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The Impact of the No Child Left Behind Act on the K-8 Setting

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Abstract

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), which was implemented in 2002, is changing the classroom for teachers and students. The legislation is widely discussed across the nation and people are deciding whether or not this change is suitable for education. The No Child Left Behind Act is affecting the core subjects in the classroom. After evaluating literature on the subject, it is obvious that there are two clear sides to this legislation. There are also actions that can be taken by teachers within the classroom to best utilize NCLB. As a future educator, it is important to evaluate NCLB and all it entails as it places a large amount of pressure on teachers and students across America. The purpose of this thesis is to evaluate NCLB and its effect on the K-8 classroom setting specifically in regards to the core subject areas.

The Impact of the No Child Left Behind Act on the K-8 Setting

Introduction

Many individuals can recall the K-8 setting as an avenue for teachers to teach with creativity and as an avenue where one's love for the children could encompass the learning environment and be sufficient to enable students to progress from one grade to the next. Each year classrooms have evolved into arenas of standardized tests, new modes of technology, and state requirements. After successfully getting past the Y2K scare of a technological meltdown to society, two years later there was a major event that scared and disturbed many educators and that has changed education as we know it. One author of the *New York Times* explains that on January 8, 2002, President Bush signed an important document that would change the face of education. This legislation was known as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). The No Child Left Behind Act is an attempt by the American government to have all children arrive at equal proficiency levels by 2014. Each year students in third through eighth grade are being tested in the core subjects of mathematics and reading. The individual state is required to provide standardized tests to regularly measure students' improvement (No Child Left Behind Act, 2007).

Schools are placed on different levels according to the percentage of students passing the standardized tests given in the core subject areas. Schools that do not have a high percentage of students passing the examinations are put on probationary status. These schools are forced to undergo reviews by the state over the next year and if they do not improve they risk losing their accreditation. Parents are notified and the school works diligently over the next year to make an improvement in the school and be labeled as having *adequate yearly progress* (AYP). According to an article in *Intervention in School*

& *Clinic*, schools may reach the point where they have to be closed and students relocated. Some schools provide tutoring to increase their students' scores fearing that the state will takeover or shut down the school completely (Simpson, LaCava, & Graner, 2004). In order to achieve AYP schools may encourage parents to become active in their child's education, use technology-based instruction, and offer after school programs to assist the students (Simpson et al.). In her article "Time to Kill 'No Child Left Behind,'" Diane Ravitch (2009) explains the consequences if the NCLB requirements are not met:

Schools that do not make progress toward the goal of 100% proficiency for every group are subject to increasingly, stringent sanctions. In their second year of failing to make "adequate yearly progress" for any group, failing schools have their students given the choice of leaving to enroll in a better public school. In the third year of a school's failure, students are entitled to free tutoring after school. In the subsequent years, the failing school may be converted to private management, turned into a charter school, have its entire staff dismissed, or be handed over to the state. (p. 5)

The federal government is not taking NCLB lightly. It is serious about each of these consequences and is ready to bring them upon any school that does not make adequate yearly progress. With the increased efforts being made to meet AYP, educators are feeling the pressure and they are becoming very stressed about their jobs. An article by Alvin Granowsky (2008), explains that "schools that have low scores and/or do not show needed improvements in test results, receive negative labels, such as unacceptable, and their teachers and administrators threatened with loss of jobs" (p. 1). Unfortunately, this

causes teachers to be afraid that if their schools do not make AYP, they will lose their jobs.

The individuals behind the NCLB Act understand the importance of a teacher and the impact good teaching can have on students. As a result, the NCLB Act requires that after the 2005-2006 school year all teachers are to be highly qualified in the core academic subjects. This means that teachers must “have at least a bachelor’s degree and demonstrate competencies in each content area as defined by their state” (Simpson et al., 2004, p. 70). For new teachers, it means passing challenging state exams in order to be allowed into the classroom. Practicing teachers are also required to pass these state exams or are asked to demonstrate competency in each content area.

