Analysis of the Debate Surrounding *No Child Left Behind*: Uncovering Obstacles and Informing Policy Recommendations for Education Reform

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Introduction

Setting the Stage

George Washington Carver, an African American scientist and inventor, once said that education "is the key that unlocks the door to our freedom." American writer, Max Leon Forman, jokingly called education in America "the only commodity of which the consumer tries to get as little for his money as he can." These two American figures spoke to an issue that has been and continues to be of critical importance in American society. Indeed, education is one of the most powerful tools a country can use to adequately equip its citizens for a successful future. Despite its importance, American education has not achieved a high level of success. For example, by the end of 8th grade, students in the United States are two years behind in math skills compared to same-age peers in similar, industrialized countries. Moreover, 68% of 8th graders cannot read at grade level, and most will never catch up. The national high school graduation rate is only 70%, with states ranging from a high of 84% in Utah to a low of 54% in South Carolina (Broad Foundation, 2008). All these statistics point to a frightening realization: American students are struggling to keep up with the rest of the developed world, and they continue to fall further behind.

So, why should Americans be concerned about our struggling education system? To put it simply, education has a profound impact on our country's society, economy, and basic standard of living. For example, nearly 44% of dropouts under age 24 are jobless, and the unemployment rate of high school dropouts older than 25 is more than three times that of college graduates. A dropout is eight times more likely to be incarcerated compared to a high school graduate and nearly 20 times more likely compared to a college graduate. What makes these figures especially troubling is that the United States spends, on average, $22,600 per prison inmate annually

compared to only $9,644 per student enrolled in public school. Dropouts from the class of 2007 will cost our nation more than $300 billion in lost wages, lost taxes and lost productivity (Broad Foundation, 2008).

In 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed into law a landmark piece of legislation, the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA), primarily to provide funding for education across the country. Almost 40 years later, Congress reauthorized the EASA as the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2002* (NCLB). Since its passage, many legislators and educators have articulated diverse opinions about the relevance, impact, and success or failure of NCLB. Despite this dialogue, however, NCLB has yet to be reauthorized. Even though Americans value education highly, something stands in the way of moving forward with improving education for all. By carefully examining the debate surrounding this most recent piece of education legislation, my aim is to understand the forces that inhibit or promote educational reform.

At the outset, I pose the following question: What is the status of current debate over *No Child Left Behind*? The overall objective of this research paper is to use this question to draw inferences as to the cause of Washington's inability to put forth a new, meaningful piece of educational legislation. My thesis is that by answering this question (i.e., by analyzing the debate surrounding NCLB), I will be able to uncover the fundamental core differences on school reform that currently impede progress and will need to be resolved in order to move forward with education legislation. To address the primary question about the NCLB debate, I will, first, lay the groundwork by outlining some of the key problems with education today and in the past few decades. Second, I will address the divide over federalism versus state control and how it pertains to education. Within this context, I will proceed to focus on NCLB, explaining the objectives and intended goals of NCLB and providing some basic background to better

understand the law. In particular, the implementation process, or manner in which the requirements of the law have been carried out, will be addressed in this paper. Finally, I will review both positive and negative outcomes associated with this legislation. The goal of this paper is not only to characterize the debate about NCLB, but also to generalize from this debate to the larger issue of what is preventing Congress from moving forward with education reform. In so doing, my intent is to understand what resolutions need to occur and what compromises need to be made to allow for effective education reform and to make recommendations for future reform in the United States.

Status of American Education and Education Policy

Prior Legislation

Federal funding for education can be traced back to the passing of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965*. As part of his campaign against poverty, President Lyndon Johnson pushed through this historic legislation which has had a significant impact on education since. The primary source of funding from ESEA comes through Title I which provides financial assistance to local educational agencies and schools with high percentages of children from low-income families to help ensure that all children meet challenging state academic standards (Department of Education, 2007). In 1980, the Department of Education was created and authorized by Congress as an agency of the federal government that oversees federal involvement in education (Department of Education, 2012).

In 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education released a report entitled "A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform." This landmark report on the status of education in the United States identified multiple concerns and emphasized a critical need for policy reform. The report found that students were not prepared to maintain the United States'

international competitive position. The report led to several states adopting higher standards for their students, such as increasing academic requirements in terms of English and math courses. The "Nation at Risk" report laid out several guidelines for "fixing" education in America, calling for significant educational reform. In fact, this report, now nearly 25 years old, ultimately provided the major groundwork underlying Bush's NCLB (Jones, 2009).

With a dismal picture painted by a "Nation at Risk" and pressure to reverse the downward trend in academic performance, the federal government released its vision for educational reform through the establishment of eight ambitious goals to be achieved by the new millennium. President George H. W. Bush pushed for these goals at a 1989 coalition of state governors concerned about America's public schools. One of the governors participating in this coalition was the soon-to-be President, Bill Clinton. It was Clinton who signed into law the *Goals 2000: Educate America Act* in 1994. *Goals 2000* was aimed at creating higher student standards, removing excessive government regulation on education, and providing students with more school choice (Hayes, 2008).

The final piece of major education legislation preceding NCLB was the *Improving America's Schools Act* of 1994. It aimed to stimulate school-wide improvement in low-income communities by targeting more dollars to schools in the poorest areas (Jorgensen & Hoffman, 2003). This legislation also improved technical assistance for schools across America in that one of the goals was to have internet in all classrooms (Jorgensen & Hoffman, 2003). The act also strengthened assessment and accountability by encouraging communities and states to use their own assessments for ESEA to improve teaching and by offering incentives for students and schools to improve their educational performance (Jorgensen & Hoffman, 2003). Finally, the legislation created more sustained, meaningful professional development for teachers and

principals by offering opportunities to deepen their understanding of the subjects they teach, master new research-supported methods for helping all children learn, share effective teaching techniques with each other, and work more closely with parents. In short, through this important legislation, federal financing was aimed at professional development for educators (Jorgensen & Hoffman, 2003).

Educational Performance of Students in America's Schools

International rankings based on academic performance have highlighted the recent struggles of American education. The Trends in International Mathematical and Science Study (TIMSS) is an assessment of academic scores for students from 38 different countries around the world in science and math (Gonzales, et al., 2004). At the turn of the century, the United States ranked only 19th in average eighth-grade math scores and 18th in science scores (National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2000). Furthermore, American students have ranked around 14th in reading literacy among developed nations since 2000 (Johnson, 2010). According to the 2009 findings from the National Assessment of Academic Progress (NAEP), only one-third of all students entering high school are proficient in reading, with only 15% of African Americans and 17% of Hispanic students being proficient readers (Boyer & Hamil, 2008). Moreover, research demonstrates that a student who is not proficient in reading by the end of 3rd grade has only a 25% chance of graduating from high school (Juel, 2006).

Recent Status of American Public Education

These statistics concerning academic performance do not reflect a new phenomenon. American public education had shown signs of weakness even during the 1970s and 1980s (Gonzales, 2007; Jennings, Kober, & Scott, 2009). The average SAT score, for example, dropped 50 points between 1963 and 1980 (Hayes, Wolfer, & Wolfe, 1996). In 1980, international

comparisons of student academic achievement revealed that on 19 academic tests used to measure achievement in science and math, American students never ranked first or second (Gonzales, 2007). Furthermore, in comparison to industrialized countries, students in the United States ranked last in 7 of 19 academic tests (National Commission on Excellence in Education [NCEE], 1983). These international comparison statistics are specifically troubling because as high technology jobs and markets expand, it is necessary for the United States to have a skilled and educated workforce to remain economically competitive on the global stage. American students also showed troubling signs of declining literacy and reading capability. In the 1980s, about 13% of 17-year-old students in the United States were considered to be functionally illiterate. Among minorities, the figures were much higher. Specifically, 40% of minority students were considered functionally illiterate (NCEE, 1983). Reading test scores on the NAEP showed a downward trend in comprehension skills in the 1980s. For example, 80% of 3rd graders, 54% of 7th graders, and 36% of 11th graders could not explain the meaning of a three-paragraph passage used in the NAEP test battery to evaluate reading comprehension (Rushefsky, 1996). Declining test scores were not the only factor plaguing the American education system; school dropout rates continued to rise as the graduation rate dropped to 45% through the 1980s and 1990s (Gonzales, 2007).

To address these staggering statistics and trends, the federal government decided to act quickly and set objectives for American education. Under the Clinton administration, the government formed what was called *Goals 2000*. Based on a foundation of eight goals to be achieved by the year 2000, the Clinton administration tried to turn the tide and alter the path of American education. The goals to be achieved by 2000 were not based on statistical improvement (unlike the aims of NCLB, to be addressed later); rather they were based on ideals

or basic principles (Jennings, 2011). The first goal addressed school readiness; the goal was for all children to enter school healthy and ready to learn. The second goal focused on higher teacher education and development to ensure quality teaching in the classroom. In that American students needed to increase their scores in math and science, the third goal was for students to be ranked first in the world in math and science. Along with improvement in math and science, *Goals 2000* targeted increased student achievement and citizenship as the fourth goal. The fifth goal of the *Goals 2000* report was an expectation of adult literacy and lifelong learning. Sixth, *Goals 2000* aimed at increasing parental involvement in schools and in the educational life of their children. Seventh, the report articulated a goal to create a safe and drug-free environment in all schools. The final goal was to increase school completion and graduation rates (Jennings, 2011).

