

# No child left behind act is a controversial united states

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The 2001-2002 No Child Left Behind Act is a controversial United States Federal law which attempts to tackle, head on, the problem of America's public schools. There are more than fifty million students in our schools and there promises to be increases to this daunting number from immigration as well as the natural growth of the country. Under this new law, schools will be required to ensure that their students will meet or exceed the national requirements set forth by the federal government and the Department of Education. Repeated failure of a specific school to reach these requirements will eventually result in the loss of funding as well as a decrease in the number of students attending these schools.

The latter is made possible by the freedom that the No Child Left Behind Act gives to students and their parents who are attending schools that repeatedly do not meet the requirements set forth in this act. Any state challenges to the law are threatened with a cessation of funds and in 2005; Utah became the first state to challenge the law with the outcome having not yet been played out on the national level[1]. Where the correct amount of attention needs to be paid to and how these problems are to be solved, as well as the effectiveness of the No Child Left Behind Act, are sources for much debate. One of the biggest problems is high school drop outs and how this increase in drop outs can be curbed.

The No Child Left behind Act focuses on a number of aspects of the public school system which the government believes needs to be improved. The first is the quality of the teachers who teach. It is a popular notion to blame the teachers for the shortcomings of the student in the classroom. The No

Child Left Behind Act ignores the fact that today's teacher is faced with more impediments to their successful ability to teach than ever before. An average student watches more than six hours of television a day, often times where there is no parental influence at home since often times, especially within the inner city, the student comes from a broken home and the mother is forced to work two jobs.

Students within the inner city are faced with the constant threat of gang violence and gang influence which makes it not only difficult to learn and to achieve an education, but it is also a dangerous prospect as well. Also, there is within the American public school, a dangerous overcrowding, brought on by illegal immigration as well as other important factors. As a result, there are hundreds of schools within the country that are overcrowded. In Chicago, there are more than 150 elementary schools and 15 high schools, despite the addition of twelve new high schools and thirty additions to existing schools, which are overcrowded. Roosevelt High School on Chicago's East side is more than 177% above capacity and Lerna Elementary school on Chicago's south side is more than 150% above its designed capacity.[2] As a result, teachers are faced with an overcrowding of students; often times the number exceeds thirty five to forty students in which an increasing number cannot speak English.

However, there exists some merit as to the requirement that teachers be knowledgeable in the subjects in which they teach. In a 2004 USA Today expose, it was discovered that in the state of California, over 35% of high school teachers were teaching subjects different than what their major or

minor in college.[3] This places the student at a severe disadvantage and makes the parents of these students nervous as to who exactly is teaching their students. The No Child Left Behind Act set forth a plan in 2002, when the law was enacted, that by the 2006-2007 school year, all teachers be regarded as highly educated in the subject in which they were teaching. This is achieved by teachers having standardized tests of their own in the subjects in whom they teach.

A teacher must also have achieved a bachelor's degree and demonstrate a command of the subject that they teach as well as a command of the English language, both in speaking and writing in order to be allowed to further teach. In order to see if these measurements will yield the expected positive results, further standardized testing in grades 3-5, 6-9 and 10-11 will be required.[4] Under the previous system, only students in grades 3, 5, 10-11 were given to standardized testing. It will be seen on a national basis in the coming months, as these results are published, as to whether or not this simple and presumed self evident requirement yield the results which the country demands.

Another important addition to the current public school system is the ability of parents and their children to choose the schools that they will attend. Previously, students could only attend the schools which were designed for their area. This gave a uniform feeling to the public school map and ensured that those who were paying real estate taxes to their local school, was used to teach the students of the local area. The No Child Left Behind Act allows students and their parents who attend poorly performing schools, the

freedom to choose the schools which they will attend. It claims that local government has failed their students and that it now falls upon the federal government to step in and fix the problem.

This is a controversial aspect of the law but one which according to the Department of Education, in their 2005 annual report, stated a number of positive aspects to the law. First, more progress was made concerning 4th graders in their reading skills over the last five years than in the previous 28 years combined.[5] America's freshman in high school achieved the highest math and reading scores since 1971 and that the math and reading scores for African Americans and Hispanics have reached an all time high as well. Lastly, forty three states and the District of Columbia have enjoyed unprecedented success in the increase of their students test scores.

Not only is the law result-driven through the test scores which their students achieve, but focuses on the concept and quality of the education that their students are receiving. The gap between white and African American and Hispanic children, according to the Department of Education, states that it is the lowest that it has been in the history of public education. The parents are more informed about the quality and yearly performance of their schools through the publication of school report cards which grade the schools on a variety of various subjects which are designed to be helpful to the parent.

This is also helpful in educating the parent as to what schools in the area would be a good fit for their child, if they so decide to move their child to another school district as their previous school repeatedly under performed and did not meet their federal requirements. This is helpful as well, not only

to the students and their parents but also for the school as well as the administrators are aware and feel the pressure to perform up to standards or their student body will decrease and so too will the amount of federal funding from the government. To many, this is a necessary and effective check on the apathetic attitude that some schools in the nation have felt towards the education of their students which they are employed to teach.

A more conventional study is the communication between that of the parent and the teacher with regard to the standardized testing that is required multiple times in a student's educational career. In 2005, New Jersey signed a contract to spend \$35 million over the next four years to implement new testing standards for third and fourth graders with regard to math and science.[6] The Educational Commission Report reported in detail about the state implementation of the NCLBA, not only in New Jersey but all across the nation as well.

