

No Child Left Behind Act:  
NCLB Needs to be Changed

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### Abstract

This paper is about the No Child Left Behind Act that was enacted to put into effect the policy of increasing school accountability for their students. No Child Left Behind requires all public schools receiving federal funding to administer a state-wide standardized test annually to all students. However, this program was severely flawed and underfunded and it did not do what it was intended to do for public education in the United States.

Key words: No Child Left Behind, accountability, public education

1. In 2002, President Bush signed into law the No Child Left Behind Act to bring social welfare to public education in America. He did this due to a wide public concern about the state of education. No Child Left Behind requires all public schools receiving federal funding to administer a state-wide standardized test annually to all students. This means that all students take the same test under the same conditions.

To understand the current policy and why that policy was created you have to understand the history with both the problem at hand and the creation of policies that lead to the creation of the current policy. The movement towards standards-based education and assessment began with the Improving America's Schools Act of 1994 (IASA). IASA reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), which was part of President Johnson's War on Poverty, and it was created to focus federal funding on poor schools with low achieving students. ESEA has raised the academic achievement of millions of underprivileged children. With the creation of both IASA and Educate America Act, the ESEA for the first time focused on the needs of all students instead of just the needy students. Research showed that for all children to learn, the whole school had to be focused on the education of all students. Over the next six years there was a lot of discussion in the government about meanings of content standards and procedures for setting performance standards.

Finally in 2002, President Bush signed into law the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), which redesigned ESEA. NCLB brought clarity to the use and importance of standardize testing of students in kindergarten through high school. With NCLB, "a new era began where accountability, local control, parental involvement, and funding what works became the cornerstones of the nation's education system. If our children

aren't learning, the law requires that we find out why. If our schools aren't performing, options and help will be made available" (Jorgensen and Hoffmann).

NCLB was intended to establish high standards of learning and accountability for all students in public schools. However, the policy is seriously flawed and severely underfunded. This policy quickly turned into making sure that all the children could "pass" the standardized tests, and if a student can not pass, this became a contributing factor to increased school drop rates eventually leading to the idea of the school to prison pipeline.

Many of the problems of NCLB pertain to the queer youth, such as the need to focus on standardized testing which leaves no room for learning relevant information relating to cultural diversity, sexual diversity, or gender diversity. Also NCLB filters internet access and this prevents youths from accessing information relevant to sexuality. Lastly, parental rights provisions including "no promo homo" language can interfere with research, anti-homophobia programs, and sex education. With this being said, the policy of No Child Left Behind should either be completely removed or reformatted to actually do what it was intended to do which was to decrease the achievement gap and give all students the opportunity for a quality education, not make education even less "equal."

(Out Now handout)

2. As discussed in question one, NCLB was created to "solve" the problem of unequal education for all students, not all students were receiving proper education and some were being "left behind." Rod Paige, the U.S. Secretary of Education, stated the focus of NCLB "is to see every child in America—regardless of ethnicity, income, or background—achieve high standards" (Jorgensen and Hoffmann).

The way the problem was defined was empowering to the clients. It gave all students the ability to receive a proper education and gave all students the ability to succeed. With that being said, the way that the problem was solved did not empower the clients. In fact, in many ways NCLB made it harder for students to succeed and took away power from students to learn and teachers to teach about many aspects of life that are not covered in the standardized tests.

### 3. **Social Problem:**

A social problem is a condition when at least some people in a community view as being undesirable. The problem that led to the creation of NCLB was the unsatisfactory public education within the United States. This problem was defined by high up politicians and lawyers that were not within the schools to actually see what was happening. If you were to ask people that were within the schools they would have told you from the beginning that NCLB would be severely flawed and would not improve public education within America. All students in America were affected by this problem of poor education, and NCLB was created to solve that social problem.

#### **Power Imbalance or Struggle:**

In a way, you could argue that teachers lost from this social problem because they are looked upon as not doing their jobs satisfactorily, and an Act had to be put into place for them to do their job. Students gain from this social problem because now there is going to be a law enacted and enforced to make sure that all students receive a proper education. Most school education interest groups opposed NCLB and the social problems that go along with the creation of the Act. These opponents included the National School Boards Association, the American Association of School Administrators, the National

Education Association, and the National Conference of State Legislatures. The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), worked closely with Bush's administration and Congress in support of the bill ([www.archives.nysed.gov](http://www.archives.nysed.gov)). It seems that administration and federal government has power, while state education associations have less power.

