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Putting Educational Reform Into Practice: The Impact of the No Child Left Behind Act On Students, Teachers, and Schools

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Claremont McKenna College

Putting Educational Reform Into Practice: The Impact of the No Child Left Behind Act
On Students, Teachers, and Schools

submitted to
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and
Professor Rebecca Hatkoff

A Thesis Presented
by

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Abstract

This thesis seeks to investigate the effects of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) on U.S. student achievement and teacher effectiveness. By combining the results from various data sources, I am able to indicate the levels of student preparedness, school spending, and specific classroom practices. After an analysis of my results, I suggest that NCLB has found moderate success in increasing the level of math preparedness for younger students from historically disadvantaged backgrounds. On the other hand, the data also suggests that there have been no statistically significant gains in reading achievement after the implementation of NCLB. Additionally, spending by school districts increased a significant amount and NCLB raised teacher pay and the number of teachers entering the profession with graduate degrees. Within schools, NCLB appears to have directed instruction towards math and reading and away from other subjects as teachers strove to achieve proficiency on the new accountability measures implemented by NCLB.

Introduction

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 is often seen as one of the most comprehensive and direct attempts that the U.S. government has made to enact educational policy reform. After President George W. Bush signed the NCLB on January 8, 2002, states were required to administer statewide, standardized tests annually to all of their students in order to show that their schools were achieving up to certain standards.¹ More importantly, states also had to begin identifying schools that were underperforming and making sure that they would be on track to achieve “adequate yearly process” (AYP).² The central goal of NCLB was to improve the quality of education across the U.S. by raising student achievement and to increase the numbers of highly qualified teachers that wanted to teach in public schools.³ To accomplish this, NCLB sought to create a system of publicized accountability and sanctions to ensure that states were striving to improve their most underperforming schools.⁴

This mechanism of achieving success has caused the NCLB to be one of the most controversial, large-scale policy initiatives that has ever been undertaken by the U.S. government. The NCLB act required states to establish set benchmark standards of achievement for their students as well as set predetermined requirements for their teachers to be considered as “qualified”. Most of this standardization occurs through the mechanism of annual state testing.⁵ As a result of the increased focus on standardized

¹ U.S. Department of Education, 2002

² U.S. Department of Education, 2002

³ U.S. Department of Education, 2002

⁴ U.S. Department of Education, 2002

⁵ U.S. Department of Education, 2002

testing with a focus on mathematics and reading, schools began to divert resources away from programs and subjects that were not on the state tests.⁶ Subjects such as art, music, and social studies received decreased funding as school resources were pumped into the math and reading programs since those were the subjects that the students would be tested on at the end of the year.⁷ On top that, some research has even shown that schools and states were incentivized to alter test scores in a ploy to receive greater funding from the state and federal government.⁸

Since the scope of the NCLB is so wide, this thesis seeks to tackle an analysis of the effects of the policy through several lenses. I will examine the student side by comparing student outcomes before and after the introduction of NCLB. With regards to teachers, I will evaluate the differences between teacher surveys and classroom practices before and after. Finally, with regards to the schools as a whole, I will analyze spending and school structure as a whole. By viewing the policy results from different angles, I hope to piece together a more comprehensive picture of the impact that NCLB has had.

For students, my findings reveal that NCLB had a statistically significant effect on the math proficiency of elementary aged students.⁹ This change is most clearly highlighted in schools that serve students from historically underserved populations, with the largest benefit occurring among Hispanic students.¹⁰ Curiously though, I did not

⁶ Rothstein, Jacobsen, and Wilder 2008: 12

⁷ Rothstein [et al.] 2008: 13

⁸ Jacob and Levitt 2003: 5

⁹ Jacob and Levitt 2003: 6

¹⁰ National Center for Education Statistics 2017

find that changes in reading achievement had statistically significant changes after NCLB.¹¹

For teachers, my findings reveal that NCLB helped standardize what it means to be a “highly qualified” teacher and also increased the amount of teachers who hold graduate degrees.¹² Additionally, within the classroom, there is evidence to suggest that NCLB has caused teachers to focus upon content acquisition for the standardized test subjects over other important considerations such as topic mastery and real life application.¹³

For schools as a whole, my findings reveal that NCLB has resulted in a nearly \$600 increase in spending per pupil in the average school district.¹⁴ Even though funding increased per student, many schools did not distribute those resources equitably and focused upon the areas that were being tested on.¹⁵ This results in a weakening of programs for subjects that are outside of the scope of the NCLB standards.¹⁶

Thus, my thesis is organized as follows. I first outline the historical background of NCLB then present what my theories are regarding the three areas of focus; students, teachers and schools. I then conduct an analysis of what existing research says about those three areas. After that, I conduct my own analysis using various survey and national data to provide new insight into the effects of NCLB. Finally, I present recommendations for future policy research and discuss how we have arrived at the

¹¹ National Center for Education Statistics 2017

¹² Hannaway and Hamilton 2008: 22

¹³ Hannaway and Hamilton 2008: 24

¹⁴ Rothstein, Jacobsen, and Wilder 2008: 8

¹⁵ Rothstein, Jacobsen, and Wilder 2008: 14

¹⁶ Dee, Jacob, and Schwartz 2010: 9

present moment with the new Every Student Succeeds Act passed by President Obama and what we should do in the future with regards to educational policy reform.