Different from years past, the new implementation of this act represent a more systemic approach to achieving testing reform and improvement. Professional development of teachers and technical assistance for low-performing schools are at the front of this debate for needed change. The report also points out the need for states, districts and schools to raise the stakes in order to avoid failure and that steady progress must be achieved and charted in order to improve student achievement.

Blending texts and graphics, the report gives a series of snapshots from March 2003-March 2004 in the field of student improvement for math and science scores for sixth graders. The progress is divided up into seven sub

categories: standards and assessments, adequate progress, school improvement, supplemental service, safe schools report cards and teacher quality and how each area must meet or exceed state requirements. The danger in failing to do so, the report points out, is that once area may well be able to pull down the other groups as well and erase a great deal of effort that has been used in this endeavor.

Any legislation the size of the No Child Left Behind Act is going to receive criticism. Much of it is justified and has allowed many to regard the law as ineffective or misguided. Massachusetts Senator Ted Kennedy criticized that: " The tragedy is that these long overdue reforms are finally in place, but the funds are not." [7] It has been the long running complaint of school administrators that the money is not being sent to the schools in order to make the necessary changes. " School Administrator Charles Johnson of the Roosevelt High School in Chicago states: " If the government wants higher test scores, then they need to show us the money!

All of these programs cost money. Give us the money and the results will follow." [8] This is a problem and will probably continue to be a problem as the 2007 government budget again did not yield the necessary amount of money for these programs which as deemed necessary in the original 2002 No Child Left Behind Act. In our highly bipartisan political atmosphere, progress from the NCLBA can only be claimed through a great deal of studies and statistics in order to make such claims.

Not only does the study set forth their guidelines, they give detailed statistics as to what areas of the country are meeting those standards and

where in the country are the students falling behind at are at the highest risk of dropping out of school. Many studies come to the conclusion, and this one is no exception, that when a student is achieving in school and finds the subject matter and the atmosphere exciting, there is a minimal chance for that student to them drop out of school. The study found that all fifty states met or were partially on track (an improvement from the days before the NCLBA was implemented, to meet at least half of the 40 NCLB requirements. This constitutes an improvement of 11% over the previous year.[9] The study then concludes by pointing out how much of an improvement this is.

Another problem with the law and one which prompts criticism of the government taking the lead in education reform is the possibility of corruption. The stakes are high for these schools to perform to the standards which the government has put in place for each individual schools. Some of these schools, knowing that they cannot meet these new requirements, will bend the result sin order for it to appear that they are meeting these new demands. This creative reclassification of the results has helped these troubled schools to maintain their previous level of government funding. In this, students are not learning more but are just being classified differently. In Missouri and Iowa, school administrators have admitted to the fact that in many of the schools across their respective states, they had lowered the requirements in order to meet governmental standards.

Despite this temptation to create new and creative ways in which to show that these schools were achieving up to government standards, the No Child Left Behind Act allows for further funding towards schools which perform



beneath federal standards as well as gives bonuses to schools that repeatedly meet and/or exceed standards. What does worry the aforementioned schools is the fact that only after a specific number of years, usually from 2-4 years of repeated failure to meet federal requirements, despite the extra funding, will schools then be cut off from this extra funding and will then be made to suffer the consequences.

There has yet to be a significant number of schools which are placed under these restrictions and then forced to react in ways which would jeopardize the funding of their respective schools as the law is still relatively new. However, it is estimated that especially within the inner cities, these requirements, whether good or bad, will create a reaction that will eventually command a reform within the most troubled and poorly performing schools within each troubled area.

The No Child Left Behind Act is controversial by nature. As the United States falls behind smaller and less affluent countries in the areas of science, reading and math, most everyone agrees that education reform is absolutely necessary. However, with a problem that affects such a large population of the country in the form of parents, students and teachers as well as the society in which they reside, it is a fact that no legislation will please everyone. The No Child Left Behind Act is being implemented in order to correct decades of misuse by apathetic “ but when high school students, upon their graduation, can read and write at only an 8th grade level, somebody is surely to blame.”[10] What is the source of argument is who exactly is to blame and in what capacity?

Are the parents to blame when the student is a product of a broken home and there is nobody present within the home to make sure that the student adheres to his school work? Is the student to blame for not possessing the self discipline to make himself to study, seek assistance outside of school hours and to ensure his or her own success? Is it the government to blame for avoiding the fact that illegal immigration has flooded many of our nation's schools which has resulted in the overcrowding of the schools or the fact that before this law, there were teachers who graduated with a degree in History, if they graduated at all, who were teaching Biology.

Or is it the fault of society who now places a greater importance on the knowledge of popculture over excellence in schools? In some degree or another, all of the above mentioned principal players are to blame. What the No Child Left Behind Act attempts to do is tackle all of these impediments to the educational process of our nation's fifty four million students. The No Child Left Behind Act accomplishes the ability to shed light on a subject which has long been ignored: the public school system. However, no government institution can amend the problems of the public school system until the parents and students do their part as well. Only to a very limited degree can government institute behavior. It is up to those involved to ensure the success of themselves, their children, their school and their teachers. We are all in this together.

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