

Winter 12-2013

Implementation of No Child Left Behind Legislation: A Case Study of the Impact on Teaching and Instruction Practices on a Northern California Middle School

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NORTHERN CALIFORNIA MIDDLE SCHOOL

Implementation of No Child Left Behind Legislation: A Case Study of the Impact on Teaching
and Instruction Practices On a Northern California Middle School

By

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for

EMPA 396 Graduate Research Project in Public Policy

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December 2013

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Abstract

In the years since the implementation of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation in 2001, standardized tests have become high stakes games for all public schools. Instead of crafting curricula that makes students think, pressured educators have tailored their teaching strictly to the tests. The results have sparked media frenzy. This study centers on the question: are teachers teaching to the test? This research examines the changes in teaching strategies that may have been adopted since the implementation of the NCLB legislation and this concern to “teach to the test.”

This study focuses on how one middle school in Northern California has evaluated and implemented the test-based accountability and subgroup provisions of the 2001 NCLB legislation. This study also examines what school policies followed and what, teaching processes might have changed to comply with the NCLB law. Another main question investigated in this study was: is No Child Left Behind a one size fits all type of legislation? This analysis identifies the differences in teaching strategies since the program became law. This study is directed at identifying the principal changes the NCLB policy has warranted within our schools and whether or not the policy is helping or hurting our children. This study is provided to enlighten and ensure that our educational system truly does leave no child behind.

Chapter 1-Introduction

Signed by President George W. Bush in 2001, the No Child Left Behind Act was a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the central federal law in pre-collegiate education (retrieved from ed.gov). Implemented at a time when there was wide public concern about the state of education, the NCLB legislation set requirements in place that reached into virtually every public school in America. It expanded the federal role in education and took particular aim at improving the educational lot of disadvantaged students. The policies of NCLB requires that all students of any race, gender, and ability level excel in reading and math by 2014 and that schools should build up to that goal by measuring achievements yearly. As the impact of No Child Left Behind legislation continues to unfold across the country, educators and child advocates continue to fight the battle of chasing numbers. The author's analysis focused on two questions: First, what impact has NCLB had on teaching and instructional practices? Second, is the NCLB policy appropriately structured to help or hurt our education system? The author presumes that upon the completion of this study, evidence will show that the No Child Left Behind legislation is a punitive law that uses flawed standardized tests to label schools as failures, which ultimately stifles the creative nature of educators. Which makes difficult a teachers ability to teach our children how to be productive members of society.

A Nation at Risk, a report published in 1981 by the National Commission on Excellence reported that the American School System was falling behind other nations compared to educational institutions around the world. This was the spark that lit the fire under government to put education on the "ballot". Throughout the history of the American educational system, schools and school districts have not been held accountable for student or teacher performance. The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) intended to change that practice by linking government

funding to achievement. Created to increase academic achievement in schools across the nation, raise the performance of disadvantaged students to the level of their more affluent counterparts, and attract qualified professionals to teach in every classroom, the NCLB policy began as an honor-worthy method providing every child with a quality education. However, the ill-advised route to school reform has hit numerous bumps in the road.

NCLB is the federal governments' single largest educational aid program. "Its stated purpose is to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to receive a high-quality education and reach proficiency by challenging state academic achievement standards and state academic assessments. " (79 U.S.C. § 6301 2003) However, since President Bush passed the new revision in 2002, there has been wide public concern from parents, educators, and academics about the implications of the policy for teachers and disadvantaged students. The first concern being that the test-based accountability has inconsistent benefits and several unintended consequences for minority students as well as teachers preparing these students for testing. Secondly, the subgroup accountability rules may sanction a disproportionately large number of African American and Latino schools. Reviews of the NCLB legislation show that some of its provisions promote segregated schools and encourage school administrators to push out minority and poor students, and place punishments on schools that serve the most diverse populations.

At the horn of this legislation in 2002, the U.S. Department of Education classified eighty-six hundred of the nation's ninety-five thousand public schools as "identified for improvement," (Brick, 2013). Central to the controversy over the effectiveness of No Child Left behind is its reliance on standardized tests as the primary measure of school quality. Under the banner of accountability, the law formalized the reward and punishment systems (Brick, 2013).

This study intends to explore the possible problems that have come to light as to whether teaching strategies since the implementation of No Child Left Behind are in the best interest of the students and if the tests administered will result in them becoming effective citizens, thoughtful human beings, and well educated individuals.

Teachers are without a doubt the most critical factor in how well students achieve. Initially focusing on teaching strategies that are used to implement the No Child Left Behind provisions this study will measure not only if strategies have changed, but how the changes may have effected student achievement. Many arguments have been and are continuing to be made for and against the Act, and teacher quality has become the main focus of these debates (Fisanick, 2008). Excellent teachers are an obvious necessity for strong educational programs. According to the Education Trust, a national education advocacy group. “Effective teachers can help students make enormous gains, while ineffective teachers can do lasting damage.” By measuring the time that teachers are spending on preparing for and administering the required state tests an evaluation will be conducted by analyzing the results of achievement gaps. Using a local middle school for the basis of this case study the author will assess how the policy has altered teacher’s strategies when is it comes to the manner in which they educate students.

