portrays a lot of the awkward social skills of an Asperger student. Some of these characteristics include: not responding correctly to jokes, misunderstanding common social cues, outbursts, awkward gross motor function, and impulse control issues. In a general education room, these actions not only cause a great deal of distraction to the other students, but also provoke other students to ridicule Isaiah. This hinders both Isaiah and the remainder of the class. Because Isaiah only has an official diagnosis of ADHD, this does not override the behavior policy of the school as would a diagnosis that included altered behaviors. When a child is diagnosis with a behavior disorder, or is in a resource room for special services, often times the behavior policy is modified due to the students’ inability to conform to the norm behavior standards. This type of modification would have potentially saved Isaiah from several of suspensions. This is because some of Isaiah’s suspensions are a result of a four-step referral. These four-steps are part of a process where students earn steps for minor infractions such as calling out, talking back, etc. Once the student earns four steps, the form is returned to the office for administration to handle. Most times, the students receive in-school suspension, unless they have had many in-school suspensions or out-of-school suspensions, which at that point the amount of in-school days are then converted to out-of-school suspensions. Because Isaiah has been involved in fighting and received an out-of-school suspension, and has not been able to successfully conform to in-school suspension norms[[1]](#footnote-1), Isaiah receives out of school suspensions. When Isaiah is removed from school, teachers place their missing work in the office to be picked up by a parent so they child can make up the work while out. Unfortunately, this does not occur for Isaiah, as no one from home comes to retrieve the work. When this work is left undone, Isaiah does not receive credit and in turn the result is his failure.

**Issue 1: Special Education Requirements**

***Intervention-based Assessment: Evaluation Rates and Eligibility Findings***

In *Exceptional Children* McNamara states that special education placement often results in unnecessary stigmatization and separation of children from the mainstream (McNamara, pg. 181). However, placements like these are only as a result of a diagnosis of a recognized learning disability or a diagnosis of a learning disability as a result of a multi-factored evaluation (MFE). The first classification of a child (through a medical diagnosis) is the most frequently supported method to provide alternative placements for children. The second method, which is essence a gate keeping function for special education placement, where (it is presumed) effective interventions are more likely to occur, would be the MFE process. This method is devoted to discovering and documenting effective intervention methods, rather than simply documenting a match between characteristics and eligibility criteria (McNamara, pg. 182). The reason for this switch between medical diagnosis and documenting interventions is financial. It is substantially more expensive to go through complicated medical and psychiatric procedures to gain diagnosis than it is to explore the myriad of possible interventions. Additionally, to go through the documentation process is more likely to keep students in the least restrictive general education environment where a student can be successful.

 Unfortunately, this new method is hindering the placement of many students. First, response to intervention (RtI) programs are highly less documented than traditional 504plans and IEPs. This means more students who change schools, or as students move through different buildings in the district, these interventions can be lost. Additionally, there is a decrease in some services due to the inadequate or inappropriate documentation. Finally, this process is time-consuming and involves conducting interviews, systematic implementation of interventions, monitoring of interventions, and communication amongst all parties. This is often a deterrent to undertake the process at all (McNamara, pg. 183).

The study then continues to compare two types of documentation process currently in practice in schools: the IBA and the IAT process. The IBA process (Intervention Based Assistance) consists of all invested parties implementing and documenting interventions and monitoring their effectiveness in each environment and then comparing the results until a list of commonly effective interventions are agreed by and set into place by the team. The IAT (Intervention Assistance Team) partakes in the same process, however, eligibility for this process comes from standardized test scores as opposed to a student’s ability to succeed in a general education classroom. The main goal of each identification process is to keep kids in the regular classroom setting as opposed to finding them alternative placements in resource/exclusion environments. What makes each task a daunting one is the “degree of perseverance in devising and documenting effective interventions (McNamara, pg. 191). The study did however indicate that IAT teams lean towards alternative placements more so than the IBA process.

***Responsiveness to General Education Instruction as the First Gate to Learning Disabilities Identification***

Learning Disabilities Research & Practice outlined the Response to Intervention (RtI) process for identification of learning disabilities. The main objective of the process is to identify and intervene with students who are struggling in school in order to proved adequate general education instruction (Speece, pg. 148). The main discrepancy researched throughout this study was between students who are identified as learning disabled and students who struggle in relation to their peers but lack a diagnosed learning disability.[[2]](#footnote-2) The aforementioned student type is also the type of student who will perform well on standardized tests and have an average or above average IQ, but fail to transfer this ability to the classroom setting.

