

A considered a
manifestation of
humanity in the



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A Long Journey to the School Reform

Although the school system is supposed to take into account the needs and wants of each of the students and guide them to the academic top of their education, in practice public school consider mostly the issues concerning the advantaged pupils, omitting the problems of the disadvantaged ones. To fight the injustice which such situation poses, the No Child Left Behind, or NCLB system was designed; introduced to the public education quite recently, it has already influenced the way in which disadvantaged children are treated in public schools. However, only once all issues concerning the disadvantaged students learning are solved, the public school system will provide the necessary knowledge base for such students, though the first and the hardest steps have already been made. Due to its specifics and its unusual ideas, the NCLB system of school education has a long and tangled history. In spite of the fact that the founders of the new educational system were aiming to improve the existing public school system and enhance the care of the disadvantaged students, the NCLB system had a long way to go before it became dominant in most of the American schools.

Beginning with the definition of the notion, it would be reasonable to quote Yell: “ The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) is a complex, sweeping, and controversial law that was passed as a reaction to the low academic achievement exhibited by so many public school students in the United States.” (130) Thus, the NCLB Act was designed to improve the score of the disadvantaged students studying on public schools. However, it would be better to specify that the entire system were aimed rather at the proper evaluation of such students’ knowledge. Since disadvantaged students are different from the rest of the class, they require specific approach in teaching, which the NCLB Act was supposed to provide. Tracking the history of the Act, one must note that it was first suggested by George Bush, who further on put it into practice. Aiming at closing the gap between the scores of the students in public schools, this act meant that another kind of discrimination – namely the one concerning the disadvantaged students – ceased to exist. Scheduled on March 3, the new approach to teaching students was supposed to bring certain changes in the system of education and level the gap between the advantaged and the disadvantaged students so that the progress of the latter could be evaluated according to their own peculiarities, but not to the standard accepted for the advantaged ones. As Olivert mentioned, “ States were required to begin reporting annually to ED on progress toward new assessment and related requirements under the NCLBA” (34).

Thus, the new act was aiming at providing the disadvantaged students with new learning opportunities and the chances to make their way in the academic learning. Those who used to be outrun by the students with more

opportunities now had the chance to prove that they can contribute to the world of science. In addition, the new act can also be considered a manifestation of humanity in the modern educational system, for the disadvantaged students could feel discriminated no longer. Relieved and obtaining psychological support from the government, these students could finally enter the sphere of science and enjoy their research without being bound by the peculiarities of their health state.

Test My Knowledge: The Pros and Cons of the New Testing System

Once the new ideas of NCLB Act were introduced to the modern system of education, it became clear that these students need specific evaluation system. Thus, the ED came to the idea of standardized testing which could assess each student's knowledge minding the challenges which disadvantaged students might face and helping the latter overcome these difficulties, providing the most convenient and comfortable way of testing. This was how the idea of the new testing system appeared. If one tracks the history of standardized tests, a number of peculiar issues will be found.

Thus, it is obvious that the idea of standardized testing was not created by the current ED – in fact, the first tests were suggested by Samuel W. King in 1874! Designed to make the testing process easier and more objective, these tests were designed to “determine students' promotion” (Alexander 1). However, as this idea failed, causing decrease in students' progress and their parents' negative feedbacks, the system of tests was long forgotten until recently.

As it has turned out, improving the test system and adjusting it to the new ideas of education and the aims of the teachers, it will be possible to use it as a means to evaluate the school progress of the modern students as well, which the American schools do each year. However, at the current moment, the use of tests raises certain questions. Considered to be utilized as the accountability of the students' early progress, standardized tests tend to evaluate the students' knowledge in the way different from the one that was expected: Proponents of this "effective schools" approach to educational reform have asserted that it makes more sense to focus on the quality of production process than to use standardized achievement test results that capture mostly student's experience outside of the production process. (Albernathy 31) Therefore, the method suggested by the ED has to take considerable time testing before the new means of assessing students' progress is accepted. Although the new approach has not been proved inefficient yet, there are numerous concerns about its efficiency. It must be noticed that at present there is certain apprehension that the standardized testing system might hinder the progress of school students in general. In spite of the fact that the standardized testing system is supposed to offer the most efficient way of calculating students' annual progress, there is a threat that teachers might misuse the new system. Depending mostly on the subjective evaluation of the tests result, such attitude might lead to serious problems.