No Child Left Behind has truly impacted the K-8 setting because educators and students are being held accountable to meet a certain set of standards presented by the federal government. An article in *Intervention in School and Clinic* states, “The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act is potentially the most significant educational initiative to have been enacted in decades” (Simpson et al., 2004, p. 67). NCLB has completely changed the K-8 classroom setting in regards to curriculum, instruction, and teaching strategies.

Operational Definitions

There are two operational definitions that must be described here to assist in the understanding of the No Child Left Behind Act.

Accountability. Accountability is the concept that each state set standards for the type and amount of information students know and learn. Children are tested yearly and the scores are reported to the government. Schools that need improvement are identified and they work over the next school year to raise the students’ test scores.

Standardized or high-stakes testing. These are the tests that are administered by the individual states and consist of multiple-choice and true-false questions. The tests are designed to evaluate students in the subject areas of mathematics and reading. Beginning in the 2005-2006 school year, these tests have been given to students in grades three through eight. The goal of the No Child Left Behind Act is that students will receive 100% proficiency level on these tests by 2014 (Simpson et al., 2004).

Literature Review

Many educators have written material on the No Child Left Behind Act and its effect on the classroom. "A Firsthand Look at NCLB" is an article written by a number of educators across the United States stating their views on the law. They evaluate the changes that have been made in curricula across the nation, as well as the changes made in teaching strategies. Teachers now have an even more valuable role in the classroom and it is important to consider how they feel NCLB is affecting education. They are the ones on the frontlines experiencing NCLB and all it entails. This article is a great resource for parents and teachers regarding NCLB. The authors take a balanced approach, while giving their firsthand experience with the legislation and its effect in the classroom.

In focusing on high stakes testing, the two subjects that are primarily tested are reading and mathematics. An article by Deborah Perkins-Gough, "Are U.S. Students Getting Better in Mathematics," looks at NCLB and reveals that students' math scores are generally increasing. However, the author cautions that a statewide examination may not necessarily be accurate in its results and that tests may not reveal as much information as the government agencies need to know.

Explanation of the NCLB Act

Richard L. Simpson, Paul G. LaCava, and Patricia Sampson Graner's (2004) article is helpful in explaining the act. "The No Child Left Behind Act: Challenges and Implications for Educators" provides readers with a breakdown of the requirements. The authors explain the major themes, an increased role in district and federal control, the qualifications of teachers, and options for parents. This article is great for people who are unfamiliar with NCLB and its demands of educators and students.

"The Impact of NCLB" is a special report written by Azzam, Perkins-Gough, and Thiers (2006), discusses NCLB and the various results that have taken place because of the law. The authors believe education is changing and they seek to provide readers with a breakdown of how that is happening. The article addresses public school funding, test scores, and the challenges of teaching and learning. Azzam, Perkins-Gough, and Thiers also discuss the group of students that NCLB is affecting the most.

Thomas Toch (2006) also sheds light on NCLB in a different manner. His article, "Turmoil in the Testing Industry," discusses how NLCB is having an effect on the testing industry. Assessment makers are having a hard time creating high-quality tests that properly assess NCLB's standards. Since national and state testing have become a big part of education, there is a high demand that was not present before this legislation came into effect. Toch illustrates that NCLB is not just affecting educators and students across the United States, but assessment creators and parents as well.

The United States Department of Education also provides a great deal of resources for parents and educators regarding NCLB. "No Child Left Behind: A Parent's Guide" (2003) gives an introduction and overview of the legislation. This package also

gives many frequently asked questions and answers concerning NCLB. Also, at the end of the package there is a list of frequently used terms that are defined for the reader.

Another valuable book for educators and parents of students who attend public schools is *No Child Left Behind and the Public Schools*. This book was written by Professor Scott Abernathy (2007), an Assistant Professor of Political Science at the University of Minnesota. The author provides a balanced approach for readers to learn about both the positive and negative aspects of the No Child Left Behind Act. He also gives suggestions on how individuals can work with NCLB.

The No Child Left Behind Act is bringing much change to the field of Education. Those who are currently pursuing a teaching degree as well as those already teaching, need to evaluate NCLB for all it entails. Unfortunately, for those who disagree with NCLB there is not a whole lot that can be done. This law is going to greatly affect the classroom until 2014 whether or not educators agree with it.