Research already conducted for this study shows that No Child Left Behind defenders say that the law has pumped billions of dollars into America’s schools, and that rising test scores are evidence of its success. Despite this claim, there’s no concrete evidence to support the idea that NCLB has made an appreciable mark on student achievement. An identified major issue is that under the law states are allowed to set their own standards. “To avoid penalization, some states have been charged with deliberately setting low standards or “gaming the system.”

This research project will evaluate if NCLB is demonstrably unable to produce sustained and significant improvements even on a standardized test in the two subjects on which it focuses, reading and math. Focusing on improving schools not just inflating state test scores this proposal will provide teacher based recommendations for the improvement of this program. Millions of children are at a fork in the road, one road leads to opportunity, confidence, and eventually the fulfillment of their personal and vocational potential. The other, unfortunately, is a road of frustration, unfulfilled promise, and an increased probability of social and academic failure (Cox, 2007). This study sheds light on the endless road of education reform. There is so much we still need to do to ensure that our children take the path down the right road.

Chapter 2- Literature Review

The search of literature related to the No Child Left Behind policy and its potential impact on how teachers have changed their teaching strategies to coincide with the policy required statewide examinations resulted in a multitude of relevant research materials. Selected reference materials focus on the current state of our Nation's schools in the wake of No Child Left Behind. Perhaps the most pertinent materials used for this study are the published school report cards made available so that parents have access to how students are performing throughout the year. These results also display how the districts are performing on the standard statewide tests required to receive funding outlined in the No Child Left Behind policies. Literature for this study shows that many questions about the policy remain unanswered. The most important question being, are we effectively closing the academic achievement gaps?

In reviewing literature for this study the author has found that there are many expert opinions on the subject of No Child Left Behind. There have been numerous studies conducted on the proponents of NCLB and the results are mixed. Below the author will itemize the literature found by what educators are declaring the problems with the NCLB policy, what works with the policy, and recommendations to make the policy better.

What does not work with the No Child Left Behind policy:

As No Child Left Behind puts testing to the front burner educators all over the world have been speaking out. Articles that effectively address the issues of No Child Left Behind in relation to this study will be used to efficiently gather data. One of the most influential articles used for this study titled, *No Child Left Behind's Emphasis on "Teaching to the test" undermines quality education* (2006), written for the University of Maryland interviews Associate Professor

in Education Linda Valli. Professor Valli who was recently awarded the Jeffrey and David Mullan endowment for education has been an educator for the past thirty-two years. She has spent most of her career conducting studies on the strategies of teaching practices. “We were simply looking for good teaching practices, but what we found during the study was the shift to high-stakes testing actually undermined the quality of teaching in reading and math (Valli, 2006).” She goes on to explain that the data in her research showed that “what we would call high-quality teaching decreased over periods of time after No Child Left Behind was implemented (Valli, 2006).” Her work also revealed that there were declines in teaching higher-order thinking, in the amount of time spent on complex assignments, and in the actual amount of high cognitive content in the curriculum. She believes these declines are related to the pressure teachers were feeling to “teach to the test.” Her results run counter to the stated idea of NCLB, which is for students to achieve despite the rigorous standards. She states in the interview “it is not what we set out to find, but it is what we discovered (Valli, 2006).”

Diane Ravitch author of *The Death and Life of the American School System* (2010), states that her support for the NCLB remained strong until November 30, 2006. This was the day she attended a conference at the American Enterprise Institute, a well-respected conservative think tank in Washington, D.C. The conference examined whether the major remedies prescribed by NCLB, especially choice and after-school tutoring were effective. The basis of the conference was to determine if the “NCLB toolkit” was working. The various presentations that day demonstrated that state education departments were drowning in new bureaucratic requirements, procedures, and routines, and that none of the prescribed remedies were making a difference. She began to doubt the entire approach to school reform that NCLB represented. Beginning to see the

danger of the culture of testing that was spreading through every school in every community, town, city and state educators became angry.

Ravitch's book went on to explain that the most toxic flaw in NCLB was its legislative command that all students in every school must be proficient in reading and mathematics by 2014, including students with special needs, students whose native language is not English, students who are homeless and lacking any societal advantage, and students who have every societal advantage but are not interested in their schoolwork. All will be proficient by 2014. And if they are not, then their schools and teachers will suffer the consequences. She explains that the 2014 goal is a timetable for the demolition of public education in the United States.