Because of these DD students performing well on standardized tests, often times they are not identified as learning disabled and struggle through school. Additionally, they do not generally respond to redesigned general education interventions and have considerably poorer academic and behavioral outcomes (Speece, pg. 151). The study indicated that this may be in part due to the process relying heavily on evaluation procedures that general education teachers are unfamiliar (Speece, pg. 152). Furthermore, the amount and complexity of the interventions that are being implemented in the classroom may make the interventions an unrealistic request without extensive training on the general education teachers’ side (Speece, pg. 155).

***Legal History of Special Education***

Remedial and Special Education reflected on the history of special education that has brought about the current requirements and amendments made to plans such as IDEA. The first very explicit fact covered with the article was that of education not being a federal guarantee. In fact education is part of state governments and polices, and thus potentially run differently in each state. Within each state, guidelines have changed dramatically over the past century. As early as 1893, states such as Massachusetts were setting guidelines and being challenged formally in courts of law in regards to these policies. For example, in 1893, Massachusetts found that students who were *weak in mind* were not fit for schooling (Yell, pg. 220). Later, Ohio found in 1934 that all students ages 6 through 18 were required to attend school. Later, in 1958, this compulsory attendance policy was challenged and thus changed to all students except for those who might be disruptive to other students (Yell, pg. 220).

 The first main legal action towards educating all students was Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHCA) in 1975, which states that schools should educate all students with disabilities with methods that fit their unique academic needs. The Act ensured that all students with qualified disabilities a.) Nondiscriminatory testing, evaluation and placement procedures, b.) be educated in the least restrictive environment, c.) procedural due process, including parent involvement, d.) free education, and e.) appropriate education (Yell, pg. 225). Later, IDEA of 1990, was enacted to provide services to autistic children as qualified students for special education services (yell, pg. 226). Then in 1997, IDEA was again amended to give measureable gains and objectives to IEP students. Additionally, the amendment established disciplinary measures for IEP students stating that students with IEPs cannot be suspended for more than ten days, and alternative placements and schools can be used for up to forty five days (Yell, pg. 227).

**Comparison of Literature to Case Study: Special Education Protocols**

In Isaiah’s case, special education protocols are hindering his education as opposed to helping him as the regulations are set about to do. First, *Legal History on Special Education* indicated that all students have the right to be educated in their least restrictive environment. Isaiah however is being withheld from his least restrictive environment due to the fact that he doesn’t technically qualify as learning disabled. Furthermore, in *Responsiveness to General Education Instructions* the article outlines how extensive the intervention and identification process is, and Isaiah is a DD student who tests average but fails to transfer these skills into the classroom environment. Therefore, the intervention process cannot be one of standardized testing to identify the disability; it must be a problem solving approach IAT that encompasses much of the school year. Seeing this is a daunting task, it is no wonder Isaiah had to wait until the seventh grade to encounter a team of teachers willing to undergo the process and take the time to have him identified as learning disabled. Furthermore, the process likes to have students remain in the general education environment as their least restrictive environment. As a result of this, Isaiah is forced to suffer through a long drawn out process and experience failure throughout the course of the school year until the process can be completed in its entirety.

Had Isaiah had the Asperger’s diagnosis, he would not have had to suffer through this process, for he would have been entitled to a resource room placement immediately upon the parent’s request. This is a direct result of what was discussed in *The Legal History of Special Education.* The laws were created and protocols passed to ensure students with severe disabilities were educated and treated fairly within the education system, but without this diagnosis, Isaiah is just a student who struggles in the classroom. In IDEA, the definition of a learning disability is a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, which ADHD is not included (McNamara, pg. 184). Later, with IDEA 1990, Autism was included as a qualifiable diagnosis, in which Aspergers became qualifiable. However, with Isaiah’s lack of diagnosis, this form of IDEA does not help to educate Isaiah in the least restrictive environment, but keeps Isaiah out of an environment that would be most conducive to him receiving an education.