NCLB and the Core Subjects

There are four core subjects within the K-8 setting: math, reading, science, and social science. In a typical school week, math and English are taught every day, opposed to science and social science, which are taught half of that time. Although these are all considered important subjects, NCLB primarily focuses and tests students on only two core subjects, math and reading. However, some states provide standards for each subject area even though they are not regularly tested. For example, Virginia provides Standards of Learning for grades K-12 in English, math, science, social science, fine arts, foreign language, and much more. According to the Virginia Department of Education's website, "These standards represent a broad consensus of what parents, classroom teachers, school

administrators, academics, and business and community leaders believe schools should teach and students should learn” (2007, para. 2). The Standards of Learning in Virginia, like many other states, are aligned with NCLB to ensure that while teachers are meeting state standards, they are meeting national standards as well.

The No Child Left Behind Act affects all subject areas in the classroom. Although the NCLB Act specifically focuses on reading and mathematics, it is important to evaluate how each subject is affected. Many teachers believe that all other content areas are being pushed aside due to the NCLB requirements. Educators and government officials need to consider the effects the NCLB Act is having on reading and literacy, mathematics, the arts and social sciences.

Math

Mathematics is a subject that many students dread; however, it is extremely valuable for their futures. Math skills that are taught in elementary school are vital to one’s success as an adult. Students most likely do not realize the importance of math in their younger years, but they will when they are placed in the real world. They quickly learn that even in grocery stores math skills are necessary. Thankfully, the NCLB places a high importance on mathematics. In fact, it may be the primary focus. An article in the *Wall Street Journal* stated that “States typically have far higher standards for math than for reading” (Finn, 2007, para. 6). The U.S. Department of Education claims that “[m]ath is a critical skill in the information age. We must improve achievement to maintain our economic leadership” (“The Facts about ...math achievement,” 2009, para. 3). They believe that in order to secure this nation’s future, math instruction needs to be highly emphasized in the classroom.

Although teachers were previously required to follow some kind of teaching guideline, the pressure was not as strong as today. Teachers now more than ever are forced to work hard in order to cover all the mathematical content that is tested at the end of the year. Liz Arseneau (2006), an educator in Michigan, writes that “[t]he focus on articulating curriculum and monitoring student progress is commendable, but the endless assessing is burning out educators and wearying students” (p. 51). Teachers like Arseneau are having a hard time fitting everything into the school year, and the stress created is taking its toll on educators. Teachers can no longer be flexible in the amount of time they spend on one specific lesson because they have to quickly cover all of the content. However, this time limit creates a major problem. With rigid standards, teachers have a difficult time getting every student to make adequate yearly progress in math. Teachers not only need to teach the concepts, but the students need to use them in real life situations. Students need to know the basic skills before they begin to work with problem solving. One difficult element of NCLB is that teachers have to have students learn both basic skills and problem solving at the same time. Teachers need to incorporate differentiated instruction into their classrooms. Since there is the pressure of having each child know the material well, they need to teach lessons that will help each type of learner. Teachers can no longer stand up in front of the classroom and think that each child is going to be able to regurgitate the information on a standards test. The students need to encounter the material in ways that work best with them. Math is one of the main areas where teachers need to be using differentiated instruction. If students encounter math in a way that is effective for them, they will have a much better chance of learning

and remembering the material. With NCLB, there are a lot of challenges that math teachers face in getting their students where they need to be.

However, despite the difficulty that teachers are having squeezing everything into their math lessons, progress is being made. In fact, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) “results suggest that schools are making progress over the long term in improving students’ mathematics achievement” (Perkins-Gough, 2007, p. 92). Even though teachers are becoming exhausted and overwhelmed with the amount of pressure placed on them, they are being successful. All their hard work is paying dividends, even if change is slow.

Language Arts

Another core subject area in the classroom is language arts. Children cannot succeed without learning how to read and write. Before NCLB, students were able to slip through the cracks and go unnoticed if they were not proficient in language arts. Now, with each student having to make adequate yearly progress, there is an increased focus on language arts. The NCLB places a high importance on this subject and feels that it is one of the most valuable things students need to take away from their education. Students are going to be better prepared if they are proficient in the language arts. Nobody is going to disagree that this aspect of NCLB is extremely important. One of the most important focuses of the language arts portion of NCLB is that children learn how to read by third grade.