The goal of 100 percent proficiency has placed thousands of public schools at risk of being privatized, turned into charters, or closed. Many cities have already suffered the loss of schools due to not meeting the NCLB requirements. Robin Landry who writes for helium.com (2006) expands on one of the chief concerns regarding the No Child Left Behind Act which is it is a system of "unfunded mandates." She states, "school districts must adhere to a stringent set of guidelines and face serious consequences if the desired results are not achieved. However, little or no federal funding has been made available to assist school districts serving lower income families." Many critics argue that it is this very lack of funds that has contributed to the schools' inability to provide a quality education to students in the first place. Crumbling buildings, lack of equipment and supplies and the inability to pay the higher salaries that would attract the most talented and experienced teachers are almost certainly contributing factors in schools that are "failing." Simply telling administrators in struggling districts that they must "do better" and then punishing them by withdrawing federal funds and burdening them with the extra expenses associated with paying for outside tutoring or transportation of their students to other schools

does little to help them achieve quality goals in the long run.

More than ten years after the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act , data reveals that at best the law has not helped the majority of American schoolchildren and at worst has hurt those students already at a disadvantage (McCluskey and Coulson, 2008). Written for the *At Issue* Publication McCluskey and Coulson give detail to the shortcomings of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) policy in their *No Child Left Behind is Not Salvageable* excerpt. Focusing on trends of achievement the author details by subject the pitfalls of the policy and how government attempts to take credit for preexisting achievements. The authors briefly overview the data received from a Harvard study conducted for the University's Civil Rights Project under the direction of Jaekyung Lee. Released in June 2006 the study concludes that NCLB does not appear to have had a significant impact on improving reading or math achievement. An average achievement score remains flat in reading, and grows at the same pace in math as it did before NCLB was passed.

The authors conclude with evaluating the modification proposals of No Child Left Behind. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings comparing NCLB to Ivory soap stated that "There's not much needed in a way of change." Given that there is still no conclusive evidence that NCLB is working, and that there is a good reason to believe that it is producing harmful, unintended consequences, this is not a common view. Even most NCLB supporters have called for the law to be reformed in various ways (McClusky and Coulson, 2008). This excerpt study concludes with the authors' opinion that the evidence and analysis presented here make it clear that the federal government has no proper role in American education beyond enforcing civil rights laws.

The measure of the worth of a society is how it treats its weakest and most vulnerable citizens. By this standard, America- the richest nation in the world falls visibly short (Sizer, 2004). Published by the Beacon Press, *Many Children Left Behind: How the No Child Left Behind Act is Damaging our Children and our Schools*, is a devastating brief against No Child Left Behind. Written by authors Deborah Meier, Alfie Kohn, Linda Darling-Hammond, Theodore Sizer, and George Wood this book is a point by point analysis by some of the most respected voices in education of how the No Child Left Behind policy is undermining everything it claims to prove.

What works with the No Child Left Behind policy:

Not all of NCLB has been a negative experience, *No Child Left Behind Has Helped English Language Learners (ELL)*, an article written for *At Issue* by Clemencia Chen and Beatriz Chu Clewell sheds light on one positive aspect of the policy. One of the many provisions of the No Child Left Behind legislation mandates that even English language learners (ELL) must meet all the standards of advancement. Given that English language learners and limited English proficient students are the most rapidly growing sub-groups in American elementary and middle schools, there is a great interest in their achievement (Cohen, 2007). Some educators have reported that the No Child Left Behind Act has played a part in the advancement of English language learners. Not only has No Child Left Behind forced schools to devote more attention to ELL students, but also the reforms have resulted in improvements in curriculum, teacher preparation, and assessment (Cohen, 2007). The authors go on to express that by increasing the accountability of states, districts, and schools for the educational success of ELL students, NCLB has focused attention on the educational needs of this group. Results show that NCLB has

enhanced efforts for teachers in effective instructional strategies for training English as second language students.

Another article in the *At Issue* publication written by Candace Cortiella agrees with the previous article stating that the NCLB legislation has yielded positive results for special education students. The article *Special Education Students Thrive Under No Child Left Behind*, focuses on the attention NCLB has brought to children who were once forgotten. Special education students are expected to meet the same state educational standards as all other students (Cortiella, 2008). The additional assistance of their individualized, specially designed instruction provides the extra support needed to reach such a level of achievement (Cortiella, 2008).

Texas, like all other states, have been invested and concerned with the education of their youth. *As Texas Goes* written by Gail Collins, from beginning to end is Texas's account on education reform and the No Child Left Behind efforts. Gail Collins, a "Yankee" by all accounts, traveled to Texas to witness the changes that were to affect generations to come. President Bush was elected into office, and he had full intention of bringing the Texas approach to education. While many reported that Texas's success with education was completely inflated, the results still spoke volumes. Collins decided to follow this journey. Texas has taken a starring role in the twenty-first-century national political discussion on education reform (Collins, 2012). Collins goes on to explain the actions of politicians such as George W. Bush, Phil Gramm, Dick Arme, Tom DeLay, and of course George H.W. Bush in an attempt to connect the dots between the grand Texas conspiracy to subvert the national welfare. "Texas runs everything." According to an article written reviewing the book by Bryan Burroughs a native Texan, "It is fact that for years, textbook publishers pretty much produced only books approved by the ultraconservative Texas State Board of Education (Burrough, 2012). No Child Left Behind is an exact replica of

the education system built in Texas, only the rest of the world cannot without proof claim increased scores but still Texas has without a doubt hijacked the American agenda.