Historical Background

Different types of school accountability reforms have been introduced prior to NCLB, and it might even be argued that the NCLB was a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which was a federal legislation regarding K-12 education in the U.S.¹⁷ President Lyndon B. Johnson first signed the ESEA into law more than 50 years ago in 1965 and declared that it would be a new age of public education in America.¹⁸ The act provided for special grants to school districts that served low-income students, federal grants for classroom textbooks and library books, created special education centers, and funded scholarships for low-income college students.¹⁹ The law also supported federal and local educational agencies to improve and monitor the quality of elementary and secondary education.²⁰ These programs existed in the form of school intervention programs, teacher training, and advocacy for disadvantaged populations.²¹

In the years after the implementation of the ESEA, the federal government raised the amount of resources that were being dedicated to public education, but that was not sufficient to solve the overall issue of public education in the U.S.²² Because of the fact that public education continued to be a local and state specific issue, it requires a national, state-by-state plan of action. Thus, the NCLB was put into place to solve for these difficulties as well as address the core issues that were first presented in the ESEA in 1965.

¹⁷ Brenchly 2015

¹⁸ Brenchly 2015

¹⁹ Brenchly 2015

²⁰ Brenchly 2015

²¹ Brenchly 2015

²² Brenchly 2015

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act was signed into law on January 8, 2002 by President George W. Bush in an effort to increase the quality of public education in America.²³ At the time, there were limited statewide standards for achievement and this act sought to create such measures on both the teacher and student sides in a push to raise student achievement and teacher quality.²⁴ The main proponents of the NCLB held the position that by having known standards of achievement for all schools, states would have greater knowledge of which schools were underachieving and could specifically target them for improvement.²⁵ Schools would also be more informed about the level that they should be achieving at and what their greatest weaknesses were.²⁶ Additionally, by creating specific requirements for what defines a “quality teacher” states could better verify and maintain the quality of their teachers in public schools.²⁷ Parents could also be more knowledgeable about what credentialing and qualifications their children’s’ teachers had to have in order to be in the classroom.²⁸

As a whole, the main populations that the NCLB was targeting were students in poverty, minorities, students receiving special education accommodations, and students who speak and understand limited or no English.²⁹ It sought to provide equal educational opportunities for historically disadvantaged students to bring them up to a national standard by setting clear designations for being a “highly qualified” teacher and notifying parents of students in Title 1 programs if their student’s teacher does not meet

²³ Dever 2009: 63

²⁴ Dever 2009: 63

²⁵ Dever 2009: 64

²⁶ Dever 2009: 66

²⁷ Byrnes 2009: 22

²⁸ Byrnes 2009: 24

²⁹ U.S. Department of Education 2002

these standards.³⁰ The main purpose of the law was to make sure that teachers that were educators for these types of students had the proper education, background and experience to be able to teach students with such needs.³¹

³⁰ U.S. Department of Education 2002

³¹ U.S. Department of Education 2002

Theories

Students

I predict that the NCLB will have a positive effect on the math and reading achievement of students due to the fact that the standards being established specifically focus on those two areas. I do think however, that class time may become more focused upon test preparation than exploratory learning, which may change the character of the education that our students are receiving in public schools. In terms of which grades will be affected the most, I think that the middle school age students will be affected the most because those years are when the most of the important math and reading topics are learned.

Teachers

I predict that the quality overall of teachers will improve slightly due to the new qualification requirements for becoming a highly qualified teacher. Additionally, I think that the focus upon adopting effective teaching practices in the classroom and guiding those types of development with existing literature will greatly help the teachers improve class time. Furthermore, increased funding for teachers will likely result in more qualified and graduate degree holding teachers entering the profession.

Schools

I predict that schools may experience an influx of resources for math and reading support, but also will have greater pressure to have their students succeed on standardized math and reading tests. This may result in resources being diverted away

from certain programs that are not a part of the NCLB standards. Additionally, administrators may have greater communication with parents due to the new requirements for teachers and information sharing that the NCLB initiated.

Impact on Students

Since the NCLB was passed two decades ago, there has been a large amount of research and discussion on the topic of whether or not it was a successful endeavor. Some researchers argue that if viewed on a larger scale, the act was largely successful at providing greater funding for public education and increasing the resources and standards for teachers at Title 1 schools that were previously completely failing to provide an adequate education for their students.³² Furthermore, they claim that it encouraged greater information sharing between schools and parents of students so that all stakeholders in the child's education were more informed.³³ On the other side, others argue that NCLB has created an educational system that has tunnel vision towards meeting the standardized benchmarks and simply teaching to get the scores on the state tests at the end of the year.³⁴ They claim that this narrow focus has weakened and took funding away from teachers and programs that are important and highly beneficial for students from historically disadvantaged populations.³⁵