Being able to read is crucial to one’s success as an individual. In today’s society, someone who cannot read is not going to advance far in his or her career. Reading instruction needs to start young, which NCLB does believe. In a “No Child Left Behind:

A Parent's Guide," government officials break down the legislation for parents. They focus on the main aspects of the act, specifically reading. Parents are informed that "research shows that most reading problems faced by adolescents and adults are the results of problems that could have been prevented through good instruction in their early childhood years (Snow, Burns and Griffin 1998)" (2003, p. 7). The officials behind NCLB believe that "[i]t is never too early to start building language skills by talking with and reading with children. No Child Left Behind targets resources for children for early childhood education so that all youngsters get the right start" (p. 7). Having children start reading early is specifically the goal here. More often than not, individuals who are immersed in reading at a young age become better readers in the future. In fact, reading is valuable throughout an individual's entire life: "[T]hose students who cannot read well are much more likely to drop out of school and be limited to low paying jobs throughout their lives. Reading is undeniably critical to success in today's society" (p. 21). NCLB values the importance of reading, which is why they have implemented the reading standards for elementary children.

Due to the importance that NCLB places on reading, a new program called Reading First has been implemented. In "No Child Left Behind: A Parent's Guide," government officials explain that this program allows for schools to get more funding for their reading programs, which allows for schools to develop "high quality, comprehensive reading instruction for all children in kindergarten through third grade" (2003, p. 22). As a result of No Child Left Behind, a significant amount of focus has been placed on reading and writing in the elementary classroom.

Science

NCLB mildly focuses on science in the elementary classroom. In the 2006-2007 school year, testing began in the area of science. The focus that is placed on science is not nearly as stringent as that placed on math and language arts; however, teachers have to shift their focus from just reading and math to incorporating science. Leah H. Kinniburgh and Edward L. Shaw Jr. (2009), state: “NCLB mandated that science would be tested one time in grades 3-5 beginning in 2007. With this mandated testing, teachers will have to spend more time on science instruction” (p. 19). Science is a difficult subject to assess with a standards examination, but teachers are now responsible for preparing the students for these new tests.

Unfortunately in revised science instruction, students are simply learning the facts. Students are no longer able to interact with science by doing a lot of hands-on activities and experiments because that is not what is tested. Before testing, teachers could allow for students to be constantly doing experiments; however, now there is too much material to be covered to allow for that flexibility. Science, as it has been taught in previous years, is being redefined. In a text written by David Jerner Martin (2006), he writes about the changes that are occurring in science instruction:

Because the stakes of standardized testing are so high, elementary teachers may find themselves concentrating on teaching the facts that are likely to be on the tests rather than teaching children how to do science, how to inquire, and how to formulate their own valid conclusions to problems and questions they, themselves come up with. (p. 329)

Although science instruction has to be altered to fit NCLB, there are some positive

aspects directly relating to this change. Now science is a tested subject, where in prior years it was not. When science was not being tested, teachers shifted their focus to math and reading. Now that the students are responsible for this material as well, focus has been placed on science instruction again. Teachers can no longer just decrease science instruction, as they have to spend time concentrating on it in the classroom. According to Mundry (2006), NCLB has expectations for science instruction:

The NCLB reflects and supports high standards of learning for all students in all public schools. By calling for states to establish and implement challenging standards for science education and measuring student progress toward the standards, it underscores the national priority for all students to develop scientific understanding. (p. 253)

Since science has become another important subject under NCLB, instruction is changing and teachers are trying to implement science instruction to the best of their ability.