Perhaps one of the most influential stories used for this study is *Saving The School* by Michael Brick. This is the true story of Anabel Garza, who accepted the position as Principle of Reagan High School in Austin, TX. Test scores were at their lowest at Reagan and dropout rates were at its peak. Anabel set out on a one-woman mission to save this school and to prove to all the nay sayers that the children that education reform forgot matter. Racing against a deadline set by the No Child Left Behind policy, Principal Garza with few of her staff members' support began a slow evolving process to re-identify the Reagan High School student. Threatened with school closure, this particular school had been use to the negative press. Known as the location of the brutal murder of 15-year old Otrrella Mosley who was killed in the schools' corridor by her ex-boyfriend, this schools future seems dismal to say the least. There were multiple reports of violent crimes as well as a climbing number of student pregnancies at the relatively small high school in Austin's east side.

Against the odds, Principal Garza had raised the rate of students passing all subjects on the standardized tests by seven percentage points, but nobody threw a party. That only brought the rate up to 34 percent. The worst single-subject passing rates were in math, 38 percent, and science, 42 percent. The state was calling for 60 percent in math and 55 percent in science. The education commissioner could shut a school down after three years of failing scores. Without much district support Garza was able to change this schools outlook. The Reagan's High School story is one of consequence, luckily the school was able to prevail despite the unreasonable NCLB requirements.

Recommendations for the improvement of No Child Left Behind:

Written for the University of California this study No Child Left Behind: *Methodical Challenges & Recommendations for Measuring Adequate Yearly Progress*, dwells on the methodological challenges for students. The study provides recommendations, based on recent research, for a viable approach for measuring progress of schools toward a set target (Thum, 2003). Based on No Child Left Behind's premise to measure achievement by using test scores, the author shows the method used to retrieve this data is flawed. He recommends that a system be put in place to establish the validity of the scores. Another recommendation involves the measure of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) detailed by the legislation. The accountability method to measure adequate yearly progress is, for example, test scores for an eighth grade class at the end of the year. All students in this class are measured the same. This requirement does not leave room for situational occurrences. What about a student who is in that class but does not report until January of that school year? The program requires that student as well meet the requirements even though their counterparts have had a five-month head start on learning. Many current suggestions for AYP revolve around three ideas (Goertz, 2001). In Texas, schools must meet absolute thresholds on achievement and other criteria. Relative growth targets are employed in California. Michigan offers an example where a major goal is to decrease the proportion of students in the lower performance bands. The author suggests that these methods should perhaps be studied to create an overall required program as a comprehensive accountability strategy.

As any researcher will see most literature found on the subject of the No Child Left Behind Act provides an analysis on its failures. Despite billions of dollars spent on a test-and-punish approach to school "reform," today's National Assessment of Educational Progress

(NAEP) report provides more evidence that the federal No Child Left Behind policy is a failure. With few exceptions, across three age groups and two subjects, the rate of improvement slowed compared with the previous period while gaps between blacks and white as well as Hispanics and whites ranged from widening to unchanging to slightly closing.

Chapter 3- Research Methodology

The political heart of No Child Left Behind is its professed goal of closing racial and economic achievement gaps (Neill, 2008). The hypothesis for this study is that evidence will show that the No Child Left Behind legislation is a punitive law that has not completed or appropriately attempted its mission. This study proposes to evaluate this hypothesis by conducting an observational study on the No Child Left Behind procedures implemented at a local Bay area middle school. By measuring what impact NCLB has had on teaching and instructional practices at XYZ Middle School since the legislation became law of the land the author will produce data that answers the hypothesis of this study. This question-based study proposes to analyze if public pressure on teachers, principals, and school superintendents to raise scores on high-stakes tests has caused them to give into the temptation to tailor and restrict instruction to only that which will be tested.

Is the NCLB policy appropriately structured to help or hurt our education system? By conducting this qualitative and quantitative study this research hopes to uncover the effectiveness of the NCLB procedural processes. With district approval the participants in this study will come from the school selected. Data will be collected not only from observation but also from a standard questionnaire designed to allow educators to elaborate on their opinions about whether NCLB administration requirements stifle teaching skills or abilities within their classrooms.

In an effort to comply with the federal No Child left behind mandate and avoid sanctions, states and school districts must find ways to address the complexities of improving student achievements (Hess & Petrilli, 2006). The overall guiding question in this study is: Since the implementation of No Child Left Behind has teaching strategies changed? The goal is to better

elucidate the connection between education strategies pre-NCLB and strategies that exist today.

The two research questions explored in this study are:

1. What impact has NCLB had on teaching and instructional practices?
2. Is the NCLB policy appropriately structured to help or hurt our education system?