Academic Performance Following Goals 2000

Passed in 1994 under the Clinton Administration, *Goals 2000* was a step forward in articulating high expectations and demanding higher-performing students and better learning environments (Department of Education, 2004). Unfortunately, student data continued to demonstrate poor performance even after *Goals 2000* was introduced; today we still see multiple downward trends in our education system. Teacher attrition rates, for example, have handicapped the progress towards creating a highly skilled teaching force. Today, 46% of new teachers in America's schools quit the teaching profession after five years or less. Furthermore, 97% of teachers who are hired are replacements for teachers who left for some reason other than retirement (Kopkowaski, 2008). While teachers struggle to gain a foothold in the goal for quality development, students struggle to achieve favorable results, even after *Goals 2000*. In this country, a student drops out of high school every 26 seconds. The consequences of dropping out

of school are far-reaching. These children are eight times more likely to go to prison, 50% less likely to vote, more likely to need social welfare assistance, are not eligible for 90% of available jobs, and are paid 40 cents to the dollar earned by a college graduate; all these factors perpetuate a cycle of poverty and under-performing students (Chilcott & Guggenheim, 2010).

Since the publication of *Goals 2000*, academic research has highlighted (a) the need for statistical data to drive policy decisions, (b) the importance of holding public school systems accountable, and (c) the growing issue of inequality in education. Student performance data are useful in identifying the academic areas in which students are struggling. Accountability is equally important in shaping education. Eric Hanushek, a scholar at Stanford's Hoover Institution, highlights the importance of accountability and argues that improvements in education should be linked with a system that has consequences and punishments for failing to meet standards (Hanushek, 2005). Finally, inequality within a diverse society is a growing concern in American education. Recent studies have brought to light the correlation between poverty and academic performance. David Berliner, a renowned educational psychologist at UCLA, has found that higher family income is linked to children's higher cognitive performance (as measured by IQ) and lower negative behavior (Berliner, 2005). Moreover, the achievement gap between White and African American 9-year-old students in math is 28 percentage points, with equally significant gaps in reading and science (NCES, 2010; Vanneman, Hamilton, Anderson, & Rahman, 2009).

In sum, these three issues (need for student performance data, importance of accountability, and concerns about inequality), coupled with the disturbing decline in academic scores and graduation rates, have given rise to a new sense of urgency to reshape and redirect

educational policy. NCLB represents the federal government's effort to address these critical issues and reverse the declining trend in academic performance in the United States.

Federalism in Education

Governance Structure of Education

To better grasp the debate over education reform, it is important to understand the roles and responsibilities of different levels of governments in education policy. There are three levels of education administration and governance. At the base are local government structures. These include local school boards and school districts within the state that have the most direct impact on the education system and schools within their locale. Next is the state government. The states have the power to set standards (such as proficiency standards) and to determine their own tests to measure student performance relative to these standards. Furthermore, state governments are the primary source of funding for public education (Dennis, 2000). The states also have the power to regulate public schools within the state. They can shape the curriculum and regulations for schools (Dennis, 2000). Finally, the federal government plays a more supportive role in public education. It provides funding rather than specific regulations by which schools must abide. For example, through ESEA Title 1 funds, the federal government helps states to finance schools and school programs. Although the federal government cannot control schools directly, it can attach requirements to the funds provided to states and schools. Furthermore, the Department of Education plays a role in generating statistics and figures to document academic performance throughout the country (Department of Education, 2011).

Historically, states have played a stronger role in education than has the federal government. Certainly *Goals 2000* represented a challenge from the federal government directing states to work toward achieving results like higher graduation rates and higher

academic performance (Jennings, 2011). At the turn of the millennium, however, President George W. Bush and other politicians began to argue that schools and states were not doing their jobs to produce high-performing students. The argument was made that the federal government's role in public education would be pulled back *only if* states could demonstrate to Congress significant education outcomes like higher rates of graduation and student performance (Jennings, 2011).

Proponents of Federal Involvement in Education

While there has been a shift in the debate regarding federal versus state control of education, it remains as one of the biggest (if not the biggest) points of contention among lawmakers and educators today. There are those who support a strong federal role in education. Eric Hanushek approaches the issue by arguing that it is in the interest of the federal government to get involved. Hanushek argues that education is a national problem and a national interest. The federal government is charged with making decisions that will benefit the entire country, including high-quality education. States may not fully appreciate the impact of education on the economy, particularly if students move to a different state after graduating or dropping out of school. The federal government, however, is in a position to understand how a population of well-educated citizens can have an overall positive impact on the national economy. Hanushek argues that states may not see the direct benefit of educating their students, thus making education a national concern that should be addressed by the federal government (Hanushek, 2005).

Another perspective on this issue focuses on the necessity of a national standard and test. In an interview with PBS, journalist and writer Nicholas Lemann discussed why he and others support federal involvement in education. Lemann noted the changes that have come about due

to the NCLB legislation and hailed them as a positive step towards a national curriculum and national standards. In addition to supporting NCLB, Lemann also sees the need for national standards of proficiency (rather than state-determined standards) to avoid having states use low standards to tout high proficiency. According to Lemann, states do not necessarily have the incentive to set high standards; only the national government can be trusted to do the right thing. He views NCLB as an initial first step toward establishing national academic proficiency standards (Lemann, 2002).

Opponents of Federal Involvement in Education

While there are strong supporters of a more federalist approach towards education, there are several people who argue for a reduced federal imprint on education. The primary source of opposition to a federalist system of education lies in the United States Constitution. The 10th Amendment of the Constitution states: "The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the states, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people." Basically, any responsibilities that are not specifically delegated to the federal government are delegated to the states. Education is not mentioned in the Constitution. As such, education is legally one of the powers reserved for the states. Thus, any federal involvement in education constitutes a potential breach in the Constitution (Dennis, 2000).

There have been multiple lawsuits that many say have been caused by NCLB. These lawsuits have been concerned primarily with funding issues and the amount of money states must spend to be in compliance with NCLB. The primary complaint is that states are spending *more* money than they are actually receiving through Title 1 funding. Simply put, in order to comply with the standards and expectations of NCLB, states are spending more money than they are receiving from the federal government (Cohen, 2006).

At the same time, federal oversight is sometimes costing states money even when the state has been implementing procedures that are consistent with NCLB. For example, Connecticut has been administering achievement tests to all students in Grades 4, 6, 8, and 10 for more than 20 years prior to NCLB. NCLB, however, now requires Connecticut to spend an additional $8 million to conduct testing in Grades 3, 5, and 7 as well (Cohen, 2006). In effect, federal involvement complicates education by adding another administrative layer of government regulations, which many people find to be costly and overly restrictive.

Department of Education

The debate concerning the role of the federal government in education revolves around the Department of Education. Certainly, the candidates for the presidential election in 2012 have voiced their opinions of the Department of Education (ED). While the ED does not necessarily represent the entire federal role in education, it has often been seen as the primary mechanism through which the federal government controls education in this country. As such, there has been debate over the necessity of the ED and whether or not it should be abolished.

Those who support dismantling the ED point to the facts and figures which demonstrate its failures. The Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) has been working to eliminate the ED and promote home schooling. HSLDA has been a leading voice, outside of politicians, pushing for abolishment of the ED. The HSLDA points out that the budget of the Department of Education exceeds $30 billion; therefore, eliminating the ED would save tax dollars and eliminate an inefficient use of federal funding. As the HSLDA argues, federal funding has increased yet failed to produce significant results. Since 1970, the average per pupil spending has risen from $3,000 to almost $5,600, adjusted for inflation. During the same time period, however, SAT scores have dropped from a total average of 937 in 1972 to 902 in 1994

(National Center for Home Education, 2000). The argument is that the ED has acted as an inefficient means to produce academic success and to increase academic performance. The HSLDA argues that federal involvement in education has not succeeded and, as such, should be eliminated.

From the view of several politicians, the ED is rather tempting to be placed on the federal spending cutting table. Here is what some candidates are saying. Representative Michelle Bachman (R-MN), told reporters that she wanted to cut the ED if elected president. Bachman believes that the ED is not a necessary organ of the federal government "because the Constitution does not specifically enumerate nor does it give to the federal government the role and duty to superintend over education that historically has been held by the parents and by local communities and by state governments" (Hornick, 2011). As a staunch constitutionalist, Representative Ron Paul (R-TX), shares Bachman's views on the ED. He sees the Department of Education as an inefficient and overly bureaucratic misuse of tax dollars. Furthermore, Paul believes that, because the Constitution does not require the federal government to be involved in education, states and local communities should be placed in charge of managing their educational systems and can do it more effectively (RonPaul.com, 2012). These candidates tend to point to the Constitution and ineffective spending as reasons to abandon the ED.

While there has been a movement to eliminate the ED, thereby substantially curbing federal involvement in education, others support the ED and argue that it still plays an important role in our education system today. This debate over the ED has acted as a forum for the bigger controversy over federal versus state control of education policy. To gain a better grasp of the federalism debate (and how it relates to NCLB), it is important to understand the objectives of

educational reform (and of NCLB, in particular) and why federal involvement is, or is not, a necessary component of reform.

Objectives of *No Child Left Behind*

Overall Objectives of Public Policy

Before delving into the specific objectives of NCLB, it is useful to provide some perspective on the basic goals of public policy in general. In his book, "Public Policy in the United States Toward the 21st Century," Mark Rushefsky discusses four ways of evaluating policy measures and then relates each specifically to education. First, public policy should be efficient. In education, policy should be aimed at driving school systems towards their ultimate goal of teaching children. Second, policy should focus on equity; when applied to education, this means closing the achievement gap and providing an equal education to minorities. Third, public policy should be aimed at creating security. By providing an educational environment to ensure that students have a more economically and financially secure future, education policy can attain its goal of security. Finally, public policy should have the goal of promoting freedom; within education, this is reflected in the option of school choice or freedom in selecting school curriculum (Rushefsky, 1996).