Social Studies

Social studies is one subject that is multifaceted. Instruction in this subject includes civics, economics, geography, and history. Each year, students are supposed to expand on their knowledge of the subject. Students learn about the world around them, their responsibility as citizens, as well as events and people that helped shaped the modern world. However, due to the fact that social studies is not a subject that NCLB focuses on, educators believe that instruction is decreasing. In fact, the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) “is increasingly alarmed by the erosion of the importance of social studies in the United States” (“Social Studies in the era of No Child Left Behind”, 2007, para. 2). Teachers are no longer able to focus on a wide range of subject

matter in the classroom. Due to pressures inflicted by the tests, teachers reduce social studies instruction to provide more time in subjects that are tested by NCLB. The NCSS states its position: “[s]ince the introduction of NCLB, there has been a steady reduction in the amount of time spent in the teaching of social studies, with the most profound decline noticed in the elementary grades” (para. 2). Unfortunately, this provides a huge disadvantage for students.

Students are going to struggle to be contributive citizens because they are not taught how to contribute. They cannot learn this necessary aspect if they are not learning about their government system or people that have lived before them. Lisa Zamosky (2008) states: “Students getting less social studies are less likely when they grow up to vote and less likely to contribute” (p. 48). Decisions that are being made now are ultimately going to affect the future of the students and nation. The NCSS writes that “social studies educators are united by a common denominator-their belief that an education in social studies is essential to civic competence and the maintenance and enhancement of a free and democratic society” (“Social Studies in the era of No Child Left Behind,” 2007, para. 4). Now that NCLB has been in place for seven years, educators are becoming worried. They see social studies instruction dwindling, but are unable to do anything because of the pressure being placed on them to get the students ready for their tests. In fact, even funding is being relocated and taken away from social studies classes. Lisa Zamosky (2008) writes that “the federal education budget for 2008 has little or no money for geography and economics classes and includes cuts in fourth-grade civics and U.S. history” (p. 50). The NCSS, “believes that social studies is a core subject in American schools on an equal footing with reading, writing, mathematics and

the sciences” (“Social Studies in the era of No Child Left Behind,” 2008, para. 5).

Unfortunately, time is running out and it looks like the federal government is not going to be adding social studies to its agenda. Teachers need to try their best to incorporate social studies into their curricula even though it may be extremely difficult with the pressure of NCLB looming over their heads.

Educators across the nation are beginning to see that other subjects are being affected due to the NCLB Act. Teachers are not able to spend as much time focusing on the arts and sciences because there is not enough time during the school day. They are beginning to see that the NCLB Act is having a large effect on the classroom in all areas.

Negative Effects of No Child Left Behind

Many educators and others involved in the field are speaking out against NCLB and its effect on teachers and students. Unfortunately, there is a lot of literature against No Child Left Behind. In fact, it appears that there is more negative feedback than positive. Even though NCLB is not optional, it is important to be aware of the position against it. Some educators believe that this legislation cannot have a large effect on education. They believe it is impossible for one thing to change every aspect of education across the nation. In his article “The Failings of NCLB,” David J. Flinders (2005) states that “just as people cannot be made morally good by holding a gun to their heads, schools cannot be made educationally good by threats of closure” (p. 4). Flinders’ point is that one government mandate is not going to automatically change education across America. Education is a multi-faceted field and change is not something that is going to happen quickly or automatically.

A major argument that is presented against NCLB is the effectiveness of testing.

According to the book *The Assessment Debate*, standardized tests are not a reliable method of testing. They are limited in the material actually covered and are only offered in the basic multiple-choice format. The results are an approximate figure of the students' understanding. Test scores do not provide a true evaluation of a school. Educators and government officials across the nation need to understand that nothing can be based solely on students' results (Janesick, 2001). Ultimately, those who are most familiar with the students are the ones who should ultimately be making decisions in the field of education. Another negative aspect that directly relates to test taking, is the condition that many people suffer from, test anxiety. Someone that suffers from test anxiety has a difficult time being rational in a testing situation, which ultimately may affect his or her test score. The NCLB greatly contributes to this anxiety because of all the testing that is associated with the law. As a result, students who experience test anxiety are the ones who suffer. Many students excel greatly in the classroom, but they do not do well on assessments, and under pressure they fail to remember the information they have learned. Although these students know the information, it does not appear that way by their test scores. The end result is that test scores do not always accurately examine a student's proficiency level.