After the implementation of NCLB, education was seen as more of a rigid one-path system rather than an open-ended experience of learning a great variety of subjects and allowing the students to find out where their main interest lies.³⁶ Researchers on this side believe that NCLB turned America's public education system into a factory farming system for testing, which on a surface level is hard to argue

³² Dale and Springer 2009: 12

³³ Dale and Springer 2009: 13

³⁴ Dee and Thomas 2010: 5

³⁵ Dee and Thomas 2010: 7

³⁶ Dee and Thomas 2010: 3

against, especially with the heavy importance being placed upon SAT and ACT testing for entrance into college.³⁷

Due to the fact that the NCLB was put into place nationally at the same time, many studies that analyze the impact that it had on students conduct a time-series trend analysis of scores on state assessments before and after the introduction of the act. Researchers found that student achievement in the areas that were tested for on the state standardized exams improved since NCLB.³⁸ It is important to note though that some researchers argue that the analysis from these scores may be misleading due to the fact that states have incentives to bolster and misrepresent their scores to fulfill the NCLB mandated requirements.³⁹

Below are four graphs (Figures 1 – 4) that display data from public schools from the National Center of Education Statistics.⁴⁰ They show achievement in math and reading for fourth and eighth grade students by ethnicity (White, Black, and Hispanic) in the years before and after NCLB. The trends on the graphs suggest that NCLB initiatives may have improved 4th grade math as shown by the noticeable shift upwards following the introduction of NCLB in early 2002. (Figure 2) They also show a similar upward trend for black 8th grade students by the steep increase after 2002 in performance. There is not a clear indication of a large effect of NCLB on the reading scores of both 4th and 8th grade students.