Most educators agree that one challenge for teachers today is they need to know how to teach a much more racially, ethnically and linguistically diverse range of students. This includes students coming from an increasingly broad range of relatively disadvantaged or advantaged backgrounds: children in poverty, children whose first language is not English, and children from well-off families. Another challenge is, because of NCLB, teachers are now called upon to produce very concrete outcomes for students that work against good teaching. This study proposes to bring to the forefront that because of NCLB teacher's jobs may be increasingly stressful and dissatisfying. This study will also show that some of the expectations under NCLB are unrealistic, and some studies already conducted show that teachers feel they are not able to establish good, human teaching relationships with students because everything is so driven by testing. Recommendations resulting from this study, if any will identify ways for educators to meet these new challenges in ways that are healthy for both them and their students.

Data Collection Plan Overview:

XYZ Middle School located in the Northern California is a multi-tiered, open-air campus which overlooks hillsides and vineyards creating a quiet and serene atmosphere. The campus serves 806 students in grades 6-8. The students are served by 39 credentialed teachers with an average of 15 years' experience educating children. An evaluation will be conducted analyzing

the implementation process of No Child Left Behind against the procedures that were in place before the law was passed.

Mission: XYZ Middle School staff, families, and community are working collaboratively to support development of the whole child and using student driven inquiry to create life-long intellectual, emotional, and social learners. Collectively, we will inspire all students to achieve their greatest potential by installing integrity, respect, responsibility and ownership for oneself.

Surveys

Initial responses from this studies survey's completed by educators from XYZ Middle School reveal that the No Child Left Behind legislation is not a realistic avenue for the achievement of our nation's children. "The law falsely assumes that boosting test scores should be the primary goal of schools, an approach that has not improved education." Surveys also reveal that classroom curriculum has been altered to reflect that which will be tested on statewide examinations. One educator went as far as commenting "instead of approaching students in a fashion that would inspire growth, I approach them from a results perspective." This is not unlike the state of mind of most educators in these NCLB times. The survey shows that educators feel that they are now "test busters", fighting daily the stress of teaching to the test.

A nation-wide survey conducted on the topic show that many Americans express mixed views about the nation's signature education law. Among those who have heard about the law, 34% say the law has made schools better; 26% say it has made schools worse; and 32% say it has had no impact (The Pew Research Center, 2007). Overall surveys for this study reveal that 64% of the teaching staff at XYZ Middle School feels that the No Child Left Behind legislation is unrealistic and has put their school and its students at a disadvantage.

Interviews

Teachers and school administrators interviewed for this study went on at great length detailing the problems they have with No Child Left Behind. Their concerns centered on the pressures to teach to the test and their need to emphasize test-taking skills and material that is on the test at the expense of other material and broader learning. They also raised issues of dislocations in their classrooms and throughout their schools. Something that stood out during the interviews conducted was that educators are very concerned about the public's knowledge or lack thereof regarding the No Child Left Behind policy. Studies show that public opinion of the NCLB policy reveals that at least half the public is basing their opinion on very limited knowledge. Fewer than half (45%) feel they know either a great deal or a fair amount about NCLB. About the same number (47%) are able to identify the law's principal components. After hearing a brief description of the law's key provisions, support rises to 56% and opposition drops to 39% (Winston Group, 2007).

Noticeably during interviews amongst teachers who had been at the school before the policy, was the consensus that the "highly qualified teacher" requirement is blasphemous. During the implementation of this policy XYZ Middle School lost two teachers. These teachers who by administrators deemed to be "highly qualified" were teaching subjects outside of their educational experience, for which they were terminated. One was teaching a math class when her degree and credentials was in English and the other who was certified in physical education was teaching social studies. "These teachers had been in these departments for more than 10 years and because of what a piece of paper said they were removed. It was a great loss for both of those departments because while they did not have the proper certification they had the experience and training required to deal with these important subjects." (Kevin Daw Interview,

2013)

Secondary data

Published school report cards reveal that years of debating, passing and implementing No Child Left Behind reforms have done little to sway public opinion of school quality. In fact, “grades” given to schools by the public, parents, teachers and administrators have remained virtually unchanged (America Speaks, 2007). As far as academics the chart below displays the most recent published student overall report card for XYZ Middle School:

Subject	Percent of Students Scoring at Proficient or Advanced								
	School			District			State		
	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12
English	51	56	60	53	53	56	52	54	56
Language Arts									
Mathematics	55	51	54	50	48	49	48	50	51
Science	44	50	60	52	52	53	54	57	60
History-Social	29	36	44	45	45	45	44	48	49
Science									

Ensuring External and Internal Validity

Considering this specific study tests the hypothesis about the cause and effect relationship regarding the impact of NCLB on teaching and learning situations for XYZ Middle School the results could not be generalized. Learning environments outside the research setting for this study could possibly produce different results. Base on this fact external validity could not be

claimed for this study. Due to the specifics of the study and its contributors ensuring internal validity was not difficult. The results produced from the study come directly from those involved with the daily operations in which this study investigates.