The limitation that NCLB places on teachers means that they do not have the time and flexibility to go into extensive detail on a particular topic. This restraint inhibits teachers from focusing on other subjects or creative and exciting lessons. One school counselor commented that "NCLB is draining the fun out of learning" (Benefield, 2006, p. 49). Students miss out on exciting lessons because their teachers cannot lose time by making games and other activities to go along with the curriculum. Some teachers are

able to fit activities into the lesson, but they still need to have enough time to assess the students to know that they have mastery of the content. However, most teachers are not able to incorporate creativity because they are focused on meeting the standards.

Some goals of education may be lost because of NCLB. Teachers focus on instructing the subjects that are tested by NCLB, but students can lose out on learning important life lessons. The school counselor writing the article “A Firsthand Look at NCLB” writes that “[e]ducation is more than a test score: it’s about instilling a moral purpose that encompasses an appreciation for lifelong learning and societal responsibility” (Benefield, 2006, p. 49). Teachers do realize the importance of teaching the students life lessons, but they do not have the time to focus such values in their classrooms.

Besides having to push that aside, students are having to take time away from other subjects. Diane Ravitch (2007), author of “Get Congress Out of the Classroom,” states that “The primary strategy – to test all children in those subjects in grades three through eight every year – has unleashed an unhealthy obsession with standardized testing that has reduced the time available for teaching other important subjects” (para. 2). When teachers are responsible for having each student make adequate yearly progress, their primary focus becomes the material on the test. They have to ensure that each topic is covered and that each student understands. In his article “Turmoil in the Testing Industry,” Thomas Toch (2006) states: “Because schools tend to teach what’s tested ... the content of the tests required by No Child Left Behind has become the focus of teaching and learning in public school classrooms throughout the United States” (p. 53). Teachers have limited time during the day to include every subject area. Since not all

subjects are tested, some begin to be neglected to allow for other time in the tested subjects. One article that was printed in an issue of *Educational Leadership* stated that, “71 percent of school districts reported that their elementary schools had reduced instructional time in at least one other subject to focus more narrowly on reading and math” (Azzam et al., 2006, p. 94). In fact, one article written by Bonnie Rosenfield, states that some students are actually pulled out of their physical education classes to make up work. She even writes that math and reading are being incorporated into the fine arts to ensure content mastery. P.E. teachers are encouraged “to incorporate math and reading lessons into their curriculum to prepare students for the state tests” (2004, p. 26). Teachers can no longer have a well-rounded classroom. Their focus has changed to meeting the requirements of NCLB.

Although there are mixed opinions, many people believe that students are not doing better with NCLB. In November of 2006, an informal survey was taken by ASCD (formerly the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development) to see how NCLB had positively affected a school or district. Most readers (60.65%) claimed that NCLB had “no positive effect in the school or district” (“A Firsthand Look at NCLB,” 2006, p. 50). When there is no noticeable change, it makes it difficult for teachers to persevere through all of the hard work. Educators also have a difficult time seeing the amount of money being put towards NCLB and there being no great change. However, the reason that there is no noticeable improvement could be due to the strict passing levels. Every individual student who does not make adequate yearly progress has a great effect on the entire student body’s results. One educator wrote that “the scores of five students could create such a negative image for our school” (p. 52). Looking at it from

this perspective, schools that are getting poor results may not be doing that horribly after all. Unfortunately, the most important thing that in the government's opinion is that they are not making AYP and that is what matters most. One newspaper article said, "Unless we set realistic goals for our schools and adopt realistic means of achieving them, we run the risk of seriously damaging public education and leaving almost all children behind" (Ravitch, 2007, para. 14). Hopefully the government understands what it is doing because ultimately the future of America is in its hands.

Positive Aspects of No Child Left Behind

Having national and state standards can positively affect the student and teacher because of what it can offer for both. Standards provide a guideline for teachers in what they need to teach in the classroom. Teachers are told what they need to teach rather than having to come up with the curriculum. Standards also make sure that students are all working at the same pace and being offered the same type of education. For example, two fourth grade students may go to different schools, but they will learn the same material. The way the material is taught may differ, but the subject matter would not. With NCLB, every student is given an equal opportunity to learn. One article state, "Now principals, counselors, and mainstream teachers must all strive to help *every* child – what schools should have been doing all along" (Schwartz et al., 2006, p. 50). Before NCLB, teachers tried to bring all students to a good level of understanding by the end of the year. They were not always successful, but there was no real punishment if and when they did not succeed. With NCLB, teachers have to work extremely hard to make sure they do succeed and have all students make adequate yearly progress. This educational movement gives teachers that incentive that they need to work hard because their jobs are potentially

on the line.