³⁷ Dee and Thomas 2010: 4

³⁸ Dale and Springer 2009: 6

³⁹ Dale and Springer 2009: 10

⁴⁰ National Center of Education Statistics 2017

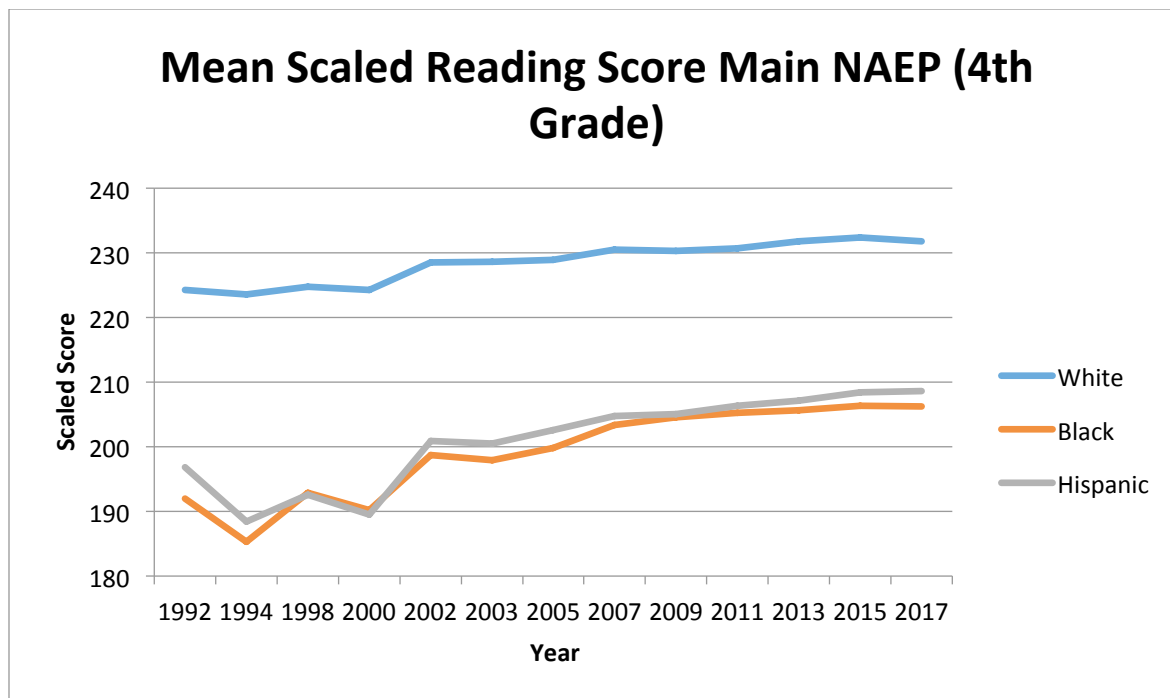


Figure 1. Mean Scaled Reading Scores for 4th grade students on NAEP

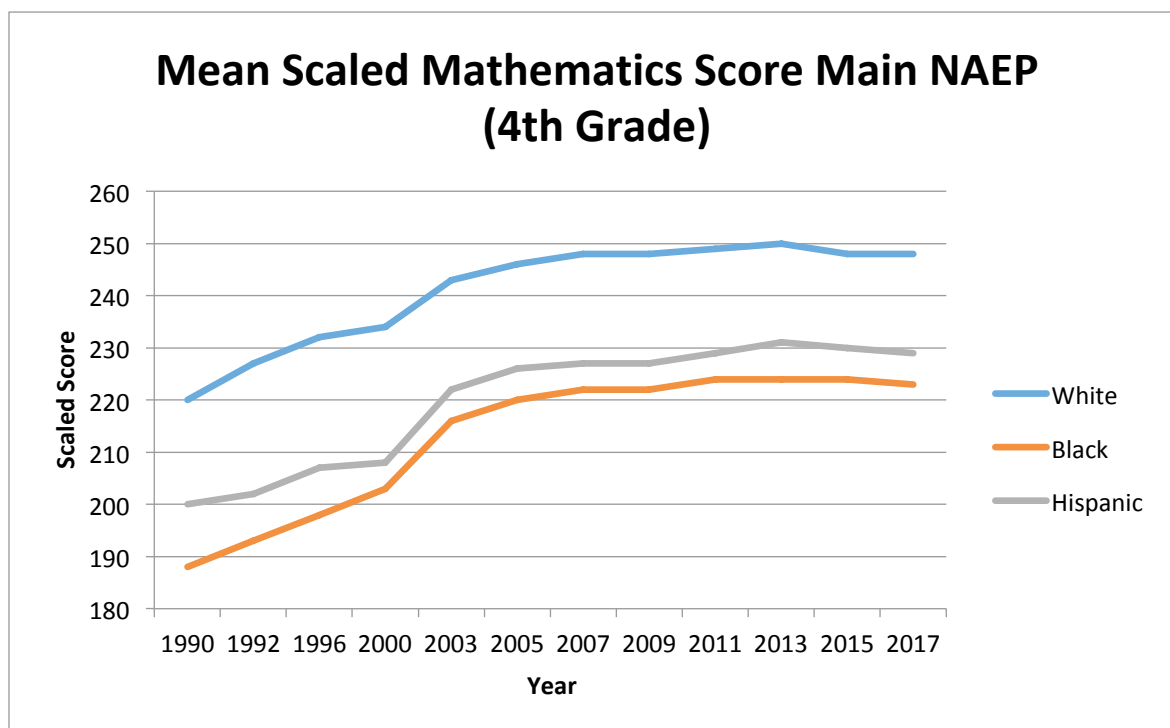


Figure 2. Mean Scaled Math Scores for 4th grade students on NAEP

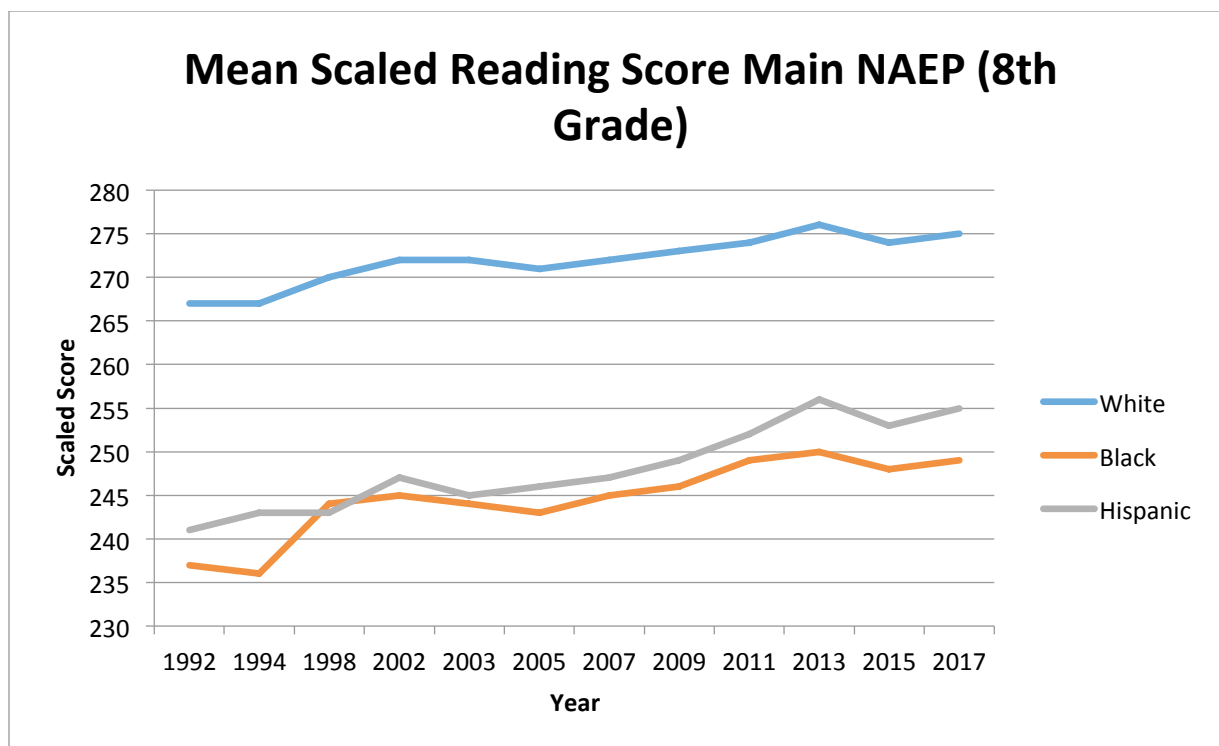


Figure 3. Mean Scaled Reading Scores for 8th grade students on NAEP

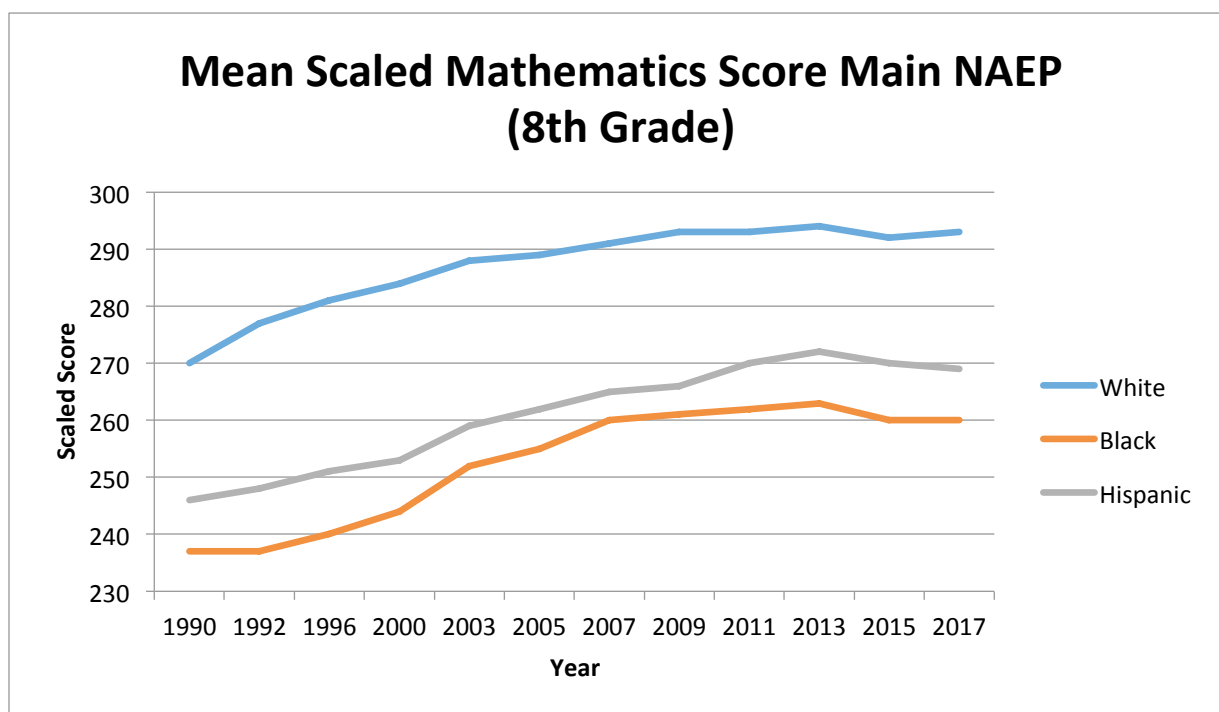


Figure 4. Mean Scaled Math Scores for 8th grade students on NAEP

There is also data from the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) that are very applicable in this instance. The TIMSS is a data set that combines data on 4th grade math achievement for participating countries in 1995, 2003, and 2007.⁴¹ The TIMSS compares the math achievement results for countries that are members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).⁴² The TIMSS showed that 4th graders in the U.S. experienced great strides in the improvement of math achievement following the introduction of NCLB, which supports other findings that suggest that math achievement improved greatly after NCLB, especially in the younger years of public education.

It also must be noted though NCLB greatly altered the instruction that was given to students and what the students were learning in the classroom. After NCLB, schools and teachers felt greater pressure to be able to achieve at the standards that were set out for mathematics and reading.⁴³ If they did not achieve at that required level, sanctions might be levied against the school and the teachers were at risk of losing their jobs.⁴⁴ Even though this might seem like a good motivator for the teachers to become better and more dedicated educators in the classroom, researchers argue that the pressure for teachers to get better and the things that we are requiring them to become more improved on are very much misguided and misplaced.⁴⁵ A teacher should be focusing on developing the creativity of a student and openness to learning, not teaching certain state standards in math and reading so that their students can get a

⁴¹ National Center for Education Statistics TIMSS 2015

⁴² National Center for Education Statistics TIMSS 2015

⁴³ Dale and Springer 2009: 11

⁴⁴ Dale and Springer 2009: 14

⁴⁵ Dale and Springer 2009: 15

certain score on the standardized test at the end of the year.⁴⁶ Yes, it may be argued that this is most effective for teachers that have no concept of what they should be teaching in the classroom, but most of the evidence disagrees with this idea. It has been shown that a more open and comprehensive education as we are starting to implement now with the new and improved common core that focuses on how the students are learning the material more so than what they are actually learning.⁴⁷ For many, the standards put in place by the NCLB proved far too restrictive and thus, were not conducive to a productive and thriving learning environment in the classroom.

