**How school protocols and state-mandated regulations effect academic content time with regulations in the areas of discipline, special education regulations and time-allotted standardized testing preparation.**

**Introduction:**

Education in Ohio is limited to roughly 180 days-worth of time for seven hours of the day. This is roughly 50% of the year. Other countries, and even other states, have gone to longer school years and/or longer school days, but how much of the original time set aside for education is wasted due to regulations and protocols teachers need to follow for aspects such as IEP’s, discipline, and standardized testing? Would education in America need to be extended, time-wise, if the time already allotted was used more effectively? If requirements that distract from true learning were eliminated, would the time set aside for learning in Ohio be sufficient?

The purpose of this study is to examine how much time is taken away from learning due to regulations imposed on teachers by administration and on administration imposed on by the state. Additionally, identification of the specific types of issues taking away from education will be analyzed individually to determine if there truly is a way to eliminate the distractions and if these aspects are, in fact, taking away an abnormally large amount of time from education. The individual issues being analyzed both at individual school levels and the state level will be discipline procedures, special education regulations, and rigid department pacing guides with time allotted standardized testing preparation.

**Research Foundation:**

In today’s schools, there are three *hot* issues: violence, IEPs, and standardized testing. All three of these affect the academic environment, and anything that affects the academic environment affects the curriculum. Violence, for example, plagues schools in all sections of the country and results in state and federal regulations being put into place at all schools. These regulations mandate school crisis plans, intruder protocols, and bomb threat procedures, all of which need drills practiced during school hours. Additionally, these plans are by no means simplistic and often take up to a full school year to write correctly. The individuals who are responsible for such plans are often teachers who must take time away from their classrooms to develop the procedures for their specific school.

Another aspect of the educational system that is taking away from the traditional classroom is that of special education litigation. With the passage of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA), teachers are inundated with paperwork and meetings for individual students, which again, take away from the time they dedicate to their classroom preparation. School’s protocols for documentation of interventions and accommodations vary, but all schools must be prepared to offer proof of assistance if ever questioned as to how they assist a certain child. Many leading researchers in the area of special education – though they support the implementation of IDEA and EAHCA – feel that schools may end up with paper compliance rather than real or exemplary implementation (Smith, pg. 3), which again takes time away from teachers’ actual jobs.

Yet another area that hinders teachers is standardized testing. Schools, especially those struggling to make adequate yearly progress, spend extraordinary amounts of time devising pacing guides and course of studies to dictate what teachers should teach and when they should teach it. These pacing guides are often counted by days and teachers are held to completing the work in that set amount of time by short-cycle assessments and quarterly exams. Often times, these pacing guides have teachers covering a year’s worth of content in less than three quarters of the school year, which is just the case at Milkovich Middle School in Maple Heights. Teachers are expected to have struggling students learn at an honors pace to ensure there is enough OAA preparation time allotted before the state test. Therefore, as opposed to teaching students at a pace that is comfortable to them, a pace at which they can truly learn the material and not just mimic back scripted responses to posed questions, teachers must fly through material, only presenting it to students at a superficial level. When this occurs, all retention of the material is lost, which again is a protocol that is not using educational time effectively and efficiently.

Overall, good teachers are being forced to comply with regulations that are set by administration at the school, state and federal level to help combat not-so-good teachers. However, these regulations have teachers’ time taken away from their classroom. Teachers must attend meetings, in-services, and create paper trails to prove they are in compliance with these regulations. And as America falls further and further behind other pivotal countries, one cannot help but wonder if these distractions in the form of protocols and mandates are the reason.

**Personal Connections:**

As a mathematics teacher, many regulations are placed on my classrooms by the state and my school’s administration in the areas of discipline, special educations, and standardized testing. For example in the area of course planning, my school requires detailed lesson plans indicating the differentiation that will be implemented, the accommodations that will be made for IEP and 504 plans, and the links to the state standards. Teachers are expected to follow the district pacing guide and be teaching the same topic within days of each other – regardless of the students’ ability levels. We also must cover material in the same sequence; a sequence developed by administration. Additionally, we must have time dedicated to standardized test preparation every week, preferably every day. With regards to the special education stipulations, it takes a full school year to identify students and get them the help they need, *if* they qualify by federal standards. Teachers must take time to document every failed attempt to assist the child, as well as every strategy that did assist the student. Time must be taken to meet with all interested parties – parents, teachers, counselors, psychologists, the student, and special education teachers. At times, if one party cannot attend the meeting, the meeting must be postponed, thus slowing the process even more. Finally, as a result of discipline protocols, students are often removed from my class for weeks at a time due to “no tolerance” policies and strict discipline codes. At the same time, students in my classroom who continually disrupt the learning environment must be documented and follow a long, drawn out process of parent phone calls, meetings, and detentions in order to have them removed from the class to help create an environment that is more conducive to learning for the others.