The No Child Left Behind Act also helps eliminate teachers who are not in the field for the right reasons. An article by Carolyn Bunting (2007) discusses how it is important for teachers to reconnect with their purposes: “Teachers benefit from going back to their own beginnings and thinking about why they wanted to teach” (p. 13). Teachers need to be highly qualified now in order to be in the classroom. This requires a lot of time, money, and effort. If teachers are not able, as Bunting suggests, to reflect on valid reasons for becoming teachers, they will be discouraged in the process. Also, both the state and local school board place a lot of pressure on the teacher to have a successful body of students. Where there is all this pressure, teachers usually have to put more hours in at school and the stress level of their job sky rockets. As a result, people who do not really have a passion for teaching may give up and leave the field. Although teaching has never been an easy job, it has been a popular career. Now, an individual must really have a desire to teach. This is a positive aspect because usually teachers whose hearts are in the right place are more effective.

Another positive aspect of NCLB is that it encourages community. Ellen Kahan (2006), an assistant superintendent in Washington, believes that this act takes the focus off of the individual. In the article, “A Firsthand Look at NCLB,” Kahan (2006) states:

Instead of placing the responsibility solely on the shoulders of individual students to succeed in school, NCLB places the responsibility on the shoulders of the school community. NCLB asks educators not just to provide opportunity for every student to learn, but also to provide whatever it takes to ensure that every student succeeds. (p. 52)

Every member of the school body must work together to tackle NCLB. Teachers cannot survive if they are disconnected from the other faculty members at the school. Sharon L. Nichols and David C. Berliner (2008) write that “[a]dministrators and teachers should work together to reframe the purposes of learning in their school” (p. 18). They believe that the faculty can work to make the students feel connected and comfortable in the school.

NCLB also helps keep parents informed and allows them to be a part of the school community. One article by Mary Ann Manos (2009), explains how parents can have a role in NCLB:

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) signed into federal law in 2002, considers parents full time partners in their child’s education. Parents can be included in curriculum decision-making, serve on related advisory committees, or advise in the selection of supplemental educational services...Greater choice for parents is one of the mainstays of NCLB. (p. 23)

When students have the parental reinforcement at home, they may be more successful. Parents are more aware because of NCLB’s strict guidelines. In order to be successful and meet the requirements that NCLB places on the school, there needs to a community within the school, which creates a positive school atmosphere for all.

The most important positive aspect of NCLB is that many students are improving. A number of people believe that students are benefiting from NCLB. One article states that “[s]cores on state achievement tests are rising” (Azzam et al., 2006, p. 94). This shows that despite the constant criticism, students are benefiting from the act. Each state is monitored by the national government as they assess their improvement. In a letter

from Assistant Secretary Kerri Briggs to Virginia's Superintendent Patricia Wright, Briggs (2009) writes that there have been improvements in student achievement:

These outcomes are due, in no small part, to the efforts of dedicated educators in your state. We have seen an increased attention on high expectations for every child, an improvement in student performance across the board and a decrease in achievement gaps. (para.1)

This letter shows that the national government believes every student is benefiting and improving. Reports taken by the Center on Education policy "shows that student scores in math and reading have generally gone up since 2002" (Perkins-Gough, 2007, p. 91). Perkins-Gough also explains that "[s]cores have risen regardless of students' poverty level...And the gains have also been apparent across almost all racial/ethnic groups" (p. 92). The most important body of individuals that is affected by NCLB is students. If they are benefiting, then the hard work put forth by everyone else is well worth the effort.

