

Proficient

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Research Packet

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Quick Facts

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was signed into law 3 days after President George W. Bush took office.

Average SAT scores have dropped 2.1% since 1972.

Math Scores for 8th grades have remained stable since 1996.

Less than 3% of teachers feel that NCLB encourages them to improve their teaching strategies with all students.

Fewer than 1% of teachers find NCLB an effective method for assessing the quality of schools.

Standardized test can be so stressful to students that it induces vomiting. One elementary school reported that during each round of testing they have to dispose of up to 20 booklets due to children vomiting on them.

By 2008, 35% of public schools in the U.S. had been deemed a failing school according to NCLB.

200,000 students were either spanked or paddled in 2008.

Some schools participate in “narrowing curriculum” meaning that some students only take math and reading courses, completely removing social studies, history, music and art from low scoring students’ school day.

Whiteboards were first used in classrooms in 1994.

History of United States Educational System

The Department of Education was created in 1867 with the goal of gathering information on schools and teaching strategies to develop a successful educational system with strong curriculum.

Most educational Acts passed by the Department of Education before WWII was to provide funding for land-grant colleges and universities. The Industrial Revolution spurred the federal government to give land to Universities in order to teach agriculture, science and engineering.

After WWII The Serviceman's Readjustment Act of 1944 (commonly referred to as G.I Bill) was passed. The bill gives veterans the opportunity to continue education by providing financial aid. Also it provides unemployment allowances and gives loans up to 50% for homes, farms and business properties.

In 1946 the district Supreme Court of California ruled on Mendez vs. Westminster and the California Board of Education deeming separate institutions for children of Hispanic descent unconstitutional. Less than 10 years later, in 1954 Brown vs. Board of Education ruled that separate educational facilities for African Americans are inherently unequal.

Partially due to the launch of Sputnik, the U.S. passes the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) in 1958. This Act increased funding for scientific research and science education. A year later the ACT was first administered.

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965) was the predecessor to NCLB. The act created Title I in response to the war on poverty. The Title I program of federal aid addresses the issues of disadvantaged children living in poor urban and rural areas. In the same year the Higher Education Act sanctioned assistance to post-secondary education such as financial aid to college students.

In 1975 public schools were required to offer free programs and assistance to individuals with disabilities through The Education of All Handicapped Children Act.

The first charter school, City Academy High School, opens in Minnesota (1992). A year later Jones International University is the first college to exist entirely online.

President Clinton reauthorizes ESEA in 1994 under the title of Improving America's Schools Act (IASA). Title I is reformed to include increased funding for bilingual and immigrant education, dropout prevention and education technology. President Bush reauthorizes ESEA once again in 2002 transforming it into its current form of NCLB.

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)

NCLB was issued to create accountability for quality of education and to improve reading and math skills in children, setting a 100% proficiency goal in these areas by 2014.

Schools were assessed using standardized testing that occurs twice a year. The scores of these tests result in the Annual Yearly Progress (AYP), which determines whether a school is failing. If the AYP is sufficient then a school is considered passing and continues to receive federal funding. If AYP is below standard then a school is sent through a series of adjustments.

Schools that do not improve in every area and do not meet AYP criteria are deemed a failing school. After 2 years of failing, schools have to set up an improvement plan within three months. Schools also have to notify parents of the new rating and offer parents the opportunity to transfer students to a school that meets the NCLB standards and pay for the transportation if a student chooses this option.

After 4 years of a school failing to meet proficiency, schools have the option of replacing staff, implementing new curriculum, extending the school year or school day or restructuring the internal organization of the school. Once a school fails 6 consecutive years they are forced to restructure, replace all or most of the staff, set up a contract with outside entity to operate school or have the state take over.

The paradox of a failing label is that instead of receiving aid, more resources are lost. A school will lose federal funding if not meeting AYP, won't attract or keep qualified teachers and if a student decides to transfer other schools are hesitant to admit a low income, low scoring student. Additionally, since schools are able to set their own proficiency standards, most schools lower student expectations in order to avoid a failing label. Consequently schools that challenge their students and fall slightly short of proficiency because of high standards are punished.

The downward spiral continues when failing schools can't keep qualified teachers and are forced to hire less qualified, inexperienced teachers. Children who are behind due to poverty, language problems or other issues receive teachers with less experience, less education and less skill when these students need expert teachers the most.

Items such as recess, naptime and field trips have been cut from elementary schools so children have more time for test preparation. Furthermore social studies and science are neglected and in some cases music and art education are completely cut. In extreme situations some schools skim curriculum down to only reading and math in order to keep up with NCLB.

Aftermath

Standardized Testing

In Proficient Ms. Delaney is lured into using standardized testing by the promises of funding and increased opportunities for student learning. The play reveals the deception of testing and the damaging impact it has on students.