**Issue 2: Discipline Policy**

***Youth Violence, Schools, and the Management Question: A Discussion of Zero Tolerance and Equity in Public Schools***

The Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy describes how teachers in Canada are reporting an increase in the type, frequency and severity of anti-social aggressive and violent behaviors in classrooms. However, they are not noticing an increase in weaponry as schools in the United States are seeing (Jull, pg. 1). The study describes such aggressions as verbal abuse, bullying, and disorderly behavior. Due to this increase in violence in schools, school behavior plans have become a sort of public record, able to be viewed and scrutinized by the public. This is mainly due to the fact that when major offenses progress to the court system, the violence and anti-social behaviors are ruled to be preformed under the student’s own volition and conscious choice. They are not being preformed as a result of internal conflicts the student might have, academic exclusion, social isolation or discrimination within the public school setting (Jull, pg. 3). The study then makes a bold statement:

“It is not inconceivable that public schools operate within a framework of systematic discriminatory practice if indeed the over representation of marginalized individuals or groups within the school suspension and expulsion records and statistics on early school leaving are indicative of those persons and/or groups targeted by school disciplinary policies and administrative practices. Simply put, ‘who gets expelled from school involves not only issues that are related to the students themselves but also issues that are driven by the educational philosophy and policies of the public school system’”(Jull, pg. 4).

This statement indicates that no tolerance policy are aimed at discriminating against certain individuals, however, it is not only these individuals that are affected.

***Dropping out of Middle School: A Multieval analysis of Students and Schools***

The American Educational Research Journal conducted a study comparing the effects a person’s individual make up has compared to the school’s discipline code in discipline related dropout rates. The research indicated that most prior research conducted was in regards to the individual’s self and the student’s background characteristics such as SES, ethnicity and family situation. After analyzing the prior research and conducting their own, the conclusion was that most of the indicators for school drop out were not a result of school discipline codes, but rather the student’s history. The student’s history, however, included poor school performance, disruptive behavior, poor attendance, negative attitudes toward the school, and early school failure – particularly, repeating grades (Rumberger, pg. 588). These aspects were then referred to as climate on page 590, which was early referred to as an aspect of school code on page 583, which would mean that these factors are a direct result of the school’s disciplinary code.

***School Discipline at a Crossroads: From Zero Tolerance to Early Response***

Exceptional Children analyzed zero tolerance policies effectiveness on improving school discipline and student behavior. They found that these zero tolerance policies are ineffective and are”sometimes used as a tool for *push out,* to encourage ‘troublemakers’ or those perceived as unlikely to succeed in school to leave” (Skiba, pg. 339). The study generally described zero tolerance policies as harsh and punitive - especially in the area of special education students. One administrator who remained nameless in the article stated that “’You don’t get it. We don’t want to understand these kids; we want to get them out’” (Skiba, pg. 340). Overall, the conclusion is that the discipline policies of current public schools use negative consequences to “send a message” and then these negatives far outweigh the positive reinforcements for good behavior. Findings supported that the main reason for discipline problems in schools is teachers are unprepared for the difficulties in classroom management and take on an authoritarian approach when dealing with troubled students. These inexperienced teachers are then placed in a power struggle with their students. The study then stated that these reactions then result in an increase in the chance of a minor disciplinary incident escalating to a major disruption.

 The study then went on to explain the harsh reality of zero tolerance policies for special education students with behavior problems. The main concern regarding this aspect of the study is the unfair over representation of special education students in suspension records. The study found that school discipline is unfair and inconsistent application of disciplinary measures is common (Skiba, pg. 338). One such unfair action is that often students who are habitual offenders will be referred to the office for discipline for minor infractions or less severe behaviors. These frequent visits to the office will then lead these special education students on an “accelerated course of delinquency by providing them with little parental supervision [and] a few extra days with deviant peers” (Skiba, pg. 339).

Additionally the study examined the implications of the IDEA reform in 1997 under the Clinton administration. The first modification was the introduction of mandatory 45 day alternative placement before expulsion for special education students. This alternative placement is meant to be an opportunity to work with the students and determine if their behaviors are result from their disability. Furthermore, when a student is approaching ten days of suspension, the school must conduct manifestation meetings with the parents to determine if the behaviors are resulting from their disability before further actions may occur. This will hopefully help to combat the student from getting additional suspensions and being placed up for expulsion. The main focus of these initiatives is to encourage a working relationship with the families of these students by seeing parents as partners not another party on which to place blame or punish.

Finally, the alternative method of earl response was explained. The first aspect was described as alternatives to violence. These actions included peer mediation and conflict resolution training for teachers and students. The second aspect was teacher education in classroom management and discipline techniques to de-escalate situation as opposed to escalate them. The third aspect was that of early intervention and understanding warning signs of violent behavior to come. The fourth main component was improved data collection on discipline to detect warning signs and target students in crisis earlier. All interventions were aimed at educating the schools and teaching them how to handle problems before they are problems and teaching children how to interact successfully with each other (Skiba, pg. 342).