Democratic System and Education: Why the Federal Government Is Involved with Education

The founders of this country had a vision when they established the framework for public education. To them, public education represented a civic duty of the government to create a stable political and social order. Public education acted as a means to instill basic democratic values in citizens and provide them with the skills and tools needed to prosper economically, thereby allowing the nation's economy to prosper and grow (Benjamin, McDonnell, & Timpane,

2000). These ideals of the founders have morphed into a much more simplistic way of viewing government involvement in education. In the United States, we have a unique pathway and set of goals that have been molded into the idea of the "American Dream." As Jennifer Hochschild and Nathan Scovronick put it, the government gets involved in education because "Americans want the educational system to help translate the American dream from vision to practice" (p. 11). In other words, public education enables governments to provide citizens with the tools and means they need to pursue success (Hochschild & Scovronick, 2004).

As a democratic government, ours is charged with promoting a stable society for future generations. Many argue that it is impossible to create a democratic society without a widely accepted set of democratic values and at least a functional level of literacy. Public education enables the government to address both objectives by educating citizens about the basic, fundamental values of democracy, while also providing tools to become literate and to function effectively and contribute in meaningful ways to society (Friedman, 1955). Furthermore, educating the public allows the government to impact economic growth and competitiveness, both of which are vital to a country's continued existence and prosperity. In effect, public education enables the government to promote its national interests. While the complexity of government involvement in education has led to some disagreement and controversy, many Americans would likely agree that, overall, government involvement and public education are staples in a democratic society and in this country.

Goals and Objectives of No Child Left Behind

As stated in the Department of Education NCLB outline, NCLB addresses two fundamental goals of increasing student achievement and increasing accountability; however, it also includes smaller objectives as part of its attempt to bolster American education (Department

of Education, 2003). First, the overarching goal of NCLB is to improve student achievement. The success of education policy is usually gauged by the academic performance of students. NCLB was established with the fundamental objective of raising test scores and academic performance of American students.

Second, NCLB is aimed at increasing accountability in education. NCLB set out to create "report cards" with student achievement data broken down into several subcategories (e.g., by minority status). Furthermore, NCLB increases accountability through frequent testing of math and reading skills (Department of Education, 2003). If nothing else, NCLB added more testing and scientific data to be used to assess schools' performance, thereby increasing accountability (Jennings & Rentner, 2006). At the same time, NCLB increases accountability through measurement and documentation of Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) to gauge the performance of students and schools over time (Rudalevige, 2005).

Finally, NCLB has the objective of creating "a change in the culture of America's schools" (Department of Education, 2003). More specifically, NCLB has the goal of providing parents with more information about their children's progress and test scores and to push parents to become more involved, thereby attempting to change the attitude and culture in America's schools (Rudalevige, 2005).

There are also smaller, more general goals and objectives incorporated into the NCLB legislation. NCLB includes clauses to increase teacher training and professional development. By creating more responsible and educated teachers, NCLB hopes to improve education for young students (Department of Education, 2003). In addition, NCLB is focused on providing greater financial resources to schools. States and school districts receive increased federal funding through ESEA.

Ongoing Debate over Policy Objectives

Even with the goals of NCLB being solidified once the legislation was passed, there continues to be considerable debate regarding what the goals of education legislation, in general, should be. Whereas most would agree that education legislation should be aimed at promoting high-quality education for all students in America, there is some disagreement over the specific objectives and approaches to achieve that goal, as explained below.

First, there is a growing movement for education policy to be aimed at offering financial assistance to impoverished families as a means of closing the achievement gap. The argument for this policy approach is that lower socio-economic status (SES) contributes to lower academic performance. As such, the specific objective of educational legislation should be aimed at increasing resources for families with low SES (Berliner, 2005). One study that looked at correlations between SES and academic scores found a statistically significant relationship. In this study, researchers observed schools with varying percentages of students receiving free and reduced lunch (an indicator of low SES). They found that schools with a higher percentage of children receiving free and reduced lunch had lower TIMSS academic scores (Gonzales et al., 2004). Further studies found that when students were divided into four social classes (based on income), there was a significant relationship between lower literacy scores and lower social classes (Lemke et al., 2001). All these results highlight the disparity in academic performance between low-income and high-income students and have provided empirical support for those arguing that policy should be aimed at increasing resources for students of low SES. To further support this push for greater financial resources for low-income families, another study examined the relative impact of an early literacy program (Head Start) and income growth. This study found that an income growth for families led to slightly higher increases in children's

cognitive outcomes and significantly lower negative behaviors than did Head Start services alone (Taylor, Dearing, & McCartney, 2004). The results of this study suggest that increasing financial resources for families would lead to better academic performance for low-SES and low-performing students.

Second, there is debate over educational adequacy versus equality. Some argue that educational reform should be aimed at *adequacy*, or providing an adequate standard of teaching and adequate expectations. The basic idea is that reform policy should strive to promote a better learning environment overall (Rudalevige, 2005). There are others, however, who argue for promoting *equality* through educational reform legislation. In other words, education policy should be directed at creating equal opportunities for underprivileged children. The argument here, which is consistent with NCLB, is that some children get overlooked, left behind, and forgotten in our education system. As such, policy should attempt to alter the education environment in the United States by directing greater focus on underperforming students or students with fewer educational opportunities; that is, education policy should attempt to create a level "playing ground" for underprivileged students (Reich, 2006).

Even with the passage of NCLB, debate continues about what should constitute the key objectives of educational reform legislation. This debate is significant because any future legislation for educational reform cannot be successful without clear and strong objectives that are widely agreed upon by lawmakers and Americans across the country. Thus, it is important to ask how the goals and objectives of NCLB were decided upon. Furthermore, it is important to highlight how NCLB grew out of the debate over education at the turn of the century. How did lawmakers reach consensus on the goals of educational reform to be achieved through NCLB?

An examination of the background of NCLB and the legislative process it endured will provide insight into how this agreement was achieved.

Background for *No Child Left Behind*

Debate over No Child Left Behind

When George W. Bush ran for president, he promised to take drastic steps in changing American education. During his campaign Bush made it clear he had plans to significantly alter education policy. He pointed to his tenure as Governor of Texas during which the state saw an increase in test scores. He especially focused his campaign on the promise of improving scores among African American and Latino students (Hayes, 2008). Early into his presidency, Bushy signed into law the historic piece of legislation, the *No Child Left Behind Act*. NCLB was not legislation that passed easily; it underwent a grueling debate among lawmakers on Capitol Hill, but ultimately passed with overwhelming support. Legislators in both houses had disagreements over major parts of the bill as well as ideas that were left out of the legislation.

With respect to debated portions of the bill that were included, the most contested topic centered on greater federal control of education (Nather, 2001a). As previously discussed, there have been differing views on the extent to which the federal government should be involved in education in the United States. This divergence in views on federal involvement was evident during the debate over NCLB. Lawmakers disagreed over the level and function of federal involvement in educational reform. Similar to the debate on federal involvement, there was disagreement over the funding levels to be included in the bill. Democrats pushed for increased federal funding to schools, while Republicans were hesitant to accept any increases without stricter guidelines for use of federal funding (Nather, 2001a).

Whereas federalism appeared to be a major focus of debate, procedural and implementation issues were also discussed in Congress during the passing of this legislation. NCLB was designed to make historic leaps in the use of scientific research data to determine effective teaching practices and the use of student testing. These landmark changes were not without disagreement. Many lawmakers, with limited backgrounds in education, believed that testing would be very useful in measuring students' academic success. Others with closer ties to the classroom, however, argued that little could be accomplished by incorporating testing regulations into the legislation (Nather, 2001b). Furthermore, the specific consequences for failing to achieve Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) based on test scores were hotly debated in Congress. There was considerable disagreement on determining how much progress states, school districts, and schools needed to make in raising test scores to avoid being hit with negative sanctions (Nather, 2001b)

While extensive debate centered on aspects of education policy that were included in the bill, there was ample discussion over aspects of policy that were omitted from the legislation as well. Among these included four basic policy changes that would have significantly altered the goals and objectives of NCLB and changed its overall impact on educational reform. First, Senator Dodd proposed an amendment during debate in the Senate to withhold federal funding from states that failed to equalize funding between rich and poor school districts. This amendment would have changed NCLB's focus to incorporate income inequities among school children. Senate Republicans, however, were able to gain support and block this amendment because they did not approve of the proposed increase in federal oversight and involvement in education. Second, President Bush's original proposal included a private school voucher amendment to provide vouchers to parents of students in under-performing schools. This

amendment would have funneled federal funding toward private schools and expanded NCLB's realm of impact. Opposition to this proposal came from both Democrats and Republicans who argued that this would drain federal funding from public schools which needed money much more than did private schools (Nather, 2001a).

Third, Democrats attempted to include a provision that addressed class size. Specifically, Democrats wanted to add language that would give more funding to schools that reduced class sizes. This amendment would have expanded federal regulation and the specific objectives of NCLB. Republicans, however, countered that states had the power to determine class sizes and that federal involvement in making that determination was not appropriate. Finally, there was debate over adding language regarding teacher requirements. This amendment would have drastically altered NCLB by not only creating legislation to impact the classroom, but the teaching profession as well. Congress and, more specifically, lawmakers who had close ties to the classroom (such as Senator Kennedy and Representative Boehner) did not want to create conflicts with teachers' unions over the issue of teacher quality and credentials. Lawmakers concluded that it was the states' responsibility to determine teacher requirements (Nather, 2001a).