NCLB uses standardized tests twice a year, starting in 3rd grade to measure students' achievements, teachers' competence and the quality of schools. The design of these tests is a series of questions with each question having a four answer multiple-choice. The test are distributed and graded in a standardize manner. There are two types: aptitude and achievement. NCLB utilizes achievement tests.

These tests place the students in a passive, reactive role that fails to engage their capacities to structure tasks, produce ideas and solve problems. Student's opportunities for higher-order learning such as analysis, complex problem solving and written and oral communication are greatly reduced with multiple-choice testing. Students are also less likely to plan or initiate anything, read or write something substantial and engage in analytic discussions.

According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) "only 5-10 percent of students can move beyond initial readings of a text; most seem genuinely puzzled at requests to explain or defend their points of view". This can be attributed to the decreased need to think outside of the box since multiple-choice questions feed students the answers.

A common misperception is that if scores are going up on standardized tests then children must be learning. There is no study/evidence to show that standardize test scores are correlated with post education success. Educational experts Alfie Kohn and education historian Anne Ratvich believe that NCLB have little to nothing to do with learning and is, at best, about raising scores on multiple-choice exams.

In addition, the Teachers Network Leadership Institute revealed that only 37% of teachers found standardized tests somewhat useful and 42% of teachers felt that they were not at all helpful to their teaching. In addition, many education experts believe that standardized tests should be used for comparative interpretations, such as comparing an individual student to the norms of the nation, instead of assessing the quality of schools.

Standardized tests are a "one size fit all" type of test that doesn't consider that children learn at different rates or where students are developmentally and neglects other types of intelligence. Other areas of intelligence including academic areas such as history, music, art and science are ignored in addition to social and emotional intelligence.

Teacher Scapegoats

Teachers, like Ms. Delaney, are the most avid advocates for students but unfortunately also are the first group of individuals blamed when a school is deemed failing. Teachers are also the first to be fired when a school has to implement an improvement plan.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics the unemployment rate for teachers from January 2011 is 6.6%, which is an increase of 2.6% since 2001. Rates for job opening and hires are also high showing the quick turn over rate of teachers and how hiring a new teacher is a quick fix to a school's educational problems.

Teachers are placed in a difficult situation where they are unable to fully teach the curriculum desired because of the focus of scoring high on standardized tests. Instead curriculum is narrowed in order to raise reading and math scores specifically on a test, which is used to assess teachers' competency.

Perceptions of the teaching profession discourage students and causes further setbacks. Public Agenda gave a survey to young college graduates about the teaching profession, which showed that 78% believe that teachers are severely underpaid and 76% feel that teachers are made the scapegoat for all the problems facing education. Furthermore 66% agree that teachers are not respected and appreciated.

Personal Accounts

Tamika Henry, 10-year veteran, social studies:

"Somehow, our society has deflated the value of a teacher. We're working hard to get their kids to the next level, doing our best to impart knowledge to them, and people act like we're sitting around in lounge chairs eating bonbons. We feel like we're being treated like pampered, glorified babysitters"

Peg Muhlerin, 28-year veteran, 1st grade teacher:

"I do think that people don't understand all that goes into this job, I think they see the summers off, or a 9-to-3 schedule and think that's all there is to it. They don't see me coming in on the weekends to get my classroom ready or plan lessons. People aren't really aware of the needs of the kids, If we could just walk into the room and start teaching, that would be easy. We accept students as who they are when they walk in the door. I have friends who work in manufacturing, and I tell them if they get some steel that is flawed and blemished, they can send it back. We can't do that."

Minorities & Low Income Students

A goal of NCLB was to improve the way schools serve poor children. Interestingly children in poverty are the main the victims of this misguided Act.

NCLB fails to acknowledge the huge inequality of education offered in the U.S. The wealthiest schools spend up to \$30,000 per student whereas schools with children of lower income families or minorities spend \$3,000. The poorest schools have the highest pupil to teacher ratio, fewer teachers, counselors, less and lower quality academic courses, resources, supplies and special services. Though the law focuses on school quality it overlooks the significant inputs or resources that enable school quality.

Naturally poorer schools fail state-imposed tests and opportunities are further cut by subsequent decrease in funding. Once these schools are placed on the failing list they are required by the government to use some funding for transporting students to a non failing school; hence, even less funds are left for the school. Not surprisingly students who choose this option are faced with reluctant schools that are hesitant to admit low scoring students that could affect their test scores negatively.

Low-income schools that receive low ratings are faced with further difficulties of maintaining a teaching staff. Such labels discourage the most experienced and qualified teachers from joining the staff since it would reflect negatively on them through association. Subsequently students that need the most skilled teachers are instead being taught by inexperience, less educated teachers.