**Public Reaction:**

The public felt that public education had to be fixed and all students should receive similar education. The majority of people believed that regardless of a students' economic or social class they were entitled to a quality education. Simply, the majority of America believed that public education had to be reorganized, to create "equal" education for all.

**Policies, Public Laws, or Administrative Rules:**

The policy behind the No Child Left Behind program is that schools need more accountability for student success. This would be accomplished by limiting curriculum and would be measured by standardized tests.

**Implementation of Social Welfare Programs:**

No Child Left Behind Act was implemented due to the result of policies that were created to increase the accountability of school. This program is not effective for many reasons, such as unrealistic goals and the lack of diversity in education. Students of public schools are primarily served by this program, but it is not a positive service.

**Actual impact/Legislative Intended Impact:**

NCLB was intended to establish high standards of learning and accountability for all students in public schools. However, the policy is seriously flawed and severely

underfunded. The flaws consisted of unrealistic goals, failure to incorporate diversity education, and a lack of accounting for students with disabilities. This policy quickly turned into making sure that all the children could "pass" the standardized tests, and if a student can not pass, this became a contributing factor to increased school drop rates eventually leading to the idea of the school to prison pipeline. (Segal, 102, 2013).

**Public Expectations:**

The social problem did not decrease after NCLB was created, in fact, it became worse. Many people all around the country are dissatisfied with the outcome of NCLB from students to teachers and many other people.

**Affected Populations:**

There are many different populations affected by NCLB from students to teachers. But no one is affected as much as students and especially students of the LGBTQ population, youths that are disabled and non English speaking students. In my opinion, NCLB negatively impacts these populations of students and all students in general. Due to the idea of "equality" for all, it eliminated important life skills education for many and it lead to a failure in today's public education.  
(Segal, 97, 2013)

4. The most common issue of a majority of social policies including NCLB, is unfunded mandates. An unfunded mandate is a regulation that requires a state or local government organization, such as schools, to perform certain actions, yet provides no money for fulfilling the requirements. With limited federal funding to public schools, most states have been forced to make budget cuts in non-tested school subjects such as science, foreign languages, social studies and arts programs. Also, schools sometimes

have to relegate to cutting field trips and school supplies, such as text books. Since the great depression the idea around federal funding for all social welfare has been a huge issue. The problem is that politicians and citizens want all of these social welfare policies, but do not want to raise or pay taxes to fund them. When President Bush put NCLB into law, the funding and the regulations/expectations were not realistic and NCLB was set up for failure due to poor funding. (Segal, Ch 1, 2013).

Another issue with NCLB is federal government being seen as interfering with a state issue.

The No Child Left Behind Act dramatically increased federal authority. While the federal government provides only 8.5 percent of the funding for public education, NCLB gave Congress and the U.S. Department of Education new powers to set policies governing America's public schools. This increased power has resulted in unintended consequences and problems that need to be addressed in the reauthorization (Hickok and Ladner).

The federal government has made the curriculums so specific that there is literally no room for the teacher to bring in activities or different learning styles that could help the children in the "real" world. A number of other social welfare policies have too many regulations, similar to specifics in NCLB, which in turn make the policy ineffective or unrealistic. For example, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) had 12,320,970 recipients of assistance back in 1996, yet in 2010 there were 4,375,022 recipients receiving assistance. This was not because 8 million people rose out of poverty. The reason there was such a drop in the number of recipients of assistance was because of the difficult regulations.