⁴⁶ Dale and Springer 2009: 14

⁴⁷ Common Core State Standards Initiative 2009

Impact on Teachers

One of the main requirements outlined in the NCLB Act was to bring more qualified teachers into the field of public education and to certify that the existing teachers were indeed “highly qualified”.⁴⁸ This is especially important in schools that are designated as Title 1 schools that serve disadvantaged student populations. With the NCLB, states were forced to determine whether their teachers were highly qualified to be in the classroom and standardize the process to become certified. After NCLB, most teachers were or became qualified under NCLB, but large inequities still existed with five states and the District of Columbia reporting that 75% or less of classes were taught by highly qualified teachers in the 2004-2005 school year.⁴⁹

More importantly, being “highly qualified” simply means that the teachers had sufficient content knowledge and educational backgrounds to teach the subject that they specialized in.⁵⁰ Even though these teachers knew their material, content area expertise does not mean that they will be successful trying to teach such material in the classroom to a students for the first time.⁵¹ More important are factors such as having a growth mindset, implementing successful teacher practices in the classroom, and engaging in warm, but demanding classroom management techniques.⁵²

Teachers that are successful in the classroom also must have current knowledge of new teaching practices and curriculum adaptation for specific student populations.⁵³

With the NCLB, this was put in to law, as it required states to individualize their

⁴⁸ U.S. Department of Education, 2002

⁴⁹ National Center for Education Statistics 2006

⁵⁰ National Center for Education Statistics 2006

⁵¹ Marszalek, Odom, LaNasa, College, and Adler 2010: 6

⁵² Marszalek, Odom, LaNasa, College, and Adler 2010: 8

⁵³ Marszalek, Odom, LaNasa, College, and Adler 2010: 17

certification requirements with a High Objective State Standard of Evaluation (HOUSSE) plan that specified what strategies teachers, especially veteran teachers with students that have special needs should use in the classroom.⁵⁴ A HOUSSE plan usually encompasses a point system or rubric where teachers can get points for doing certain things such as professional development that contributes to their teaching knowledge and expertise. It also usually has components of performance evaluation, a portfolio of evidence of the teacher's competency, student achievement data, and even activities, services, and awards received.⁵⁵ All of these factors combine to make sure that the teacher is performing at their highest capacity in the classroom and is able to teach children of all backgrounds and socioeconomic statuses.

Even though these provisions exist in the NCLB to help in raising teacher quality in the classroom, some researchers found that the state testing decreased the standards that teachers have in the classroom due to the narrower focus it pushed teachers towards.⁵⁶ Due to the fact that the NCLB only tested on a limited subjects, and topics, some teachers were motivated to only focus on those particular things in the classroom rather than providing a holistic education for their students.⁵⁷ This resulted in decreased quality of instruction in the classroom and less learning overall for the students even if test scores were increasing for the school and district.⁵⁸

In light of this, the NCLB provided funds for schools to recruit and retain highly qualified teachers and give them proper professional development opportunities to

⁵⁴ Burdette, Laflin, and Eve 2005: 2

⁵⁵ Burdette, Laflin, and Eve 2005: 3

⁵⁶ Dee and Thomas 2010: 5

⁵⁷ Dee and Thomas 2010: 7

⁵⁸ Dee and Thomas 2010: 6

improve their instructional ability in the classroom.⁵⁹ In areas where there were specific alternative route and certification programs such as in Chicago, the push to attract and hire more talented and motivated new teachers was a great success and improved the overall teacher qualifications and morale.⁶⁰ These schools are now far more successful than they were before and have great teachers in their classrooms.⁶¹

NCLB's focus on teacher evaluation has also led to an increased effort to provide teachers with feedback about their teaching and student performance.⁶² The hope was that this new system would help teachers have a greater understanding of what their classroom looks like from the outside perspective.⁶³ The evaluations were supposed to give teachers more information about specific things that they could improve on in the classroom and where their greatest weaknesses lay.⁶⁴ In practice though, many teachers became frustrated with what they deemed "unfair" requirements for them in the classroom.⁶⁵ Teacher testimonials show that many teachers held the belief that they were being unfairly criticized and evaluated on the performance of the lowest achieving students in the class, some of which had severe learning disabilities or were just starting to speak English.⁶⁶ The evaluation system on some schools even made it so that a

⁵⁹ Birman, Boyle, Le Floch, Elledge, Holtzman, Song, Thomsen, Walters, and Yoon 2009: 15

⁶⁰ Birman et al. 2009: 16

⁶¹ Birman et al. 2009: 7

⁶² Hazi and Rucinski 2009: 4

⁶³ Hazi and Rucinski 2009: 6

⁶⁴ Hazi and Rucinski 2009: 6

⁶⁵ Hazi and Rucinski 2009: 5

⁶⁶ Hazi and Rucinski 2009: 8

teacher's salary bonus was determined by how they were able to score on these evaluations, which further increased the pressure.⁶⁷

Even more egregious was the unfair distribution of evaluations among tenured and non-tenured teachers at public schools. A study found that tenured teachers were evaluated less frequently than once per year, while non-tenured teachers at similar schools were evaluated more than a few times a year.⁶⁸

Many of these concerns were due to school districts and states having unreasonable standards for student achievement.⁶⁹ States and schools having adjusted expectations for students with learning difficulties and ELL students easily remedy this problem though.