**Comparison of Literature to Case Study: Discipline**

With Isaiah’s suspension history of ten days of out of school suspension for fighting coupled with his final disciplinary infraction of bringing a sling shot to school, Isaiah does fall into the pattern described by Exceptional Children. The school did have to comply with IDEA 1997 and hold manifestation meetings and evaluate if his disability caused his actions; however, though his diagnosis of ADHD leaves room for impulsivity in his actions, by consciously asking another teacher about a sling shot being classified as a weapon, the zero tolerance policy was enacted and Isaiah received ten days out of school suspension.

This no tolerance policy hinders Isaiah’s progress in the classroom, because he is a child who has little supervision and support at home. He will most likely not complete the work given to him for those ten days and his grade will suffer accordingly. In addition, this detrimental effect the suspensions has on his academic progress will result in him having to repeat the grade, which (if the American Educational Research Journal is correct) will lead Isaiah to possibly drop out due to ”grade retention being the single most powerful predictor” of dropping out. Additionally, as stated in both the American Educational Research Journal and Exceptional Children, the Columbine High School incident of school shootings urged many schools to comply with stricter no tolerance policies on weapons in an attempt to avoid that type of situation. What's more is this incident with Isaiah supports the Canadian Educational Administrations and Policy’s claim that weapons are a primary concern in American schools. With Maple Heights’ decision to implement a no tolerance policy as opposed to installing metal detectors like most urban schools, I believe Maple is trying to send a message regarding their stance on violence in their school (Skiba, pg. 337).

**Issue 3: Standards and Curriculum**

***External Standards and Good Teaching: The Pros and Cons of Telling Teachers What to Do***

The Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis describes the rationale and organizational strategy behind creating educational standards. The goal of educational standards is to maximize the probability of good teaching of worthwhile content to all students (Porter, pg. 343). This would infer that some students are not getting worthwhile educations dependent on their school environment. The study outlined three main problems with this idea:

1. What is worthwhile content?
2. What is good teaching?
3. How can good teaching of worthwhile content best be provided?

First, what is worthwhile content? This area was described to be the broadest of the three questions. A main reason for this disagreement is the fact that teachers, parents, students and administrators are divided as to what content is considered worthwhile. Additionally the study indicated that a very distinguishable divided between social classes. “In studies in elementary school mathematics, poor children and minority students – even within the same schools and within the same classrooms received less instruction on concepts and applications and more instruction on computation skills than did more affluent and white students” (Porter, pg. 351). Furthermore, the argument between higher order thinking and problem solving skills versus basic computation skills is even further disputed by stating that “Affluent communities demand more content and more conceptual and application-oriented content than do less affluent communities” (Porter, pg. 352).

How good teaching is defined is another area where the study indicates there is a great deal of disagreement. The two main sides of this argument are defined as direct teaching and student discussion/active student participation. Both parties do, however, agree that good teaching is planful (Porter, pg. 345). Good teaching must inspire children from poor families, not drive them out of school. Additionally, good teaching must not stifle the learning experiences for more gifted students (Porter, pg. 353).

The aspect of how good teaching of worthwhile content can be provided delves into the realm of standards. The main finding regarding standards is that they require teachers to *teach for exposure* as opposed to teaching for in-depth understanding as a result of more and more topics being taught in shorter amounts of time with little hope for student mastery (Porter, pg. 345). The study then goes on to discuss the purpose of standards and how they can be most beneficial. The conclusion here was that standards are meant to sort people into categories of competent and incompetent. Moreover, the conclusion that standards are best utilized when they are strengthened by rewards such as merit pay for teachers and promotion for students rather than by force, which was described as students and teachers being externally motivated to accomplish something for fear of what will happen if the goals is not obtained (Porter, pg. 348).

***Effects of High-Stakes Testing on Instruction***

The article begins by outlying why standards are designed to be covered by schools when developed by individuals outside of the school. The article points out that the standards are developed to improve efficiency and effectiveness of instruction by narrowing the content taught to fragmented bits that are to be covered at a certain point in one’s educational experience (Shepard, pg. 1). The article then goes on to discuss how even though these standards are being taught and tested, there is potential “for test scores to go up without there being a commensurate gain in learning”. In addition, though the standards are being implemented, there has been no gain in higher-order and application skills. The rationale given for this was that teachers are now teaching to the test and designing materials that mirror the test as opposed to providing students with application-type problems (Shepard, pg. 2). Another reason given for teaching to the test was that “[teachers] are under substantial, even great pressure to raise test scores (Shepard, pg. 5). As the article goes on to analyze teacher’s reactions to this new testing phenomenon, it indicated that teachers feel higher-order thinking skills are being slighted, as were topics that are not on the test, to give more emphasis to basic skills. Teachers’ room for differentiation of material to meet individual students’ needs was also indicated as an area that is compromised due to standards and test preparation.