Controlling for Bias

To ensure that this study is free of any bias the bulk of the data was received from published literature as well as interviews with staff members at the school chosen. While the findings and conclusion will of course have the authors input it will be a direct result of the information collected for the basis of the study. Verbiage used in research can be leading the author intends to rid the study of any language that cannot be supported by the facts. One of the major limitations of this study is that the author is not an educator. Time was also a significant factor in planning the overall research design, as well as choosing the primary research tools. The author is however invested in the quality of education received by America's students.

Dependent and Independent Variables

The independent variable in this study would be the No Child Left Behind policy itself. The dependent variables in this study would be considered the after effects of the policy. Significant to this study would be the dependent variable of instructional practices after the implementation of No Child Left Behind (independent variable) policy.

Operational Definitions

Accountability System: measuring state standards annually on a standard based assessment; aligning sanctions and rewards according to the number of students who achieve the standards.

Adequate Yearly Progress: measurement defined by the United States federal No Child Left Behind Act that allows the U.S. Department of Education to determine how every public school and school district in the country is performing academically according to results on standardized tests.

Teaching to the Test: an educational practice where curriculum is heavily focused on preparing for a standardized test.

Highly Qualified Teachers: the teacher has obtained full State certification as a teacher (including certification obtained through alternative routes to certification) or passed the State teacher licensing examination, and holds a license to teach in such State, except that when used with respect to any teacher teaching in a public charter school, the term means that the teacher meets the requirements set forth in the State's public charter school law.

Chapter 4-Results and Findings

This chapter presents an analysis and evaluation of the data collected from survey questionnaires and key informant interviews conducted for this study. Survey questionnaires were distributed from November 11, 2013-December 6, 2013. To date 64% of the teachers have responded from XYZ Middle School. Four Key informants were interviewed from November 22, 2013 to December 3, 2013. The results of the data are provided below.

Sub-Question Results

Question 1

What impact has the No Child Left Behind legislation had on teaching and instructional practices?

100% of the participants in this study agreed that the No Child Left Behind legislation has in some way altered traditional teaching practices.

Question 2

Is the NCLB policy appropriately structured to help or hurt our education system?

8% of the participants in this study agreed that the No Child Left Behind policy is designed to close the achievements gaps of our nations children Which means that 92% of the participants see that the no Child Left Behind policy has been a negative effect on our education system. Many teachers commented that it is unlikely that No Child Left Behind could affect student learning without affecting the learning environment, including instruction. Indeed studies find that NCLB has led teachers to devote more classroom time to core subjects, to spend more time

searching for better instructional strategies, and, perhaps less productively, to “teach to the test” (Dee & Jacob, 2010; Reback, Rockoff, & Schwartz, 2011). Of course, change comes with difficulty, and inducing enough change in the instructional environment to impact student learning seems likely to have had effects on teacher, both intended and unintended. “I am not the teacher I was before, I don’t feel the same satisfaction, I am now a test buster simply making student complete repetitious acts” (Keller Interview, 2013).

Survey Data

Question 1

Gender:

<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>
9 (36%)	16 (64%)

Question 2

Years as an educator:

1. 0-2
2. 3-5
3. 6-10
4. 11-15
5. 16-20
6. 21+

YEARS AS AN EDUCATOR		
0-2	0	0%
3-5	1	4%
6-10	5	20%
11-15	6	24%
16-20	5	20%
21+	8	32%
TOTAL	25	100%

Analysis of Data:

On average the teachers at XYZ Middle School have been educating children roughly over the last 15 years. The seasoned educators would be considered resident experts on the trends and challenges since the implementation of the No Child Left Behind policy.

Question 3

Grades Taught

1. 6th
2. 7th
3. 8th

Grade Currently Teaching		
6th	8	32%
7th	5	20%
8th	12	48%
TOTAL	25	100%

Analysis of Data:

48% of the educators who participated in this study are currently teaching 8th grade students.

These student next year will be enrolled in high school. Each teacher spoke about the effects that this policy will have on their students as they travel onto the next educational arena.

Question 4

Please discuss briefly the changes if any that No Child Left Behind has had on your teaching approach.

Analysis of Data:

100% of the participants in this study agreed that the No Child Left Behind policy has in some way changed their teaching approach. Whether it be positive or negative results show that this policy alters educational environments.

Question 5

My classroom curriculum is tailored to meet the statewide test requirements.

a. Strongly Agree	8%
b. Agree	64%
c. Disagree	12%
d. Strongly Disagree	0%
e. Not Sure	16%
Total	100%

Analysis of Data:

The implications that teaching to the test has had on the NCLB framework has been very negative. While teaching to the test is not detailed in the legislation teachers have found that this may be the only way to manufacture the results required by the policy. 72% of the participants in this study agree that their classroom instruction procedures are tailored to meet the requirements if statewide examinations.