Passage of No Child Left Behind

Through much discussion and debate, as well as modifications in the language and provisions of the bill, Congress was successful in shaping the legislation to receive strong bi-partisan support to be passed into law (Hayes, 2008; Jorgensen & Hoffmann, 2003). Both sides were able to find some common ground in the final legislation. Republicans were promised increased accountability and sanctions for failing schools, including school choice. Furthermore, Republicans liked the flexibility provided to states and school districts by consolidating almost

50 separate ESEA programs into five grant initiatives aimed at five specific goals, thereby minimizing the federal footprint on education (Skinner, Lomax, Dortch, Kuenzi, & McCallion, 2010). On the other side, Democrats were promised increased funding. At the same time, Democrats hailed the legislation for its goals of funding literacy programs and teacher quality incentives. Both sides applauded Bush's commitment to accountability through the annual testing of students, school report cards, rewards for states and schools that are successful in teaching disadvantaged students, and penalties for the schools that continue to produce low-performing students (Hayes, 2008).

Although passing NCLB relied on appeasing both Democrats and Republicans, there were a few central figures that played a major role in promoting the legislation. At the heart of NCLB was President George W. Bush. Bush and the Republican Party supported and endorsed high-stakes testing, and he was committed to creating a policy grounded in this belief (Hayes, 2008). While Bush acted through the executive branch to shape education policy, he relied on several prominent individuals within the legislative branch. Senators Ted Kennedy (D-MA) and Judd Gregg (R-NH), along with Representatives George Miller (D-CA) and John Boehner (R-OH), were the chief sponsors of the bill in the Senate and the House of Representatives as they managed to negotiate both houses approving the NCLB legislation. The final votes were 87-10 in the Senate and 381-41 in the House. On January 8, 2002, less than a year after being proposed, NCLB was officially signed into law by President Bush (Jorgensen & Hoffmann, 2003)

Provisions and Requirements of No Child Left Behind

The *No Child Left Behind Act* is a re-authorization of ESEA; that is, NCLB continues to serve as the same outline for federal funding as ESEA, but with added and unique provisions not included in the original ESEA. These provisions are linked to how federal funding is distributed

and used (Skinner et al., 2010). As such, it is pertinent to discuss the specific provisions that make this legislation different from the ESEA as well as the changes designed to promote education reform in the United States.

To begin, NCLB includes language and terms that center on the requirement that states develop "challenging" academic standards in reading and math. One of the key terms in NCLB is "Annual Yearly Progress," or AYP. Simply put, each state is responsible for setting annual statewide academic progress objectives to ensure that *all* groups of students reach proficiency within 12 years; there is specific language requiring 100% proficiency in both reading and math by the year 2014. To measure this progress, NCLB requires states to test children annually in Grades 3 through 8 in reading and math. It is important to note that the bill specifically prohibited any national curriculum or national standards. NCLB placed the responsibility of selecting tests and measures on the shoulders of the states, and gave states until the 2005-2006 school year to do so. Any state receiving federal funding from Title 1 must administer tests and release the data from these measurements to the public. Once in place, schools and districts are required to use their test data to document AYP and progress toward their statewide objectives. Specifically, states must demonstrate (through tests scores) that they are on course to reach 100% reading and math proficiency. At the same time, states are required to compare their standardized test scores to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) data. While there were no penalties for states failing to pass the NAEP, the data act as a means to make cross-state comparisons of proficiency standards and student performance. In other words, the NAEP data can be used to highlight states with low proficiency standards. Specifically, if a state reports high proficiency, but its students score low on the NAEP, this could be a sign of overall low proficiency standards (Skinner et al., 2010).

NCLB has made radical changes in the way the federal government funds education. It set in place a more scientific approach to measuring academic progress and success and attempted to hold states and school systems more accountable for effectively teaching children using evidence-based practices. To promote educational reform, NCLB includes provisions that act as consequences should states and school districts fail to adequately maintain or meet AYP. Schools that fall behind are subject to various sanctions imposed by the state. Under-performing schools can avoid sanctions and negative consequences by demonstrating AYP and/or showing a 10% reduction in the number of students who are not meeting annual proficiency goals (Skinner et al., 2010).

Schools that fail to make AYP for two consecutive years are publically labeled as being "in need of improvement" and required to develop a two-year improvement plan. Moreover, students are given the option to transfer to a better school within the school district, if any exists. Schools falling short of AYP for a third year must offer free tutoring and other educational services to students who are struggling. Missing AYP for a fourth consecutive year renders a school as requiring "corrective action" which may involve replacement of staff, introduction of a new curriculum, or extending the amount of time students are in class. A fifth year of failure to meet AYP results in developing a comprehensive plan to restructure the entire school; the restructuring plan must be implemented if the school does not meet AYP for a sixth straight year. Such restructuring may include closing the school, transforming the school into a charter school, hiring a private company to run the school, or asking the State Office of Education to run the school directly (Skinner et al., 2010). These sanctions are used as incentives for schools to show success, but also function as safety measures to push for significant education reform in areas where teaching is ineffective and students are struggling.

Also included in the NCLB Act are several provisions that maintain the federal government's goal of achieving a healthy and successful learning environment for all students. The legislation requires states to establish one challenging standard or goal for its students to achieve. Each state determines for itself what counts as a high or "challenging" standard. In addition, the state's curriculum standards must be applied to all students, rather than having different standards for different students in different cities or parts of the states. In other words, this goal must be applied for *all* students in the entire state, not just a specific district which may have greater resources or higher-performing students. Finally, the law requires each state to employ highly qualified teachers. While states have the authority to determine the standards and credentials for "highly qualified teachers," this provision within NCLB is designed to promote the professional development and education of teachers (Skinner et al., 2010). Overall, NCLB made drastic changes to the original language of ESEA in order to promote far-reaching reform that would, hopefully, positively impact education in the United States and foster academic success.

Evaluating the Implementation Process of No Child Left Behind

In the years since its passage, NCLB has come under scrutiny and widespread criticism. Of greatest concern is the process by which NCLB has been implemented. The ineffectiveness with which NCLB is carried out is a source of frustration and negativism among the American public, who are also frustrated with lawmakers' apparent inaction in reauthorizing NCLB (Greifner, 2006). NCLB has received considerable negative feedback with respect to certain implementation issues, including the lack of common proficiency standards, concerns with high-stakes testing, inclusion of sub-groups of students in mandated testing, and the limited

effectiveness of restructuring (Wong 2008). The criticisms surrounding these and other implementation issues are addressed in the following sections.

Lack of Common Proficiency Standards across States

Within the current structure of NCLB, states retain a fair amount of control and power in education reform. One area of state control lies in each state's authority to establish proficiency criteria for students enrolled in their schools. Simply put, there is no national proficiency rating system that applies to the entire country, but rather, several different standards for the different states (Skinner et al., 2010). The problem with this aspect of NCLB is self-evident; states may intentionally set low proficiency standards to meet the AYP requirements of NCLB. During an interview (cited previously), Nicholas Lemann discussed the problems of having state standards. Lemann pointed out that because the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is administered uniformly to a representative sample of students in all states, it provides a common national yardstick for measuring proficiency. Nonetheless, there are no negative sanctions for a state failing to meet proficiency standards on the NAEP. In other words, a state may have relatively low standards for proficiency such that school districts can perform poorly on the NAEP (a national metric) and yet escape any consequence or punishment from the federal government because students achieve AYP according to state standards (Lemann, 2002).

This conundrum is related to how NCLB is designed and implemented with respect to AYP. The NAEP is an assessment process in which all states must participate; NAEP data are used to compare states' academic progress and performance and to represent, in general, what students know in various content domains (such as math, reading, or science). Being able to compare states based on NAEP scores has highlighted a flaw in the AYP system of NCLB. Some states set low standards to look good in terms of AYP, whereas other states set more

respectable standards and higher expectations and are punished for having students fail to achieve proficiency (Viteritti, 2011). While NCLB takes important steps towards creating more accountability and using statistical data to improve education, the process by which the legislation is carried out with respect to proficiency standards undermines certain objectives of NCLB.

High-Stakes Testing

One of the most debated issues concerning the process of NCLB focuses on the use of high-stakes testing to drive education reform. In education, high-stakes testing refers to the use of academic tests (e.g., standardized achievement tests) to evaluate student performance for purposes of making decisions in which the "stakes are high," such as being promoted to the next grade level or being able to graduate. High-stakes testing leads to a school's performance to be based solely on the test scores of students (Reich, 2006). While President Bush received praise for bringing the use of objective, statistical evidence and scientific approach into the realm of education policy, high-stakes testing has remained one of the most contested aspects of NCLB.

Although much commentary on high-stakes testing has been negative, a strong case can be made for supporting high-stakes testing. Testing promotes accountability and can lead to higher expectations for students and schools. Despite the concerns with states setting their own proficiency standards (as discussed previously), high-stakes testing does hold states more accountable for student outcomes and allows greater transparency regarding student performance through the use of statistics and AYP reporting. Through high-stakes testing and public reporting of test scores, NCLB pushes schools to either make improvements and maintain high performance in their education system or to face negative consequences (Fusarelli, 2004).

