Introduction

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act has created federally mandated standards and assessment requirements, with severe sanctions for those schools, districts and states that choose not to participate, or fail in their efforts to reach published benchmarks for improvement. This piece of legislation exacerbated the country’s high-stakes testing culture, and altered the way we prepare and assess teachers, create curriculum and teach our children.

Background: Federal and State Commitment to Education

The Department of Education (DOE) was formed in 1867, essentially to collect data to help states establish effective school systems. In its 130 year lifespan, the DOE has changed form, function, and even location within the Executive branch of the government.

According to the DOE, NCLB is built on “four pillars” which guide the legislation. These four pillars are: Stronger Accountability for Results, More Freedom for States and Communities, Proven Education Methods, and More Choices for Parents (Department of Education, 2008).

General Education for Children Ages Zero to Five

Head Start served the purpose of assisting children who come from backgrounds where funds, parenting and health care services were lacking. The Department of Health and Human Services study (2005) of the Head Start program found positive impacts for both 3 and 4 year old children on pre-reading, pre-writing, vocabulary and parent reports of children's improved literacy skills and that children enrolled in Head Start had improved access to health care and better health status overall.

Special Education for Children Ages Zero to Five

Prior to the 1970s, the majority of children with disabilities were either refused enrollment to schools or were provided inadequate services by the public schools. Children with developmental delays can benefit from early intervention under Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) only if they are identified and served before the age of 3. The goals of early intervention (EI) programs are to prevent unnecessary conditions from developing and ensuring that children receive needed specialized services early in life. The long term benefits of EI include significant reductions in special education placements and improved retention in age appropriate grades.
Science Education
The quality of science instruction in the United States is problematic. The U.S. falls behind several other developed countries in the area of student performance. The assessment looked at scientific knowledge, understanding of the features of science, science and its effect on our lives, and willingness to engage with science-related issues. Science remains one area of academics that has suffered as a result of constraints, at a critical time for educating people about important scientific issues.

College Affordability
Only 27% of the country's population has a bachelor's degree. Only 4.1% are from low-middle income group. An increasing number of people cannot afford the high cost of a college education. The government has not made a commitment to provide students with adequate financial aid to fund their education. According to the National Association for College Admissions Counseling, the government has spent only 135 billion dollars on education for the past decade, a minuscule amount when compared to the amount spent on the war in Iraq.

Teacher Recruitment, Support and Retention
Sometime within the first three years, one third of all new teachers in America leave the profession. Within five years, about half of new teachers will leave the profession. High quality teachers are a scarce resource in our public schools, and for high poverty and high minority communities, quality teachers are often nonexistent. Trends show that teacher leavers exceed teacher entrants by 23 percent (Ingersoll, 2002).

Without quality teachers, we cannot expect the children of America to remain globally competitive and able to solve complex world problems. The current trend shows turnover for the teaching profession is higher than any other occupation. We need to recruit and retain quality educators into all schools, giving children the chance to have successful futures.

References