Question 6

The NCLB policy is an effective way to improve academic achievement for my students?

a. Strongly Agree	0%
b. Agree	0%
c. Disagree	80%
d. Strongly Disagree	20%
e. Not Sure	0%
Total	100%

Analysis of Data:

In an effort to be exempt from the requirements of NCLB many states have submitted waivers to opt out of the policy. Not only do they relinquish any rights to the funding that comes along with the policy but any form of aid that schools may require throughout the school year would have to be satisfied by their local districts. Many educators see this as a relief. 100% of the participants in this survey agree that the NCLB policy is not an effective way to improve academic achievement.

Question 7

The goals of NCLB are realistic for my students.

a. Strongly Agree	0%
b. Agree	0%
c. Disagree	100%
d. Strongly Disagree	0%
e. Not Sure	0%
Total	100%

Analysis of Data:

Major issues surround the No Child Left Behind legislation are the stringent requirements and many teachers feel that to achieve these requirements are unrealistic and statistically impossible. The participants in this study agreed 100% that the No Child Left Behind policies are not reachable goals for their students.

Question 8

I have creative control over the lesson plans for my classroom.

a. Strongly Agree	0%
b. Agree	40%
c. Disagree	32%
d. Strongly Disagree	28%
e. Not Sure	0%
Total	100%

Analysis of Data:

68% of the participants in this study disagree that they have creative control within their classrooms. These results indicate that at XYZ Middle School being creative or teaching outside of the “box” may be discouraged. This has been an ongoing battle since the implementation of the No Child Left Behind policy many teachers feel they are not allowed to progress in ways they see fit.

Question 9

My schools accountability report card plays a pivotal role in what I teach.

a. Strongly Agree	40%
b. Agree	28%
c. Disagree	32%
d. Strongly Disagree	0%
e. Not Sure	0%
Total	100%

Analysis of Data:

Each school in the state of California by law are required to publish their schools Annual Accountability Report Card. This report reflects that's school student assessment results. This report is designed to classify Adequate Yearly Progress as required by the No Child Left Behind Act. When asked how pivotal this report is to teacher's instruction practices at XYZ Middle School there were mixed answers. 68% of the participants either agreed or strongly agreed that the annual "report card" plays a role in their instruction practices. 32% disagreed that the report played any role at all in educating students.

Question 10

Teachers at my school have a voice in the methods in which we teach our students.

a. Strongly Agree	52%
b. Agree	16%
c. Disagree	12%
d. Strongly Disagree	20%
e. Not Sure	0%
Total	100%

Analysis of Data:

A super majority (68%) of the teachers agree or strongly agree that they have a voice in the methods in which they teach their students. However, a strong minority (32%) either disagrees or strongly disagree that they have a voice in how they teach. This indicates that at XYZ Middle School while teachers are required to meet the rigorous standards of No Child Left Behind they are able to construct classroom material in the order they choose.

Chapter 5- Conclusion and Recommendations

In the decade since the No Child Left Behind Act made “accountability” the buzzword of public education, underperforming schools across the country have endured not-so-private dramas of survival (Green, 2012). Recommendations set forth in this study advised by experience educators respond to the pitfalls of No Child Left Behind. Immediately the law forced schools to confront the uncomfortable reality that many kids simply weren’t learning, but the remedies that followed did little to assist with that now growing problem. The author has serious questions regarding the conceptual foundation of the legislation. How are teachers to succeed in establishing environments conducive to learning and creating when their main incentives have changed to counting the multiples on tests that they have no part in creating? The fatal errors of the No Child Left Behind policy have diminished the value of the American education.

This study finds that the No Child Left Behind Act focuses on testing as the sole means of measuring academic success. Other studies conducted on the policy reveal that while assessment tools are needed, these high stakes tests encourage underhanded manipulation of students and test data. Reflected in this study are educator’s concern with spending more time on test preparation rather than authentic teaching and learning. Many teachers are being made to feel that their credibility as educators has been compromised for the sake of collecting data that often isn’t reflective of student, teacher, or school performance (Berliner and Nichols, 2008). This amongst many other reasons is the driving force in educators and parents alike to speak out about what needs to change with the policy. Part of the reason that NCLB has not been as successful as hoped for is that it is unrealistic since its requirements are not credible or easily enforceable; many states lack experts who truly understand NCLB’s provisions (Hess, 2008).

Policy Recommendations

Research conclusions lead to one viable and promising policy recommendation: form a local Educators Union. Educators at XYZ Middle School would benefit handsomely from the creation of a local Educators Union. By creating the platform of a guiding coalition team, teachers in the local area along with parents could devise a planned initiative to reshape the district's response to the NCLB policy requirements. Devising a plan to not only meet the requirements of NCLB but advance the achievement of their students, this planned learning community will see advances by following this agenda:

First, by developing an alliance with the California Department of Education, the committee can develop statewide standards that are at least reachable. To keep the funding "flowing", the alliance should request government's permission to be measured against solidified state standards only.