At the same time, however, there has been a great deal of frustration with the use of high-stakes testing. Most criticism centers on a narrow picture that high-stakes testing offers policy makers and educators about the quality of teaching and schools. Several critics think it is unfair to base a school's or individual student's success or failure solely on a test. Think of a college application or job resume. Although one's grade point average and standardized test scores are important, they do not necessarily portray the full range of qualifications of the individual. That is why work experience, extra-curricular activities, and volunteer work are generally added to bolster resumes; colleges and prospective employers take these things into account when determining one's proficiency. Thus, David Tilly, who currently serves as Director of Innovation and Accountability for Heartland Area (Iowa) Education Agency, argues that standardized tests should *not* be the sole measures for evaluation and determination of education policy (Tilly, 2008). Tilly claims that the "scientific research-based practice" and "test-based decision-making" provisions in NCLB do not address some of the basic academic skill areas and behaviors for which we have yet to find research-based strategies or appropriate tests. For example, if a student is struggling to comprehend a reading passage on a test because he or she does not understand the vocabulary, then the reading test score will neither provide an accurate picture of the student's comprehension skills nor will it provide information for a teacher to help that student (Tilly, 2008). In other words, using high-stakes testing may not uncover the real areas where students are struggling (or, conversely, their areas of strength). High-stakes testing required by NCLB does not show *why* students are not succeeding. Therefore, such testing is not a good mechanism for bringing about effective school reform (Tilly, 2008).

Similarly, the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) argues that NCLB should allow for the use of multiple assessment measures to more appropriately and effectively assess schools'

performances. While high-stakes testing data can highlight performance areas in which the majority of students are progressing or struggling, they are not good for monitoring growth (or lack of growth) among students. Assessing student growth on a frequent basis would ensure that students who are not making progress do not get overlooked and can receive help before they "fail" on a high-stakes test (CEC, 2007).

Performance Requirements of Targeted Sub-Groups of Learners

Yet another controversial aspect of the implementation of NCLB relates to the performance requirements for sub-groups of students. NCLB requires states to report test results by certain sub-groups, including economically disadvantaged students, students with disabilities, students with limited English proficiency (LEP), and students within different racial-ethnic groups. Each subgroup must meet the AYP expectations. If one sub-group does not meet AYP then the entire school fails. When schools fail to make AYP, it is often because of students in two particular sub-groups, specifically students with disabilities and students with LEP. The failure of students in these sub-groups to make AYP occurs because they are expected to maintain the same proficiency levels as their general education and English-speaking peers. As such, CEC believes that the rules governing these sub-groups should be less strict (CEC, 2011). Having all student sub-groups achieve 100% proficiency by 2014 will be extremely difficult and expensive, if not impossible, and sets schools up for certain failure.

A related problem with the NCLB requirement concerning sub-groups is reflected in certain scenarios that could result in misleading and damaging results. For example, there is a provision in NCLB that requires 95% of a sub-group to be tested (Fusarelli, 2004). If participation within a sub-group is less than 95%, irrespective of test performance, the school is listed as failing and must face consequences for not meeting AYP. A problem occurs when

several students within one sub-group are absent from school for testing. Because these students are missing, this could result in an entire school being listed as failing (CEC, 2007). Similarly, many students fall into more than one sub-group (e.g., an African American student with a learning disability), which may lead to deliberate over-counting or under-counting of the number of students. This potential for miscounting is criticized by several who see the sub-group requirement as an unfair flaw in the process by which NCLB is carried out.

Ineffectiveness of Single Restructuring Options

Some researchers question whether the negative sanctions imposed on schools that fail to meet AYP are the best way to approach educational reform. Specifically, NCLB requires schools to select one of five options if they fail to make AYP for six consecutive years: (a) replace most of the school staff; (b) become a charter school; (c) turn the school over to the state; (d) contract with an outside organization to operate the school; or (e) undertake other major restructuring of the school's governance. Most schools pick the option of undergoing "any other major restructuring." Jack Jennings, President of the Center on Education Policy, and his colleagues conducted research across 42 schools (in five states) which had fallen short of AYP for six or more years. The purpose of their study was to determine whether any one of the five NCLB restructuring options was statistically more effective than the others (Jennings et al., 2009). These researchers found that no single reform option led to success. While a combination of reforms tended to be the most successful at promoting increased academic performance, single restructuring reforms seemed to be least effective (Jennings et al., 2009). As such, Jennings and his colleagues argue that one problem with the implementation process for NCLB is that it does not adequately address educational reform for the most needy, under-performing schools (about 10% of all public schools). Instead of forcing schools to undergo a single reform, Jennings

believes it would be more effective if NCLB allowed schools to pursue a combination of restructuring reform initiatives to be more successful at creating improved academic performance in schools (Jennings et al., 2009).

Inadequate Funding

While the majority of criticism of NCLB implementation focuses on high-stakes testing and accountability, there are two additional areas of some debate. First, there is concern over the inadequacy of funding as part of NCLB. The legislation was aimed at increasing federal funding for education; however, some make the argument that a loss of funding has actually occurred for some schools. Schools spend money to adhere to the requirements of NCLB (such as an increase in testing), and the reform expenses for low-performing schools usually exceed federal funding from NCLB (Haney, 2006). Furthermore, with federal funding of education at only 8% of the total financial pie, states bear a lot of the burden for funding education and complying with NCLB mandates. Moreover, some school districts may become involved in expensive lawsuits seeking to be exempt from NCLB requirements (Rudalevige, 2005). With the strict implementation policies of NCLB, funding is an issue for many states. When schools cannot afford the necessary reforms, they face both punishments from the NCLB legislation and expenses from lawsuits.

Intentional Grade Retention

The second area of some debate concerning the implementation process of NCLB relates to the deliberate "flunking" of students in some schools. NCLB relies solely on test performance at targeted grade levels to make judgments about proficiency and AYP. A study which looked at academic performance in the state of Florida, however, uncovered a problem with this aspect of NCLB. Florida showed significant improvement in NAEP and state standardized scores. From

2001-2005 there was a five-point increase on the Grade 4 standardized tests. There was also a ten-point increase in test scores for African American students (Haney, 2006). While these results look promising, further analysis uncovered a troubling trend. Looking at graduation rates from 2001-2005, researchers found a sudden change between Grades 3 and 4 (keeping in mind that Grade 4 is when students are tested for NCLB). Specifically, between Grades 3 and 4, there was a higher rate of grade retention. Furthermore, there was evidence of disproportionality in retention, with 15-20% of Hispanics and African Americans being held back compared to only 5% of Caucasians (Haney, 2006). So why is this such a troubling finding? It would suggest that schools are purposely flunking students in years just prior to the grades for required NCLB testing in order to keep test scores high. While there is not a provision in NCLB that requires students to be retained if they are not prepared for test taking, this is a side effect in the implementation of NCLB because of loose regulations combined with strict reform policies based on standardized test scores (Ryan, 2004).

No Child Left Behind has been subject to much criticism regarding the manner in which it is carried out and applied to states. While it is important to realize that public policy often encounters unintentional side-effects and that it is hard to draft a piece of legislation that has no flaws, several people have criticized the implementation process of NCLB. The foregoing evaluation of the implementation process of NCLB underscores the notion that any reauthorization (indeed, any future education reform) may require changes in the way the legislation is carried out in order to better align the implementation of NCLB with its intended goals.

Evaluation of Outcomes

As is the case in any piece of legislation, lawmakers work together to address an issue and formulate policy that will promote success and contribute to a beneficial outcome. *No Child Left Behind* is not any different; it is aimed at strengthening education and student outcomes in the United States. Similar to other pieces of legislation, however, it has been hard to accurately predict the outcomes of NCLB. As one would expect, there is extensive debate over whether NCLB has had an overall positive versus negative impact. With that said, it is safe to say that NCLB has met with mixed reviews.

Positive Outcomes of No Child Left Behind

The goals of NCLB are focused predominantly on increasing student achievement. Whereas the initial goals of NCLB have been achieved to a certain degree, other unintended or unspecified outcomes have resulted as well. Looking at test score data, there is evidence of an upward trend. One study found an average increase of 5 points on the math NAEP test among 4th graders and an average increase of 8 points among 8th graders between the years of 2001 and 2009 (Dee & Jacob, 2010). There is also evidence that the presence of AYP has actually led to improved academic achievement. Research has found that AYP has had a positive impact on mathematics achievement, particularly in lower-performing schools. Furthermore, data on reading show signs for optimism. The same study that observed an increase NAEP math scores also found a similar increase in the NAEP reading test scores. There was an increase of 4 points among 4th graders and an average increase of around 2 points among 8th graders on the reading portion of the NAEP (Dee & Jacob, 2010). A specific example of this improvement can be seen in the case of Stanton Elementary School in Philadelphia. In 2003 less than 2 in 10 children met reading standards; in 2005, about 7 in 10 met the same reading standards (Toppo, 2007).

Another area of improvement is the much talked about achievement gap. Nearly 75% of schools and school districts have shown rising test scores and slightly narrowing (or, at least, not widening) achievement gaps as of 2006. Jack Jennings and his colleagues believe this recent trend is a promising sign of closing the achievement gap (Jennings & Rentner, 2006). Furthermore, there is a greater focus on struggling students who often are the ones who are overlooked and "left behind." As explained earlier, NCLB requires schools to report test scores by sub-groups. This allows greater attention and support to be directed toward minority groups as they need to perform well in order for a school to do well. Another example of a positive impact on minority children can be seen by looking at children in Philadelphia who are now 50% more likely to attend preschool than before the law (Toppo, 2007). One study found a marked decrease in the achievement gap. Specifically, the percentage of African American students passing statewide exams rose 31% and Hispanics saw a rise of 29% of students passing these exams compared to an 18% increase for Caucasian students (Fusarelli, 2004). These statistics suggest that NCLB is successful in bringing attention to the learners who may be at highest risk of not succeeding academically. To be identified as being successful, schools need these students to perform well academically. The statistics presented here demonstrate that the goal of helping low-performing sub-groups is being met.