Recommendations for Educators

For right now, the No Child Left Behind Act is not going anywhere. The original plan was for it to be in effect until 2014. Now with a new president in office, things may change. However, educators need to focus on the present. Due to the amount of significance placed on NCLB, teachers need to work to create a learning environment that will maximize students' experiences. Reed (2005) writes, "NCLB is a reauthorization of the 1965 ESEA. It will not go away in the foreseeable future" (p. 56). The most important thing that teachers need to do is familiarize themselves with NCLB. They need to understand its effect on their classroom and specifically, the subject matter they teach. Teachers should be aware of the consequences if their students do not make

adequate yearly progress (AYP). There is a lot of literature on NCLB circulating: newspapers, magazines, and even television. Teachers and parents can also contact the Department of Education. An article written by Donna Reed, states that “this agency assists parents and educators in understanding the law, makes referrals if they need more assistance, and promotes workshops about NCLB” (2005, p. 56). The first step to implementing NCLB in the classroom is to understand exactly what it is.

Another recommendation for educators is to review the state standards yearly when planning curriculum. If teachers are aware of the standards, they are able to incorporate each of them into their curricula. Teachers can be overwhelmed if they try to plan from week to week trying to fit the standards into their lessons. This way, teachers are aware of what lies ahead of them.

Teachers should also partner together to face NCLB and effectively implement it into the classroom. When all the teachers of a certain grade level are working together, it eases the workload and they are able to help each other. For example, if there are four fifth grade teachers at a public school, each teacher could pick a core subject area and design the curriculum for that area. Implementing standards can be difficult, but when there are several teachers working together, it eases some of the weight placed on the teacher. Besides teachers collaborating to help each other, they should also work to create a positive school community. In their article, “Testing the Joy Out of Learning,” authors Sharon L. Nichols and David C. Berliner (2008) discuss the importance of school’s atmosphere:

Teachers and administrators should strive to create a climate of caring and cooperation, instead of competition. We know that students are more likely to

attend school and excel when they feel they belong. Feelings of connection lead to greater effort, greater persistence, and positive attitudes. Feelings of rejection have the opposite effects. (p. 14)

Schools should have a community atmosphere where teachers and students partner to create a positive learning environment. In order for success, everybody should feel capable of performing to their best abilities.

Specifically within the classroom, there are several things that teachers can do to help succeed in NCLB. First, if teachers have continual assessment in their classroom they can observe each student and his or her individual progress. When teachers have constant feedback, they are able to carefully plan their lessons to meet the needs of each student. Assessments can take many different forms, so it is best that teachers alternate methods. Another thing that teachers should do is incorporate differentiated instruction. They need to remember that every student learns differently. When there is such a high value placed on each topic, teachers need to ensure that every student understands the concept. If they incorporate differentiated instruction, they can instruct all students in the way they learn best. Teachers should also know their students. Most importantly, they should know the student's learning styles and their strengths and weaknesses. When teachers take the time to make learning personal, both students and their parents see their commitment to making the classroom a successful learning environment.

A final way that teachers can best tackle NCLB is to stay informed. Articles and books are constantly being published on the subject. Teaching is a field that is constantly changing. Teachers are encouraged to attend classes and keep up-to-date on their information. Just as they are advised to stay informed on subject matter that they teach,

educators need to be alert for changes to NCLB. Although educators are unsure of the future of NCLB, it is not going anywhere for the moment.

Conclusion

With a new president, there may be changes to NCLB in the near future.

Educators cannot predict what is going to happen as they have been thinking that this legislation would be in effect until 2014. However, throughout the presidential campaigns last year, then President elect Obama made references to potential changes for education:

He promised that teachers would no longer be ‘forced to spend the academic year preparing students to fill in bubbles on standardized tests.’ He recognized that subjects like history and the arts had been pushed aside, and that children were not getting a well-rounded education. (Ravitch, 2009, p. 4)

Although changes have not been made yet, at any time President Obama make sweeping changes. However, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan is hoping for things to stay the way they are. He “appears ready to propose a few nips and tucks in the program, but leave it fundamentally unaltered” (p. 4). As one article mentions, “In the meantime, educators must understand and follow this law of the land” (Simpson et al., 2004, p. 75). NCLB is having such a great effect on educators and students that for the time being they need to stay focused and committed to the ultimate goal.

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