Another finding was that high stakes, state-mandates testing could result in teachers engaging in classroom practices that are not directly aligned with what they personally believe are best practices.⁷⁰ Teachers lamented how they felt extreme pressure to dedicate a significant amount of class time to teaching to the standards rather than doing lessons on more real world examples and interesting topics.⁷¹

This is not to say that teachers are fully against the provisions set in NCLB. In a study by the International Reading Association in 2005, teachers said that they agreed with the intentions and larger requirements of NCLB such as the focus being placed upon increasing the amount of resources and time dedicated to reading development.⁷² In some cases, results were finally showing once students reached later grades where

⁶⁷ Hazi and Rucinski 2009: 9

⁶⁸ Hazi and Rucinski 2009: 15

⁶⁹ Dee and Thomas 2010: 7

⁷⁰ Dee and Thomas 2010: 9

⁷¹ Dee and Thomas 2010: 9

⁷² International Reading Association Survey 2005

reading comprehension ability became more evidence such as 5th and 7th grade.⁷³ The roots of that development though occurred in 1st and 2nd grade due to NCLB.

As a whole, teachers were very much affected by the implementation of NCLB and there were many benefits as well as harms from the policy. Even though they received greater resources and support in most instances, many teachers found themselves restricted by NCLB's high stakes testing and focus upon mathematics and reading. This paved the way for the new policy and represented a learning experience both for the policy makers and education administrators in schools.

⁷³ Dee and Thomas 2010: 14

Impact on Schools

When thinking of NCLB, the first things that usually come to mind are the students, teachers, and maybe even the parents. What is often forgotten is the impact that such a policy can have on the structure, management, and makeup of an actual school. NCLB's requirements forced many schools to hire or let go of certain personnel, change how they funded teachers and programs, and even how they structured counseling for their students.⁷⁴

With regards to spending, NCLB strove to increase the amount of funding for teachers and math and reading programs so that greater quality teachers could be hired and there would be more instruction of reading comprehension and mathematical understanding.⁷⁵ In fact, the NCLB increased total current expenditure by around \$570 per pupil, or by 6.8 percent from 2000 – 2002.⁷⁶ Additionally, average annual teacher compensation increased from roughly \$75,000 to \$80,000 in states that did not have prior high quality teacher certification.⁷⁷ This is most likely due to the influx of teachers with master's degrees that occurred following the implementation of NCLB.⁷⁸

Structurally, some schools even fired teachers that were considered nonessential or began to phase out programs such as art, literature, and history.⁷⁹ In fact, over 71 percent of schools reported that they were decreasing instructional time dedicated to those subjects after NCLB.⁸⁰

⁷⁴ Hoxby 2002

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Dee, Jacob and Shchwartz 2010

⁷⁷ Dee, Jacob and Shchwartz 2010

⁷⁸ Dee, Jacob and Shchwartz 2010

⁷⁹ Pederson 2007: 288

⁸⁰ Pederson 2007: 289

The effect on counselors in schools is also important to highlight. After NCLB, counselors were required to do far more paperwork that certified that their students and staff were achieving at NCLB standards.⁸¹ They had to account for student success rates, attendance rates, and were called upon to proctor more tests and academic periods.⁸² At the same time, the standing of counselors as academic, professional, and emotional support for students and parents was decreasing due to their relegation to more clerical work.⁸³ This was a highly detrimental effect of NCLB because counselors in schools should be seen as an integral part of the structure of the school, but were overwhelmed by lots of work outside of the usual scope of their profession.

Schools also had to place a lot of focus upon arrive at the standardized tests at the end of the year and in the buildup to those dates, instructional time and attention was concentrated on succeeding on those tests.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Sabens and Zyromski 2009: 6

⁸² Sabens and Zyromski 2009: 12

⁸³ Sabens and Zyromski 2009: 9

⁸⁴ Sabens and Zyromski 2009: 10

U.S. Public Education Post NCLB

Since NCLB, public education in the U.S. has gone through a large shift towards standards and set achievement benchmarks. Large promises have been made about fundamentally changing the education system and yet, we are nowhere closer to a high functioning and effecting public education system in the U.S.

Funds that were supposed to be dedicated to schools and educational programs have been diverted to other government expenditures such as the military and states and local governments are struggling with student enrollment, but have not yet received the financial support that was promised.⁸⁵ Teaching is still not considered at the top of college graduates lists of desirable long-term professions and we continue to fall in the international rankings of math and science ability.

After the introduction of common core standards and the signing of the Every Child Succeeds Act by President Obama on December 10, 2015 educational policy reform shifted from only requiring standards for teachers and students to pushing for schools to prepare their students to attend college and receive a four-year degree as well as focus more upon how they learn topic in the classroom over what they are learning. As the U.S. job market evolves to require job applicants to have college degrees, this new model will help to prepare our students for the future.