A good example of what wrong assessment of the tests result can lead to was demonstrated by Callahan: Ms. Henry recommends that Susie be held back a year because she performed poorly on the standardized tests, despite

the strong grades on daily assignments, homeworks, and class tests (4)

Thus, despite their initial goal of closing the gap between the disadvantaged students and their classmates, standardized tests prove insufficient for helping the disabled to study efficiently. Thus, most people argue that these tests do not take into account various health issues and are designed to fit only a particular group of students, disregarding all those who do not belong to the average student type. Peterson explained that the so-called standardized tests test students not on their knowledge but on their ability to answer certain questions, thus narrowing their specialization to the size of a chestnut: For instance, Public Agenda has reported that roughly eight in ten Americans believe it wrong to base grade promotion or graduation on standardized tests. This hesitance stems from the fact that two-thirds or more of Americans express concern that some students do not test well, that testing cannot measure all the skills children should learn, and that too much reliance on testing will cause teachers to focus too heavily on tested material. (76) Considering the abovementioned, it must be admitted that the current system of testing has to be reconsidered.

Narrowing and often running at counter to the school curriculum, these tests make teachers adjust the school program to the issues which are going to be raised in tests; in addition, the tests do not contribute to objective evaluation of both students' progress and teachers' skills. Despite the fact that the developers of the tests were guided by the best intentions, this is the case when the result did not meet the expectations of the ED. There is no doubt that standardized tests evaluate not the knowledge of students, but their ability to answer certain questions.

Getting Any Better? The Changes in the Educational System

Designed to create a better environment for disadvantaged students at public schools and give them opportunity to compete with the advantaged students, the NCLB Act presupposes that certain changes are bound to happen in the nearest future.

With help of the NCLB Act the government and the ED hope to estimate the progress of college students in a more effective and objective way. Splitting the key goal into several steps, the ED is going to change the educational system gradually to help both students and teachers to adjust to the changes and the new school environment. It is well worth mentioning that most schools' teaching staff perceived the new system of assessment rather reluctantly. Explaining deep concern about the results which the new system will cause in colleges, teachers were unwilling to accept the new idea of testing. Because of the complexities which such changes dragged, teachers considered that the idea was not worth implementing: Teachers we surveyed accepted the idea of accountability but believed it has been pushed too far and is being used in a counterproductive way that narrows education and is unfairly burdens schools serving very poorly prepared students without requiring any changes in the conditions that make some schools profoundly unequal. (Sunderman 103) Requiring time and consideration, the school reform undertaken too soon might seem somewhat half-baked and not properly adjusted to the existing system of education.

Indeed, there is certain threat that some students can use this as an opportunity to improve their score without doing anything, merely on the account of the NCLB Act. It cannot be denied that these fears have certain

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ground to base on. One of the faults of the new reform is that once suggesting the most efficient way of assessing the disadvantaged students and creating the pattern of education suitable for them, it has now gone too far and is currently taking dangerous shapes. As long as the reform process is carried out under the control of the Educational Department, the reform proves efficient and valuable for the disadvantaged students, yet when the process becomes uncontrollable, which has already been predicted by some college teachers, the problem of the unequal assessment will emerge again – yet this time it will concern the excessive advantages given to the disabled students and the fact that the advantaged students are left outboard. Moreover, the new reform seems to have restricted the abilities of school principals in establishing the curriculum. The latter feared that, instead of making the process of shaping the curriculum easier, the reforms which the NCLB Act presupposed created additional obstacles for compiling school curriculums.

As Abernathy claims, In addition, a significant percentage of principals believed that NCLB would facilitate their ability to establish a curriculum. From this perspective, the law might allow principals to push for standards and curricular reform, since they would now be able to argue that the law was forcing these changes. (86) Observing the current situation in the educational sphere, one can claim that the NCLB Act has already given certain positive results. Meaning to improve the existing system of education so that it could fit the needs and specific features of the disadvantaged children, the NCLB Act has made colleges reconsider the existing scheme of evaluation and adjust it to the needs of disabled students. However, there is

still much to be done. In spite of the fact that the NCLB Act has helped the disadvantaged to be educated on the same level as the rest of students and be accessed according to the peculiarities of their health, the act requires certain improvements.

On the one hand, it is desirable that the act considered the problems of the disabled students; on the other hand, the interests of the advantaged students must not be infringed either. Therefore, the current system of education is bound to face further reforms and changes which will make it even more democratic.

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