Second, adopt credible, enforceable and fair remedies for the NCLB Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) requirement. Parents and educators need to have confidence in the reliability of AYP as an identifying mechanism (Hess, 2008). Currently, if schools fail to meet the Adequate Yearly Progress set by the standards of NCLB for three consecutive years, they are threatened with the school's closure. Upon receipt of these threats, schools go into corrective action in an effort to ensure that the funding from NCLB continues to be issued. The local Educators Union can ensure that appropriate remedies are put in place so that local schools are always in corrective action mode. Three years is entirely too late to determine where things went wrong. This should be an annual occurrence.

Lastly, the development of trained No Child Left Behind experts would be infinitely beneficial for local districts trying to implement the policy. With the California Department of Education's assistance, the Education Union should enlist the help of educators on a national platform to come to local schools and train teachers the best methods of implementing the NCLB policy. This practice will at least forge a way to develop real time results so that achievement can be measured. Many states and districts need expert assistance to fix their troubled schools (Hess, 2008).

Areas for further research

There were many limitations with this study mostly the time constraints. There are so many avenues that need to be investigated about the No Child Left Behind legislation, and the crusade should not stop with this study. The following 3 areas could benefit from further research:

1. NCLB Impact on Graduation Rates: Every day an estimated 2,500 students across the nation drop out of high school. In the last decade, approximately 30% of students who enrolled in high school have failed to graduate four years later. No Child Left Behind's connection with this should be analyzed.
2. Insist on Real Consequences for failure: threats of school closure and funding reductions will only produce results that are dishonest and manipulated. Incentives for the success beyond approval should play a part in getting schools to the achievement levels promised by NCLB. This should be examined.
3. No Child Left Behind and English Language Learners: Results have shown that NCLB has been very beneficial. Although the adjustment to NCLB protocols

has been somewhat problematic for some students in schools with high rates of Limited English Proficient (LEP) students, the overall results of these changes have been positive. The advances that LEP students have made in the face of NCLB should be analyzed.

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Appendix A

Operational Definitions:

Accountability System: measuring state standards annually on a standard based assessment; aligning sanctions and rewards according to the number of students who achieve the standards.

Adequate Yearly Progress: measurement defined by the United States federal No Child Left Behind Act that allows the U.S. Department of Education to determine how every public school and school district in the country is performing academically according to results on standardized tests.

Teaching to the Test: an educational practice where curriculum is heavily focused on preparing for a standardized test.

Highly Qualified Teachers: the teacher has obtained full State certification as a teacher (including certification obtained through alternative routes to certification) or passed the State teacher licensing examination, and holds a license to teach in such State, except that when used with respect to any teacher teaching in a public charter school, the term means that the teacher meets the requirements set forth in the State's public charter school law.

Appendix B - Survey Questions

Gender:

(1) Male ____

(2) Female ____

B. Years as an educator:

7. 0-2

8. 3-5

9. 6-10

10. 11-15

11. 16-20

12. 21+

C. Grades Taught (Select all that apply)

4. 6th

5. 7th

6. 8th

1. Please discuss briefly the changes if any that No Child Left Behind has had on your teaching approach.

A comment box was placed in the space below this question on the Survey Monkey tool.

2. My classroom curriculum is tailored to meet the statewide test requirements.

a. Strongly Agree b. Agree c. Disagree d. Strongly Disagree e. Not Sure

3. The NCLB policy is an effective way to improve academic achievement for my students?

a. Strongly Agree b. Agree c. Disagree d. Strongly Disagree e. Not Sure

Appendix B - Survey Questions cont'd

4. The goals of NCLB are realistic for my students.

a. Strongly Agree b. Agree c. Disagree d. Strongly Disagree e. Not Sure

5. I have creative control over the lesson plans for my classroom.

a. Strongly Agree b. Agree c. Disagree d. Strongly Disagree e. Not Sure

6. My schools accountability report card plays a pivotal role in what I teach.

a. Strongly Agree b. Agree c. Disagree d. Strongly Disagree e. Not Sure

7. Teachers at my school have a voice in the methods in which we teach our students.

a. Strongly Agree b. Agree c. Disagree d. Strongly Disagree e. Not Sure

Appendix C - Interview Questions

1. One of the requirements of the NCLB Policy is to ensure that teachers are “highly qualified.” What does being highly qualified mean at your school?
2. What does being a highly qualified teacher mean to you personally?
3. Is the expectation of 100% compliance an obtainable request?
4. Do you feel that the policy allows you to be creative in your role as a teacher?
5. Are sufficient resources provided to you to meet the NCLB requirements?
6. What is your school's plan for students who don't make Adequate Yearly Progress as required by NCLB?
7. What is your school's program, if any, for students who have learning or social disabilities?
8. How much time do you spend strictly preparing students for the statewide exams?
9. In your opinion, what implications does this policy have on minority students?
10. What consequences do you face, if your students don't meet state requirements (based on NCLB policies)?