Some other positive impacts include the increase in funding, positive teacher reviews, and successful school reform. NCLB has led to an increase in funding of about $740 per student. Since its passage, NCLB has increased federal funding from 17 billion dollars to around 25 billion dollars in 2006 (Department of Education, 2007). There has been an overall 60% increase in federal funding since the passage of the law. The average amount of money spent on a student by local, state, and federal tax dollars is now more than $7,000 (Rudalevige, 2005).

NCLB has contributed to some unintended outcomes as well. One such outcome is the positive reaction, in certain areas, from teachers. Although teachers have expressed mixed opinions over the legislation, there are some consistent areas in which most teachers agree the law has been effective. In a 2007 online study, teachers considered to be "highly accomplished" were asked to rate NCLB. These teachers reported that the law did a good job helping to focus on core curriculum and core academic skills; it also helped to promote higher expectations for all students (Brint & Guiggino, 2010). Furthermore, a large number of teachers found that NCLB was successful at encouraging planning and organization for classes and had a positive impact on teachers' confidence in their students (Brint & Guiggino, 2010).

Finally, research has documented increased attention in schools to the core academic areas. Overall, there has been more time spent teaching math and reading. In fact, 60% of districts require a specific amount of time for reading in elementary schools. Also, schools are directing greater attention to the alignment of their curriculum and instruction with academic standards, and they are analyzing test scores much more rigorously (Jennings & Rentner, 2006).

Negative Outcomes of No Child left Behind

Despite positive outcomes of NCLB that have been highlighted by impressive statistical data, there are also negative outcomes. First, the reliance on high-stakes testing along with strict penalties puts a tremendous amount of pressure on schools to find ways to prepare students to pass tests, and sometimes this can have negative effects. For example, schools that fail to reach AYP for two consecutive years must allow students the option of transferring to a better-performing school. The problem is that this essentially allows for a "brain drain" within a school district where struggling schools will continue to be challenged if they lose their high-performing students to schools that are already successful (Fusarelli, 2004). Furthermore, research

documents an increase in time spent on reading and math which, in turn, decreases time spent on other subjects. In times of budgetary crisis, the subjects that are not tested - such as sports, music, and foreign language - can face cuts (Israel, 2011). Moreover, because a school's performance is based solely on standardized tests, there has been a rise in "teaching-to-the-test" which may minimize a focus on creative thinking and the use of non-traditional teaching approaches in favor of a narrow, skill-focused instructional method driven by teaching students to perform well on a test. Many educators argue that NCLB has had a negative impact on teaching standards as it has lost its focus on nurturing children's creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving.

Teacher reactions confirm that the focus of their teaching has been impacted in negative ways by NCLB. Teachers surveyed in the 2007 online survey (mentioned earlier) voiced criticisms about NCLB's impact on individualized student learning, decreased creativity, weakened relationships between teachers and students, and lack of understanding and respect for teachers. Teachers reported that the emphasis NCLB places on individualized teaching and learning is not cost-effective because they are forced to divert some of their teaching away from the group to focus on the individual needs of children. This actually leads to less time spent teaching because the teacher feels obligated to address the needs of each child. Furthermore, teachers noted an overall decline in student's creativity because their teaching focuses on test-preparation rather promoting critical thinking. Also, teachers experienced a weaker interpersonal relationship between themselves and their students as they spent more time on test preparation and less time on getting to know students personally. Finally, teachers reported feeling a decline in respect and understanding for their profession with the passage of NCLB. They indicated that, as a result of NCLB, teaching was reduced to "bland" drill-based, test-preparation teaching,

leading to a lack of respect and appreciation for the teaching profession (Brint & Guiggino, 2010).

A decade after being enacted into law, NCLB has shown both promising and negative results, leading to a mixed and inconclusive evaluation of the overall impact of the legislation. In general, the positive student performance outcomes resulting from NCLB are offset by the negative outcomes with respect to school funding and loss of innovative teaching. Similar to the debate concerning other aspects of NCLB, it cannot be unequivocally stated that NCLB has had only a negative or only a positive impact on education.

Discussion

What is the State Of Debate Over No Child Left Behind and Education Policy?

This paper set out to critically analyze the debate over education policy by examining *No Child Left Behind.* While it is hard to arrive at one answer to this question, it can be concluded that the status of debate is rather diffused and centers on not one, but many different aspects of NCLB. This paper has examined the debate over the implementation process, objectives, outcomes, and federal versus state control issues as they pertain to *No Child Left Behind* to illustrate just how diffused the debate is. As such, my primary research question can be answered by concluding that the state of debate over *No Child Left Behind* is multi-faceted, encompassing both convergence and disagreement among lawmakers, educators and the general public.

The goal of this paper is to make inferences about the future of education policy based on an analysis of the debate on NCLB. To do this, it is important to discuss more specifically the diffusion of the debate surrounding NCLB. As seen through the foregoing discussion, Americans have mixed views on NCLB. A recent Gallup poll further confirms this. In 2009, a

survey found that 20% of respondents thought NCLB made public education better, 45% thought it did not make a difference, and 30% thought it made education worse (Newport, 2009). Interestingly, these numbers have fluctuated throughout the years since the passage of NCLB. In 2005, for example, the percentage of Americans who held favorable views on NCLB was virtually the same as the percentage who held unfavorable views (Lyons, 2005). Over time, there has been an increase in those holding unfavorable views and a decrease in those holding favorable views. While it is clear that Americans stand somewhat divided in their views on NCLB, there is a wide range of opinions on specific issues.

Discussion: What Divides Us?

There is clearly an ideological divide underlying the diverse opinions about NCLB, but it is not necessarily Republicans against Democrats on every single issue. It is important to remember that the legislation was passed with overwhelming bi-partisan support from both Democrats and Republicans. In looking at attitudes and opinions about NCLB, it is evident that that party affiliation does not play as significant a role as one might predict. In fact, according to a 2009 Gallup Poll survey, 40% of *both* Republicans and Democrats believe that NCLB has had only minimal impact on education. Similarly, a comparable percentage of *both* Republicans (26%) and Democrats (22%) think that NCLB has had a positive impact on education (Newport, 2009). Yet another Gallup Poll suggests that both parties agree funding for education should *not* be cut; only 35% of Republicans and 31% of Democrats support cutting education spending (Newport & Saad, 2011). Looking at this broader picture of party affiliation and its relation to opinion over NCLB and education, there is greater consensus than might be expected. This is not to say, however, that political ideology does not divide us; it does to a certain degree, but in more

narrowly focused aspects of education policy. At the same time, perhaps party identification is *not* the sole factor that divides us in education policy.

Discussion: Ideological Differences

While not being the single determinant of one's views on education policy, ideological differences have contributed to the diffusion of the debate over *No Child Left Behind*. This is most readily observed in the debate of federalism versus state control of education. Democrats approved NCLB, in large part, because of its plan for increasing education spending. Simply put, Democratic lawmakers are in favor of increasing, or at least maintaining, federal involvement in education. For example, the Health, Education, Labor, and Pension (HELP) Committee Chair, Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA), has pushed for education legislation that maintains federal involvement in education (Dillion, 2011a). The Republicans, however, support less federal involvement. Certainly 2012 GOP presidential hopefuls have made their views very clear: eliminate the Department of Education and curb federal involvement in education. Although this fundamental ideological divide regarding the role of the federal government in education is not specifically directed toward NCLB, it may be difficult to overcome to move policymakers toward agreement on future education reform.

While the debate over federal versus local control may not necessarily be completely split along party lines, the ideological conflict stands as a wedge between lawmakers. Both sides have valid points; both sides have a fair amount of support. Certainly local control would save federal tax dollars and would allow states to control their own education system to meet their own needs. On the other hand, education (albeit not an explicit constitutional right) can be construed as a national issue in that an uneducated public contributes to national social and economic problems. Furthermore, federal involvement has enabled funding to be directed to critical areas of

education. Head Start is a good example of federal funding helping a specific area of education, i.e., early intervention for economically-disadvantaged young children. Although the issue of federal control continues to divide policymakers, it may be possible to achieve unity with some compromise from both sides. In his proposed reauthorized version of ESEA, for example, Senator Harkin supports conceding some amount of federal control of education to state control. Finding an appropriate balance of federal and state involvement will be the key in drafting successful future education policy recommendations.

Discussion: Accountability, Penalties and High-Stakes Testing

Another source of disagreement and illustration of how the NCLB debate is diffused, rather concentrated on one issue, relates to the concept of accountability. Policymakers and educators struggle to agree on how to make schools accountable and hold students to high standards. Analysis of the conflicting opinions about the implementation process, outcomes, and objectives of NCLB highlight a consistent trend in the nature of the disagreement. Those holding optimistic views towards NCLB tend to be in favor of high-stakes testing and strict penalties for schools that do not meet AYP. Those holding a pessimistic view towards NCLB tend to be frustrated with high-stakes testing and do not see strict penalties as a way of improving education. Given this divergence in opinion, however, several questions remain unanswered. How can schools be held accountable without being strict? How is it possible to guarantee that "no child is left behind" without using test data to determine which students are failing and require extra support? On the other hand, should a school's performance be based on the test scores of students who are unmotivated and not engaged in learning? Is it fair to punish schools that are already struggling with high-risk student populations and limited resources by forcing them to become even more financially burdened? Essentially, policymakers find themselves in a

"Catch 22" with two conflicting yet equally compelling perspectives which make it difficult to achieve compromise.