Overall, the question of how mandates and protocols for school discipline, special education and standardized testing adversely affect the learning environment will be researched in an attempt to clarify the rationale behind such mandates. Furthermore, to investigate if others feel students are not truly being helped by regulations being developed to do just that. Are my experiences within these areas drastically different from the norm; do others feel these regulations are helpful to the educational system in America becoming competitive with other, more successful countries?

**Problem Statement:**

Academic time is compromised due to non-academic issues such as government mandates and school protocols in the areas of discipline, special education regulations, and standardized testing preparation.

**Objectives**

* **To explore various views regarding protocols involving discipline, namely no tolerance policies**
* To investigate history and litigation requiring discipline protocols as well as standardized testing regulations
* To research special education regulations on documentation
* To discover underlying principle of time-allotted standardized test preparation

Upon researching the aforementioned objectives, connections will be made as to how litigation and the government have influenced the educational world and begun to dictate requirements for the teaching profession. Moreover, how these stipulations and regulations take necessary time away from the main focus of education – the students. Finally, any alternative methods of dealing with discipline, special education and standardized testing will be evaluated as they emerge, and the extent of time involved to utilize the programs will be analyzed.

**Literature Review:**

**Discipline:**

**Across the literature examined thus far: Monograph 2 of the Virginia Council of Technology Teacher Education by John E. Bonfadini; Zero Tolerance Policies in Context: A Preliminary Investigation to Improve School Discipline and School Safety by Mary M. Shannon and Douglas S. McCall; and Addressing Barriers to Learning published by Mental Health in Schools Program and Policy Analysts, school discipline is seen as an all-encompassing burden in today’s educational field. The Virginia Council of Technology Teacher Education explained the daunting task of Due Process, and how it requires a myriad of regulations be followed incase parents sue school systems. The Mental Health in Schools Program and Policy Analysts stated that current litigation has forced schools to comply with various safety regulations such as crisis drills and intruder protocols, which some are fighting to say cause a bigger distraction and anxiety to students than an actual emergency. In addition, the information discussed in Zero Tolerance Policy in Context indicates that those stipulations are, too, in effective. Overall, the problem of school discipline has been indicated to be the number one reason for *teacher burn-out* in most research due to the decline in classroom behavior since as early as 1980 (Bonfadini, pg. 1). A look into the rationale for such policies and regulations will further elaborate on the issue of school discipline.**

**Special Education:**

The area of special education is mostly regulated by IDEA 2004. Within these regulations, and in conjunction with NCLB, the field has gone for accessibility to accountability as stated by Christy Chambers in *Trends in Special Education*. Chambers views are mirrored in *Individualized Education Programs* by Stephen Smith. Likewise, both articles are focused on interventions and the individualized aspect of educational plans. As Chambers states, “What [we are] seeing across the country is a shift to addressing the child's needs because children are very different” (Chambers, pg. 2). The emergent concept of RTIs (response to intervention programs) is conveyed across both articles as the solution to this newfound problem of treating each and every child with a disability differently yet equally. Therefore, RTIs will be further researched along with the documentation process and needed for IEPs and accommodation plans.

**Standardized Testing:**

“Until recently, [standardized test] scores were used for a rather limited set of purpose. Scores were used to group students for instruction, evaluate and modify school district curricula, plan instruction, diagnose achievement deficits, place students into special programs (e.g., gifted, handicapped), and help parents understand general achievement levels of their children” (Haladyna, pg. 2). Like in *Raising Standardized Achievement Test Scores,* current research is delving into how standardized testing has diverged from its traditional role of evaluating students to a more critical view of if schools are successful. With this new heightened sense of importance, research is suggesting schools are perseverating on these scores, and therefore, these scores are now dictating education instead of guiding its practices. *Old and New Beliefs of data-driven Reform* seeks to look into how exactly this transition has taken place and the rationale behind the current trends. While these two articles present two drastically different views, the first as a negative pressure on schools and the later as a new insight to the application of knowledge and not just the memorization of isolated facts, further research will be conducted on both views to see which view encompasses the majority of the population and possess the most validity.

**Schedule:**

After presenting the proposed topic for research on April 6th, research will continue through the end of April. Articles will be gathered, topics will be sorted and any emergent concepts within the articles will be researched as well. In May, research will be broken into broad categories and compared. From these comparisons, conclusions will be drawn as to what the history is regarding protocols for discipline, special education documentation, and standardized testing preparation. Additionally, a comprehensive normative view will be generated regarding the aforesaid categories.

**Qualifications**

As a classroom teacher, dealing with regulations and requirements is commonplace. Meetings, paperwork, and documentation, all take up time that would otherwise be devoted to my students. In addition, having served as a department chair, the rigors of course structure is familiar to me, as is instructing other teachers as to topics and sequencing of lessons. To research the rationale, history, and viewpoints on protocols and state-mandated regulations will help me as I continue my work in the classroom as well as in my future role as a curriculum director.

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