An alternative view was that by implementing standards for education all students have the chance to master the basics before going on to other more difficult material (Shepard, pg. 9). It also outlined how testing gives teachers a common goal and a sense of purpose and clarify learning goals specific to each topic. The research also highlighted that testing helps to identify struggling students and help get them the assistance and interventions that they need to succeed. However, the argument for standardized testing hindering gifted students was presented that the standards in essence hold these students back by providing vast amounts of time devoted to drilling basic skills that the struggling students need to learn (Shepard, pg. 10).

***Making Mathematics Work for All Children: Issues of Standards, Test8ing and Equity***

Educational Researcher conducted a study on how the standards system is hindering the education of minority students in a disproportionate manner. Their hypothesis is then that because the minority students are getting less than satisfactory educations they are then leaving school with negligible skills and wind up having access only to the lowest paying jobs (Schoenfeld, pg. 13). The study spends a lot of time discussing the current reforms in educational standards affecting the educations of minority students. The main component they are resistant against is the procedural versus conceptual model in the standards. The study indicates that minority students are privy only to the procedural aspects of standards and not pushing students to more in-depth problem solving skills and are thus being held back from the rest of the population (Shoenfeld, pg. 14). They feel that the students only experiencing the procedural, rote aspect of mathematics and are graduating as a result of taking a test and arbitrarily arriving at a right answer through computation or placing a letter \in a box. These students have not truly become mathematically literate (Shoenfeld, pg. 15). A positive actualization of the study was that teachers have begun to make the difference in the educations of minority students by independently holding minority students to the same standards as the majority.

**Comparison of Literature to Case Study: Standards and Standardized Testing**

As the literature relates to Isaiah, standards and standardized testing should be helping Isaiah to learn basic skills and improve his performance in the classroom; however, this is not the case. I feel Isaiah is too low to benefit from the grade level standards. The *External Standards and Good Teaching* article outlined the hindrances brought upon gifted and advanced students by standardized testing holding those students back. The opposite end of the academic spectrum would be the struggling students, who – in my opinion – would be overlooked as well. Instead of not being challenged as the gifted students are, the struggling students would continue to struggle year after year because they lack the foundational skills from the year before. In essence, this is what has happened to Isaiah. Year after year he fell further and further behind and was not given the opportunity to make up the skills through remediation because he did not fall far enough below grade level until this year.

Another aspect of the standards that has failed to meet Isaiah’s individual ability level is the perseverance on teaching only topics on the test as outlines in the *High-stakes Testing* research. When teaching to the test, teachers do not have the freedom or time to cover topics not on the test. Therefore, when some students have missed prior concepts in earlier years, the teachers cannot hold the rest of the class back and teach those skills. This is why Isaiah has been given the intervention of Mobey Math. Through this computer-based intervention, Isaiah can have alternative lessons on the computer over the basic skills he is lacking, but this does not adequately replace the attention he would get if I could take time to go over these topics with him. If Isaiah were to qualify for an alternative classroom placement he could receive this type of service.

**Comparisons throughout the literature**

**Discipline and Special Education (School *Discipline at a Crossroads,* p 335)**

As discussed by Skiba, discipline policies have become punitive and rely heavily on sending a message to students that certain activities such as drugs, weapons and violence will not be tolerated. With such punitive discipline policies, the climate may make any attempt to include more students with behavioral problems, which in turn create conflicts between general and special educators (Skiba, pg. 335). This is true in Isaiah’s case, as he was subject to a no tolerance policy written for the general school population and thus received a mandatory ten day suspension. However, the incident with the slingshot was an honest *Isaiah-like action.* He explained to the principal as well as his parents that his little brother had the slingshot and was using it to shoot rocks at the dog. Isaiah knew this was wrong so he took the slingshot away. Unfortunately, he took the slingshot and then put it in his back pack, which eventually came to school. Because Isaiah had neglected to remove the slingshot before coming to school, he was in possession of a weapon and guilty of violating the school handbook regardless of his individual idiosyncrasies.[[3]](#footnote-3)

**Standards and Special Education (External Standards, pg 348)**

Porter states that standards are all designed to ensure that all students are privy to the same minimal education. He then states that because these standards are minimalistic, they in essence stifle the learning of the advanced students (Porter, pg. 353). Conversely, these standards are in fact hindering the exact opposite type of student – the type of student Isaiah is – the low ability. Because gifted education is classified as special education, both extremely high and extremely low students have similar results and experiences in the classroom. Both types of students struggle to have their individual level of education met by the general education teacher. Therefore, just as the gifted are being held back, Isaiah is being held back. He is being forced to learn at a general education pace, when he is incapable of processing and grasping topics that quickly. As a result he is left to struggle and learn very little while awaiting a diagnosis and IEP paperwork to be processed to enable him to gain access to the educational environment that will be meet his needs.