As discussed previously, part of the problem with accountability is that states have variable proficiency standards that make it hard to equitably and reliably evaluate every state. One of the reasons NCLB received strong bi-partisan support is that it required the use of scientific data on which to base education reform. This may have driven states to lower their proficiency ratings to avoid negative sanctions. Furthermore, there has been a growing concern over how to both demonstrate and ensure accountability. On one hand, the federal government would be ill-advised to initiate a national curriculum and national standards; on the other hand, however, it is important to work with states to maintain ambitious, but achievable standards. So, how is it possible for the federal government to support states to set higher standards and ensure accountability? There is no definitive answer to this question; however, it is one that will need to be considered for a future policy recommendations. Recently, Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, took an important step towards working with states to create more accountable and respectable standards by overriding the strict provision in NCLB that requires 100% proficiency by 2014 (Dillon, 2011b). Secretary Duncan's hope is to find a way to push states to adopt higher proficiency standards to take a positive step towards increasing student performance.

A second point of debate in relation to accountability concerns the use of high-stakes testing to measure a school's or individual teacher's performance. Certainly one can argue that basing a school's performance on a standardized test is not ideal; however, few alternative, feasible, and financially efficient options have been offered. The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) has worked to lobby Congress to take a different approach to measuring a school's performance. Members of CEC have pushed for growth models for determining

accountability. A growth model shows students' score changes over time and focuses on the change (growth) itself, rather than on level of proficiency, as an index of accountability. The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) has lobbied for similar measures. NASP has called for a reauthorization that maintains high standards while expanding the means of measuring school performance (Gorin, 2010). The National Education Association (NEA) is another organization that is against a "one-size-fits-all," high-stakes testing approach. The NEA disagrees with labeling students as either "proficient" or "non-proficient" on the basis of one test score because it ignores any progress that students make. As such, the NEA has pushed for models that include multiple, differentiated levels of student achievement to capture students' progress (Gordon, 2004). All of these recommendations, however, may prove to be financially and logistically infeasible. Although initially there was strong support of high-stakes testing to ensure accountability, it appears lawmakers and educators have either sided with organizations like NASP and CEC in support of retaining a revised accountability system *or* shifted to a more conservative approach that opposes national accountability because it maintains federal involvement in education. Any future policy recommendations must strive for a compromise between those wishing to expand tests of school performance (thereby increasing federal involvement in education) and those who oppose this idea.

A final issue relating to accountability and high-stakes testing is the presence of strict penalties. The system of sanctions that NCLB set in place for schools that do not achieve AYP has resulted in three divergent viewpoints: those who support strict penalties; those who oppose strict penalties and want lighter penalties; and those who would rather use incentives over penalties. As seen throughout this paper, there is some support for strict penalties because they push schools to educate all children effectively (as shown by data-based academic

improvement). Others, however, have blamed these strict penalties for creating a flaw in the system when states lower their academic proficiency standards to avoid consequences; lower standards undermine the attempts to improve American education. Finally, there is a third contingency that has promoted the use of incentives, rather than negative sanctions. Within the Obama Administration there are education reformers that worked to draft a plan that relies on incentives; this plan is called *Race to the Top*. The Obama team decided to use financial incentives (in the form of grants) to push states to compete with each other in achieving high-quality education reform (Hu, 2011). In fact, this program helped lead states to embrace reforms that many educational researchers have been advocating, such as increasing charter schools, taking away the tenure system, and promoting professional development of teachers (Tough, 2011). The *Race to the Top* initiative may signal a new era of incentive-based education reform; however, there will continue to be debate and division on this issue. As such, future policy recommendations will have to incorporate strategies to successfully bridge these critical differences on accountability, high-stakes testing, and the use of penalties if they are to find bi-partisan support both on Capitol Hill and within the educational community.

Discussion: An Uneducated Public

Part of the problem in achieving workable compromises regarding NCLB may be that a large proportion of the public is still uninformed about the law. As recent as two years ago, almost 40% of Americans responded as being "not very familiar" with NCLB (Newport, 2009). While this figure was down from 60% in 2005, it gives rise to a concern that the American public is not well-informed about education policy. The same survey in 2005 found a wide range of views on NCLB. Specifically, 28% of respondents said they had a "very" or "somewhat" favorable opinion of it. Almost identical was the percentage of respondents (27%) indicating a

"somewhat" or "very" unfavorable opinion of NCLB. The highest percentage (45%) of Americans, however, reported they did not know enough about NCLB to have an opinion one way or another (Lyons, 2005). In 2005, only 38% of Americans surveyed had confidence in the public education system, yet nearly half of them were uninformed about NCLB to render a decision about its impact. Today, only 34% of respondents have confidence in the American public education system (Morales, 2011). The point here is that Americans must become more knowledgeable about and invested in educational reform legislation if they are to have a legitimate voice in the debate. Perhaps America stands divided on how to improve education in this country because Americans have failed to learn about effective educational reform and, as such, fail to inform their representatives of their views and opinions on how education should be improved. Education impacts every single American. It is vital that citizens within a democracy have informed opinions on issues, such as education, that affect everyone. A better grasp of where Americans stand on education policy will help shape legislation and future reform.

Conclusion

Policy Recommendation

What is the next step in policy reform? We are essentially faced with four options: (a) maintain the NCLB education legislation as is; (b) make small alterations to NCLB provisions while keeping other provisions; (c) scrap NCLB and design completely new educational reform; and, finally, (d) bring an end to federal involvement in educational reform. Analysis of data leads me to believe that both the first and last options are not likely in the near future. Even those most supportive of NCLB seem to be willing and almost expecting at least some changes to the legislation; while they support NCLB and highlight the positive outcomes it has generated, they realize the need to revise certain provisions (specifically, the process and mechanisms used to

enforce its provisions). At the same time, completely eliminating federal involvement in education is an improbable option. While staunch conservatives and members of the Tea Party have pushed for cutting the Department of Education (thus eliminating the federal role in education), they likely will not have the political capital to successfully accomplish this maneuver. Thus, we are left with the option that includes making changes to the current NCLB legislation.

To best craft a policy recommendation, one must look at the views and opinions of the key players in the ongoing debate about education reform. To simplify, I have identified three different groups, each with their own perspective and each with their varying power of influence. First, at the heart of education reform are the *lawmakers* in Washington. Second, there are professional interest groups and unions trying to influence these lawmakers by providing research and persuasive arguments. Finally, there is the *public* whose voice acts as a guide for both interest groups and lawmakers.

On Capitol Hill, we continue to see debate among lawmakers over the level of federal involvement in education. Republicans have tended to be against federal regulation and are pushing for spending cuts. In contrast, Democrats are against making major cuts; in fact, President Obama's recent 2013 budget proposal increases funding for the ED. While, at face, this ideological divide may seem too difficult to overcome, there *does* appear to be bi-partisan agreement that the implementation process of NCLB should be revised. On one hand, our current lawmakers are united in their willingness to take into account the opinions of both constituent interest groups and the public. On the other hand, however, they have the difficult task of trying to arrive at compromises among diverse opinions in order to create educational legislation that has enough widespread political support to become law. That is, they must look beyond the "big

picture" of all Americans wanting better education to grapple with the more specific political issues of funding levels, degree of government intervention, and state power.

These legislators are influenced by several interest groups and unions, such as the National Association of School Psychologists, the National Educational Association, and the American Federation of Teachers, which have pushed for revisions in educational legislation. For the most part, these interest groups focus on the use of high-stakes testing; they lobby for other forms of accountability while broadening the subject domains that are tested and used to measure school success. These groups also question the use of negative sanctions as part of educational reform. While several interest groups support increasing accountability and reforming failing schools, the unions and interest groups are skeptical over the current use of sanctions against struggling schools. In short, these groups provide arguments, based on research, that urge Congress to find ways to channel better support to the most struggling schools and to have a deeper impact on the children who are not proficient and are being left behind. These interest groups are offering Congress their own suggestions on how to alter the specific school-reform procedures embedded within the bill (*not* the political and financial aspects of the bill). When disagreements among these special interest groups arise, they tend to focus on content changes that are most educationally relevant, most meaningful for schools, and will have the greatest impact on student outcomes.

Finally, the public has also voiced their opinions on NCLB and the future of school reform. A recent survey found that 31% of Americans would like to see NCLB reauthorized in its current form. Another 26% said they would like to see minimal changes; 25% indicated they would like to see major changes; and, 18% reported that NCLB should not be renewed at all (Newport, 2009). Yet, deeper analysis of these survey data reveals that Americans, overall, do

tend to support some sort of change in the current NCLB legislation. An overwhelming 73% of Americans said they would prefer to have a national standard and a national test rather than allowing states to set their own standards and tests (Howell, Peterson, & West, 2007). The American public tends to have varying opinions on broad issues related to education and educational reform. As such, the public acts as a thermometer to gauge the direction they would like to see educational reform take. In other words, unlike lawmakers or special interest groups, the public, in general, offers broad opinions on NCLB and education policy, rather than focusing on specific political aspects or the procedural content of the legislation.

