

Enhancing Students Academic Performance

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December 13, 2011

Abstract

Prior to the enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, the public was expressing discontent about the declining of students' test scores and the quality of public schooling. The federal government eventually began discussing and debating for education reform and the No Child Left Behind of 2001 was finally passed and signed by President George W. Bush. The Act was met with jubilation and exhalation by the public and the education community; it was another step towards enhancing students' academic performance.

Introduction

Prior to the enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, the public was expressing discontentment about the declining of students' test scores and the quality of public schooling. The federal government eventually began discussing and debating for education reform and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 was finally passed and signed by President George W. Bush. The Act was met with jubilation and exhalation by the public and the education community; it was another step towards enhancing students' academic performance.

When the euphoric mood finally settled, the public and the education community noticed a different picture and ventilated their opinions: either for the Act or against the Act. In one camp, there were those who supported the Act and noted the positives features in the Act such as the concept provided a reliable source of information that was not privy to the public and provided the closing of the academic gap between white and minority students. In the other camp, there were those who opposed the Act and noted the negative features in the Act such as the requirements would worsen the performance gap, since there was no other way to compare with other education reforms relating to local control and teacher training. Also, the Act would promote an undesirable narrowing of teaching styles and student curricula.

However, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 had a dramatic impact on the education system. The Act provided the means for the federal government to take control of the education system that was entrusted for the states and school districts to handle. For example, the federal government mandated that schools are held accountable for students' academic performance, states are required to develop a test-based student assessment program, states are required to inform the public of their efforts by making available such as report cards, ratings for schools, teacher evaluations that is tied to merit pay, and states were given the legal authority to control or

close failing schools Dee (2003). And significantly, the federal government also controlled the purse string for the education system.

Purpose

The purpose of this article is to identify key issues such as grade promotion, graduation requirements, school choice, and charter schools and assess how high-stakes testing have affected education issues positively and negatively.

Grade Promotion

The process of grade promotion was already in place before the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Heubert and Hauser (1999) indicated that many lawmakers, administrators, and teachers were unaware of the Standards that provided the appropriate guidelines for administering the high-stakes testing. With the passage of the Act, states were mandated to design and develop a test-based testing program, which would make the states accountable for students' test performance. If the results on the high-stakes testing indicate the students did well, the students would be promoted to the next upper grade. If the results on high-stakes testing indicate the students did not perform well, schools would retain the students in their present grade level for another year. Thus, with this Act, students are also accountable for their academic achievements.

The Act has caused a major shift in the schools' teaching staff. The teachers were saddled with the burden of ensuring the students to perform well when taking high-stakes testing because

the teachers are being evaluated, which is tied to merit pay. The teachers will have an increase of pay whenever the students perform well on the high stakes tests. Thus, teachers would concentrate more on testing materials and less on regular subject contents.

There are several positive features and these are: students are able to concentrate on subject contents in order pass the tests in order to be promoted to the next upper grade with their classmates, teachers would also have the satisfaction in knowing their lessons and teaching methods were made possible for their students to pass the high stakes tests. And the schools would have the effort knowing they utilized programs such as extra tutoring and college students as mentors to increase student learning.

There are several negative features and these are: students self-esteem would drop and knowing that they did not pass the high-stakes testing and might be considered grade retention, teachers would have to reflect and would likely water down their lessons and start teaching the tests so that the students will be able to pass the high-stakes testing. Students would, therefore, be short changed in having a proper education. And the schools would put the pressure on the teachers and students to perform well. Schools would be graded on how students performing well. If a school the students did on the high-stakes testing, parents would start thinking twice if their child should remain at the school.

Graduation Requirement

Heubert and Hauser (1999) also indicated that the process for graduation was in place even before the passage of No Child Left Behind Act of 2001; states required students to pass a test before graduating from high school. Students their earn high school diploma by

accumulating Carnegie units, which are based on the number of hours spent in class. This would indicate that students have passed certain courses and pass one or more competency exams in order to graduate. With the passage of No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, the states were given the legal authority to close schools. If students' are not performing well in their high-stakes testing, the schools are rated.

There are several positive features and these are: students would have less stress when passing the high-stakes testing in their freshman years in high school rather than waiting for the last minute in their senior year. Students not passing the tests in their freshman year have several opportunities to take the test and concentrate on the area of the test they missed, teachers would have the satisfaction in knowing that their time and effort working with their students paid off. Schools would also have the comfort in announcing number of students to be graduating and that the courses assisted the students in passing the high stakes tests, which would impress parents and the public.

There are several negative features and these are: the students would be stressed in knowing that they would not graduate with their peers, teachers would have to review their lessons and teaching methods. The schools would provide additional teacher training. The state would place the schools into a rating system and monitor the schools until the schools improve. The ratings would give the parents to starting considering having their child transfer to another school. If the school continued to have their students do poorly on the high-stakes testing, the state can either take control of the school or close the school and replace the administrator and half of the staff.

School Choice

It is the first time ever that the federal government used high stakes testing results to measure performance and provide rewards and sanctions to states and school districts Moe (2003). The high- stakes testing results require the school districts, administrators, and, teachers and students to change their behavior. And this would give parents the opportunity to request a transfer to another public school within the school district or to a private school if the parents noticed their child's school is failing.

There are several positive features and these are: students would transfer to a higher performing school where learning can take place, teachers would have the satisfaction in knowing their lessons and teaching methods caused their students to graduate. Schools would have the comfort to notify the state that their students did well on the high-stakes testing and will be receiving their high school diploma.

There are several negative features and these are: students not passing the high -takes testing would transfer to another school and have to start making new friends. The teachers might reflect on teaching the test. Schools might have additional teacher training sessions, which would pose scheduling problems among teachers. States might have to take over the schools or close the schools if the schools continually show that their students have not improved in their high-stakes testing.

Charter School

Loveless (2006) expressed that this was part of the federal government education reform that was tied to accountability and school choice. With the school ratings in hand, the parents of the child might look into charter schools. Most charter schools have become a place to have students that might need a more structured classroom environment and where teachers are allowed to teach their students with very little supervision. Many of the charter schools have small classes, where they are able to provide personalized learning in math, reading, and writing.

There are several positive features and these are: students would concentrate on the areas they are doing poorly, teachers would be able to teach in the own teaching methods, charter schools are monitored by the school district regulations, states have the power to let school districts the power to grant charter school status, and charter schools hire their own teaching staff.

There are several negative features and these are: students mostly likely have to be on the waiting list for admittance to a charter school, teachers are not held accountable to their students, and charter schools rely on student enrollment, which would be tied to financial support from the state but the rest of the funds are from private sources such as tuition. Most charter schools are selective on the types of students they can enroll.

Conclusion

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 was considered the cure all in education reform. However, it became the nightmare because the Act was a means for the federal government to take control of the education system. Throughout the system, states, school districts, schools,

teachers, and students are made accountable of the students' academic performance. The Act provides rewards and consequences. Yet, the next education reform would likely have controversies.

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