5. There are a number of different oppressed groups that do not benefit from No Child Left Behind. Such as the LGBTQ youth, disabled youths, and non English speaking students. I already stated the effect of NCLB on the LGBTQ youth, but it is just as bad if not worse for students with disabilities. No Child Left Behind Act has placed some students with disabilities in situations where they are expected to pass regular state grade-level assessments, despite the fact that they may be working at considerably below grade level. I was put into this situation every year when I was forced to take the grade level standardized test but could not read at grade level. I had to guess at the answers and this made me feel dumb and frustrated me. Often teachers are forced to focus on teaching the standardized test material and students are missing out on many learning opportunities. Also, this takes away of there one-on-one need time to learn specific skills that pertaining to them because they are stuck in the classroom having to learning the material on the test, so there school can pass. Another group of students that do not gain from NCLB is the non English speaking students in America's schools. They are forced to take the same standardize test, even though they can not yet speak English (Ten Moral Concerns in the No Child Left Behind Act).

NCLB standardized test results are broken down into subgroups. The subgroups are ethnicity, special education, English-language learners, and economically disadvantaged. Parents of students receive annual reports containing: "student academic achievement disaggregated by subgroups; comparison of students at basic, proficient, and advanced levels of academic achievement; graduation rates; professional qualifications of teachers; and identification of schools in need of improvement." The reason why the results are broken down into subgroups is so that schools and school districts can use the

information as a tool to see where schools need to improve (Fusarelli 2004). That may have been the intended reason to create the subgroups; however, that was not the final result. This singled out the oppressed groups in need and the long term affect was increased school drop out. This is known as the school-to-prison pipeline.

6. NCLB is not accomplishing its stated purposes of improving education for disadvantaged students and closing the achievement gap, as I have stated multiple times throughout this paper. I understand as a social worker in a school I could not just do away with NCLB, but I would continually advocate for change and I would focus on easing the barriers to academic success by implementing school-based interventions to address the psychosocial factors that underlie differential achievement in schools, and prove that NCLB is not needed. School social workers can also advocate for changes in other educational policies to ensure that vulnerable and oppressed students are not left behind academically and socially and hopefully lead to the abolishment of NCLB (Lagana-Riordan and Aguilar). As a social worker, every choice you make is inherently political, you can either do nothing which in turn supports the policies that are already enforced or you can strive for change (Haynes and Mickleson, 11, 2010).

## NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND HAS NEGATIVE AFFECTS ON ALL STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

We need your help! All students deserve the opportunity to succeed in high quality public schools and No Child Left Behind Act does not provide high quality education. It is not high quality because the policy is seriously flawed and severely underfunded. Also, No Child Left Behind Act leaves limited room for needy students to learn specific needs.

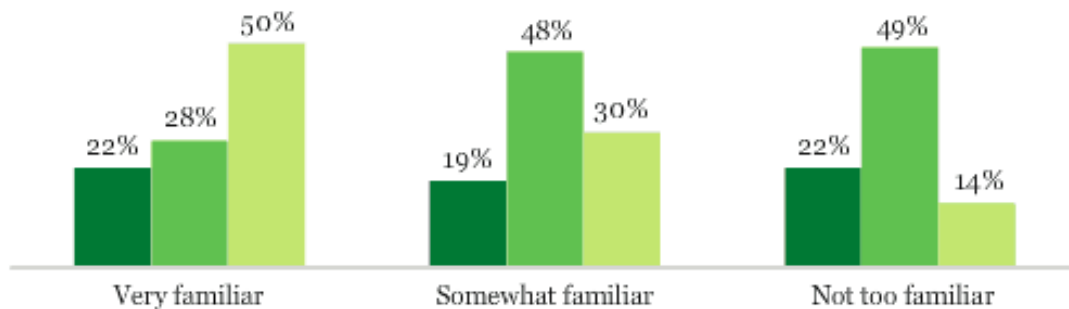
Such as:

- LGBTQ youth
- Students with disabilities
- Non-English speaking students

### *Opinion of No Child Left Behind, by Familiarity With NCLB*

Asked of those very, somewhat, or not too familiar with No Child Left Behind

■ Has made public school education better    
 ■ Has not made much difference  
■ Has made public school education worse



Gallup Poll, Aug. 6-9, 2009

GALLUP POLL

(Newport)

We need your help in changing this policy! Our main goal is to provide the best education to all students in America and No Child Left Behind is not the answer.

Thank you for listening,

Kevin Hull

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