**Standardized Testing and Special Education (Responsiveness to General Education, pg. 153)**

Due to standardized tests being of the multiple choice format, it is possible for students to perform high on the tests, yet flounder in the classroom (Speece, p. 153). This is due to the little work or actual process that is being asked to show – and the chance of guessing correctly. Without the test scores being adversely affected by Isaiah’s disability and without a learning disabled diagnosis, he was not targeted as a student at risk by the IAT team. This is due to the IAT’s heavy reliance on test scores as indicators of learning disabilities. Without this red flag students such as Isaiah are left to struggle until a team of teachers takes the time to work independently with him and see how much he truly does not grasp of the content.

**Conclusion**

With Isaiah being a case of a myriad of individual problematic educational issues, he is hindered by the education system which was set in place to help students just like him. First, the special education requirements were put into place to ensure students with special needs were serviced and provided the same educational opportunities as other students. With IDEA and EHCA, the law indicated these students had rights and were legally eligible for these rights based on their disability. However, in Isaiah’s case, the law is withholding a least restrictive environment from him due to the fact that though he struggles in the classroom and has obvious learning difficulties, he does not have the learning disability that would qualify him for the educational environment that all feel would be the most successful placement.

 In regards to discipline, again, Isaiah is being hindered by the laws and regulations. He has been subjected to following the norms of the educational system when he has a behavior disorder that adversely affects his ability to function in the classroom successfully, but without the diagnosis coming from a medical doctor, the schools cannot recognize that he is even a contender for the disorder as all psychiatric tests indicate. Without this diagnosis of Asperger s – a diagnosis that would make some of his behavioral concerns in the classroom part of his condition – he is forced to be treated to the same no tolerance policies as all other students even though he most likely does not understand the severity of what he has done. Had he been diagnosed with a disability, as explained with IDEA 1997, he would have different consequences for his actions.

 Finally, the standards are also holding Isaiah back, as research for mathematics education specifically has indicated, the mathematics classrooms typically servicing minority students are struggling to provide a successful math education and produce mathematically literate students. Additionally, because “Isaiah is so low functioning in the mathematics classroom, the standards are again holding him back because we are not truly teaching him what he needs, but rather what the state says he should be learning. Just as standards are holding back the gifted and advanced student as research indicates, they are also jeopardizing the struggling students as well by not affording them the opportunity to learn topics pertinent to them at their own academically appropriate pace. He is so far behind and lacking the foundational skills necessary to be successful that trying to teach him the content for a typical seventh grade student is far beyond his grasp.

 Overall, all three aspects: discipline, standards and special education protocols are working together to hold Isaiah back from truly being successful in school. By creating laws and protocols based on the norm of society, students who are an exception are being hurt. Isaiah would benefit from a resource room placement, but special education protocol insists that since he is not diagnosed Aspergers he would not benefit from that placement. Because Isaiah has idiosyncrasies in his behaviors such as hording, yelling out, and lacking the ability to follow societal cues for appropriate behavior, he is subject to the same rules and regulations as other students, even though he lacks the ability to understand what he did was wrong. And lastly, because Isaiah is so low functioning, the standards that were set to ensure each child had access to the minimal set of educational objectives, Isaiah is forced to try to understand concepts that are at least four grade levels beyond his current ability level. All of these components were established to help ensure a positive educational experience for all students, but are in fact what is holding Isaiah, and those like him, back.

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1. In-school suspension is a strictly silent environment. Even minor behavior infractions result in being removed from the environment. With Isaiah’s outbursts and comical comments, this was not a successful solution for him. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. A child who performs significantly lower than their peers but lacks a diagnosed learning disability is referred to for the purpose of this article as a case of dual discrepancy (DD) due to the negative correlation between the student’s ability level and their performance in school (Speece, pg. 148). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. It should be noted that once items go into Isaiah’s backpack – like homework for example – they never again do come out. Isaiah is a hoarder and compiles numerous random items when allowed to have a backpack. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)