Despite NCLB attempt to close the achievement gap between minority and non-minority students as of 2009 the gap has not significantly changed. Though scores from minorities have increased so have those from white students, maintaining the gap.

Average Classroom

In 2007, 72% of public school teachers were female, 44% of which were under age 40 and 52% had a master's or higher degree. In contrast, a lower 74% of private school teachers were female, under age 40 (39%) and 38% had a master's or higher degree.

Though the pupil teacher ratio was at its all time low of 15.5 students in 2007, the current class size is 23.4 students in public secondary schools. The initial decline is attributed to the rapid growth of number of schoolteachers entering the workforce.

The average length of a school day in elementary and secondary education is 6.8 hours in 2004. The average school year was approximately 181.2 days. Most of the time spent teaching was over reading (10.8hrs per week) and the least amount of time over science (2.8hrs).

The average salary for public school teachers in 2009 was \$53,910, which is only 2% higher than in 1998 after accounting for inflation.

Technology in the Classroom

Technology has become a critical part of a child's education. As computers become a regular part of life the importance of learning how to use these devices are more important than ever to keep individuals competitive as they enter the job market.

In 2005, 94% of public schools had internet access, a dramatic increase of 59% since 1994. The student to computer ratio in 2005 was 3.8 to 1. Computers are most commonly used for drill and practice technology, in addition to teaching keyboard and organizational skills.

Some pro-technology arguments include the fact that computers allow students to express themselves in new unique ways such as through videos, animation, message boards and blogs. Another is that students learn more in a shorter amount of time when using the internet. A major meta-analysis conducted by James Kulik revealed that those with computer access scored in the 64th percentile compared to those without computers who scored in the 50th. The drawback of these findings is that computers did not have positive effects in every area of study.

Despite claims of educational gains due to technology there isn't data to support these beliefs and most studies are inconclusive. The true value of computers is becoming computer efficient instead of using computers to aid learning.

Regardless, some schools have openly embraced the integration of technology in educational settings. For instance Stanford School of Medicine has issued ipads for every medical student. Students are encouraged to take notes and have their textbooks on the ipad, which 71% comply. Additionally some schools have completely replaced textbooks with ipods, laptops or kindles. Cushing Academy, a private school, has dismantled their library, giving away 20,000 books in favor of the ebook on kindles. Educators there argue that though these technological devices might be expensive initially, textbooks are also expensive and replacing these books every couple of years is more costly to the school.

The pitfall of the increasing use of technology is its corresponding dependency. For example students don't need to think extensively about a topic or reflect over the meaning of a passage when the internet is at their fingertips offering up every conceivable afterthought on a vast array of subjects. Such sites as sparknotes and easybib take the work and learning out of a task and subsequently teaches students to first use shortcuts and then rely on their abilities if that fails.

Discipline

In Proficient Ms. Delaney never punishes her students, not because she's lenient or a push over but because the children respect her. Rodney, on the other hand, struggles gaining the children's respect and instead influences them through fear. This displays the extremes on the spectrum of discipline in public schools.

The debate on how to properly discipline children has been around since the existence of educational systems. In the 17th and 18th century schools used corporal punishment. Corporal punishment means "any punishment in which physical force is used to cause some degree of pain or discomfort". Earliest records show that a wooden cane was used to punish disobedient children. A leather strap became popular in the 1850s and remained in use until the paddle was introduced in the 1890's. The threat of physical punishment was thought to be the most effective way of managing students' behavior.

Distressingly from 2006-2007 some schools still participated in corporal punishment. In 2008 a surprising 20 states still deemed this method of punishment legal. Even more disturbingly students with disabilities are not exempt from school corporal punishment under these laws. Interestingly juvenile correction facilities have been banned from corporal punishment but it still continues in the classroom. A majority of the states that use this form of discipline are from the south with Texas ranking the highest.

Schools that use corporal punishment argue that it's a quick way to regain control, asserts more authority to teachers and does not cause long lasting harm. The Society of Adolescent Medicine disagrees, and through studies show that physical punishment causes severe muscle injury, blood clots, whiplash and can deteriorate family life. Furthermore educational experts point out that students have difficulty learning when they constantly fear punishment and that corporal punishment teaches violence.

Most schools find physical punishment barbaric and instead implement a variety of discipline measures such as revoking privileges or suspension from school. The Teachers Networking Learning Institute suggests that teachers use assertive discipline. This technique equally places behavior monitoring on students and attempts to maintain dignity of both the instructor and student. Teachers are instructed to make clear the consequences of breaking rules and when broken, to articulate to the student why he/she is being punished. Additionally, schools attempt to reinforce desired behavior through rewards.

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