Thus, we are left with a "grab bag" of mixed opinions and perspectives on several aspects of the NCLB legislation. The task now facing Congress is to determine how to accommodate the public opinion of American voters, the advice of educational interest groups and unions, and the diverse ideological perspectives on Capitol Hill to intricately craft an education policy in order to move forward with reform in the near future. Make no mistake; this is not an easy task. Congress will likely face months of heated debate before reaching some sort of consensus and providing America with realistic and potentially effective educational reform. But what form of educational reform legislation will Congress put forth? Based on an analysis of the debate surrounding NCLB presented in this paper, I conclude by offering the following policy recommendation of my own.

The basic framework of NCLB should be maintained. I think the law itself is well organized and does a good job trying to address adequacy. Certain provisions, however, should be reshaped to eliminate or curb any unintended, negative side effects. With that said, states should administer tests to 4th and 8th graders to measure academic performance. There will need to be some negotiations, however, between the states and the federal government. Accountability

is necessary for educational reform, but it is difficult to find ways to maximize accountability. Having different standards set by individual states has proven to be an obstacle in the way of true educational reform; as such, there should be a national standard of proficiency so we can adequately measure academic performance across the country. Those who oppose government regulation make some valid points; the United States Constitution does not specifically designate powers of education to the federal government, and states are closer to their schools and can more efficiently work with school districts. It may be that educational reform that calls upon increased federal involvement would be considered unconstitutional. This debate over constitutionality, however, is beyond the scope of this particular paper. Regardless, I believe these arguments are not valid. Implementing a national standard will not be used to increase government regulation of education per se but, rather, to ensure that states are using reliable and reasonable measures of proficiency. In order to adequately create a system of accountability, we need national standards to ensure states are using reasonable measures. This does not mean that the federal government will play a greater role in educational reform at the local level; these rights will continue to fall to the states.

At the same time, however, the provision of 100% proficiency is realistically unattainable; this provision should be dropped in order to relieve states of strict expectations (and potentially costly sanctions). Instead, AYP should be based on a much more attainable goal, one that also takes into account students' growth or progress over time. Through collaboration and consultation with educational measurement experts, a level of proficiency should be established that the federal government deems to be adequate as a trade-off for removing the 100% proficiency provision. This new AYP mandate will necessitate collaboration and compromise in order to be effective. The federal government should listen to and head the advice and

recommendations of local officials and education experts when deciding how to create a new AYP system and standard.

One of the most contested aspects of NCLB is the use of high-stakes testing to determine school success. One way to address the concerns raised by educators is to expand the testing content areas to include both science and social studies as well. Furthermore, as noted above, I recommend the use of growth models in evaluating schools. There is currently not a lot of opposition to this idea. Expanding the content area should ensure that core subjects are receiving an equal amount of teaching time because they will all be tested on proficiency tests. Furthermore, expanding test subjects will provide more comprehensive academic data and a better representation of American students. These provisions will highlight specific areas in which students are struggling and where greater support is needed. With these data, the reauthorization of NCLB should allow states greater flexibility in making decisions about how to assist schools that are labeled as failing and not meeting AYP. Sanctions and consequences (including positive incentives) should be directed at the specific areas or subjects where schools are struggling, rather than on broad reforms that may not be successful in "fixing" schools.

Some interest groups, such as the CEC, have pushed for less use of negative sanctions and greater use of positive reinforcements. In my mind, there is some need for negative sanctions because it pushes states to be more accountable. One potential problem with a policy like Race to the Top is that some states may simply opt out of reform and not put forth effort to change school systems. Furthermore, grant programs like *Race to the Top* may neglect to fund states in need of federal funding because a reward system would only reward states demonstrating improvement and not the states that may be struggling to improve. With that said, I think it is important to be smarter with the use of negative consequences and to ensure that reform is

happening in the areas where it is needed. By basing reform on more specific goals (determined by statistical data), education reform may be more effective.

Finally, research has consistently demonstrated the benefits of high-quality teaching; as such, my policy recommendation will be based on building a competent and strong work force of teachers in America. A small portion of ESEA funding should be put aside for teacher development and skill-building sessions. These career-building sessions will help teachers to develop the tools they will need to adequately educate today's youth. A bold political move would be to include a provision that requires teachers of failing schools to attend such skill-building sessions to increase the overall teaching quality in schools that are failing to meet AYP. Finally, teachers who are performing well should be acknowledged and rewarded; they should also receive incentives (such as lower class sizes or pay increases) for choosing to teach in failing or struggling schools.

Any policy decision that impacts the teaching profession is very dangerous and must be carefully thought out. As was the case during the original debate on NCLB, several lawmakers did not include provisions regarding teacher quality and credentials to avoid conflicts with education organizations, such as teacher unions. Nonetheless, these lawmakers must understand that education policy is rather weak without the proper and adequate level of professional development in teaching. I believe the provisions I have recommended will offer teachers a way to improve their teaching skills and become more effective educators. By taking an approach that works *with* teachers, rather than against them, Congress and the federal government should avoid conflict with teacher unions. Furthermore, this new legislation could attempt to alter some of the negative opinions (over NCLB) that are held by teachers. The point of these provisions is to

promote respect and establish high expectations for the teaching profession - a political move that should be able to foster academic success in classrooms.

NCLB is not a perfect law; opinions differ and implementation problems abound. Nonetheless, lawmakers, special interest groups, the American public all agree that education reform is critical. Given this common ground, I believe the overall framework provided by NCLB should be retained. Modification of the some of the basic provisions of NCLB (rather than complete elimination of NCLB and starting over with new educational legislation) is the best choice for the future of educational reform in this country. Hopefully, this is the path that Congress will pursue towards creating a more successful education system, one that brings about academic success for all students.

This policy recommendation is based on my own personal views and opinions concerning educational reform. While I attempted to appease as many "groups" as possible, there are still several other policy recommendations with different provisional changes and alterations. Regardless, I did attempt to incorporate the recommendations of several professional organizations and ideological groups. Organizations such as the CEC and NASP would likely approve of my test expansion and the use of growth models, but might push for even more reform such as requirements for decreased class sizes and more programs for several sub-groups (e.g., students with disabilities). Proponents of more federal involvement, like Hanushek and Lemann, might approve of national standards but be skeptical of removing the 100% proficiency provision. At the same time, some interest groups may feel on the short end of the stick. The HSLDA may disapprove of increasing the ED's role in education and the continuation of federal funding for education. Teacher unions such as the National Education Association may disapprove of the provisions regulating the teaching profession and feel left out of this policy.

As is the case with almost all policy, however, there will always be winners and losers. The purpose of this paper was to explain the current "stagnation" in educational reform in Washington. This policy recommendation has been formulated based on a critical analysis of the NCLB debate and is designed to address the basic, fundamental reasons we have not witnessed new legislation aimed at education reform. The status of the debate concerning NCLB, and educational reform as a whole, is so diffused it is pragmatically impossible to draft a piece of legislation that has the unanimous support of Republicans, Democrats, teacher unions, interest groups, and Americans across the country. With a multitude of recommendations and opinions on educational reform, finding compromise is a hurdle that cannot be easily jumped. In this age of political polarization, finding compromise may be even more difficult than before.

Concluding Statement

Let me conclude, first, with interjecting a personal statement. Although not intentional, this paper may have appeared to harshly criticize the *No Child Left Behind Act*. While a decade has given rise to some controversial facts, trends, and points of views, I personally applaud President Bush and the lawmakers who drafted and passed this legislation. Regardless of what critics say about NCLB, it was a historic leap forward in education reform that thrust the issue of education into the center stage of politics. It took innovative steps in bringing education reform into a new era of accountability and data-based decision-making; it pushed schools to focus on low-performing students; and it instigated higher expectations for *all* students in our schooling system. That is not to say that NCLB is without flaws; ten years of implementation have revealed some significant problems. Nonetheless, in my view, NCLB should *not* be seen as a failure, but, rather, as bold and much-needed legislation that brought attention to the pervasive troubles

within our school system and pushed for high expectations and goals to ensure a positive future for this country.

Will it be possible to overcome the differences and resolve the diffused state of debate about education that is reflected in the ongoing discussions related to NCLB? This paper set out to uncover the essence of the debate surrounding NCLB with the aim of identifying and understanding the critical underlying patterns of disagreement that impede efforts to move forward with reauthorized educational legislation. It is clear through the foregoing discussion and analysis that the NCLB debate is complex and diffuse, and not concentrated on a single issue. Different lawmakers find themselves at times divided and, at other times, in agreement on multiple issues related to education reform. The question remains whether this divergence is too great to overcome.

The wise words of inventors and authors of the past should act as a plea to Americans everywhere to demand an accountable, respectable and high-quality education system in the United States. The decade-old *No Child Left Behind Act* has done its part in moving educational reform into the next era, an era of accountability and data-based decisions. As many have suggested, however, NCLB has had mixed results in terms of education outcomes, and it leaves education reform in a state of flux. Will Congress take up the cause and set in place a new path for American education? Or, will the federal government opt to surrender its influence in education to the states? Although time will tell, one thing is for certain. Resolution of the diffused debate surrounding *No Child Left Behind* will lay the groundwork for shaping education legislation for the future. Every American must share the responsibility to create and implement education policy that truly represents the views of the people and that will be most beneficial to those in greatest need - all students in America's schools. Regardless of this call to action,

however, the question remains: Within this context of polarity and diverse viewpoints, will Americans courageously put aside differences and take a uniform stand to support education? It is my hope that education will win out, that policymakers will find common ground among diffused perspectives to set America back on the track of academic excellence.

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