Furthermore, I think that the new push to redesign curriculum to focus upon students gaining the learning ability and skills to understand difficult subjects is far better than focusing on specific topics that they have to learn for state tests. It gives them skills that are far more transferable to other professions and facets of daily life. We

⁸⁵ Gray, 2006

can only hope for the best with this new Administration to continue to support public schools and not fall into the trap of supporting the privatization of education.

Conclusion

At the start of this analysis, I could have never imaged the far-reaching effects that NCLB has had on the American system of public education. It has impacted people from all sides and sectors of the educational system from students, to teachers, parents, counselors, administrators, and even art teachers.

As an act that was designed to increase achievement in math and reaching for underserved students, provide greater quality teachers, and increase accountability, one might say that NCLB has been moderately successful in achieving those goals. My analysis suggests that students in elementary grades and specifically from historically underserved backgrounds greatly improved their math abilities following NCLB. Additionally, the amount of teachers with graduate level degrees greatly increased.

Even though these strides have been made, it is also important though to note the major harms that have resulted from the policy. Instructional time was specifically focused upon math and reading instruction and test preparation in favor of art, history, and literature. Teachers felt that they were being restricted by the policies and unfairly evaluated. Schools even had to restructure in order to put greater emphasis upon succeeding on the end of the year standardized tests.

With regards to students, I my theory was mostly correct, with the only inaccuracy being with the fact that elementary aged children were the ones that were most impacted by NCLB. For teachers, my theories were largely correct in principal, but in practice did not play out the way that the writers of NCLB had hoped for. More teachers with graduate degrees did enter the profession and there was greater oversight and evaluation of teaching practices, but teachers also felt unfairly treated by

the evaluations and incorporating the best classroom practices into their teacher development was not widespread among schools nationally. Finally, for schools in general, my theories were quite spot on.

I think that we are starting to learn from our mistakes and improve upon NCLB though. With the new initiatives that we are taking, I strongly believe that this next chapter in the American public education system will be a progressive and innovative one and I hope to be a part of that.

Further Research

Even though NCLB was passed less than two decades ago, research still has to be done specifically in the areas of teacher effectiveness and specific case studies on school districts that have been successful implementing NCLB standards and policies into their school districts. I think that it might be very insightful to compare different school districts that have similar demographic and socioeconomic makeups, but varying success with implementing the NCLB standards. By doing this, researchers might be able to pinpoint the specific changes in culture, policy, or teaching practices that the successful schools are making and try to transfer those over to the underperforming schools. It would also minimize the issues involved with comparing a successful affluent school to an underperforming underprivileged school.

Additionally, I think that specific case studies of districts and specific policies like the ones in Chicago that have led to significant improvements to student achievement and teacher qualifications should be conducted in order to figure out how those can be nationalized across states and into other school systems. I think that there is far too little information sharing and strategy forming between schools in different states and even different parts of states and this must be a more collaborative effort. It is so easy to look at the implementation of a policy after the fact and say what went wrong with it and what resulted from it, but if real time analysis were occurring that would be far superior. We could share knowledge of what different schools and states were implementing and whether they were working. I think that that would be a far more productive use of resources than reflecting much later on about how we could have done better.

I think that another area that could provide meaningful results would be a national survey of students that asked them about their opinions about what form of standards, testing, and schooling were most effective for them in the classroom. I think that many times, students are often the biggest stakeholders in the public education system and yet, their voices and opinions are often silenced or not heard at all. I believe that students have a lot to say about the changes that have come with NCLB and I am interested in hearing if any of their suggestions may in fact be adopted into actual reform in the school system.

Future Educational Policy Reform

Though I think that the Every Child Succeeds Act is very much a step in the right direction. I also argue that schools should implement specific college readiness programs that provide students with mentorship throughout the college admissions process and even after they graduate.

Additionally, I think that there should be some sort of national adoption of programs like the Power 150 Index and mentoring program that is currently in place at Alliance Charter Schools in Los Angeles. The Power 150 index is a list of colleges that have a graduation rate of over 75 percent or higher for underrepresented minorities and they use this to help students figure out where they are going to apply to when it comes time to graduate high school. Counselors also know which schools are need-blind and can accept students that come from more difficult financial situations. They also try their best to have partnerships with local community colleges and state schools so that students are able to attend college by passing their A-G requirements.

I strongly advocate for schools to adopt similar policies so that their students can be more supported during high school, the application process, and beyond while they are in college. This will help to ensure the greatest chance of success in the future in this new job market.

Overall, I do not think that America's public education system should be written off as so many people do. I think that we have a lot of money and resources to make something great, but we need to bring all of our collective willpower and brainpower to implement policies that are up to date and constantly evolving to encompass the needs

of students. We must also be extremely cognizant of the fact that no one-size solution will fix everything in all schools. Each state, district, and school has specific needs for their students and teachers and administrators should be more flexible and accommodating to whatever the students, parents, and even teachers need. I will definitely carry that with me as I start to teach in my own classroom very soon.

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