

Chapter 1: Introduction

The educational system in the United States has long been a topic of discussion for federal, state, and local legislators. From the viewpoint of many, it has been a failing system that has been unable to keep up with its Eastern counterparts, such as China and Japan. However, the American education system is unlike that in many other countries (Corsi-Bunker, n.d.). The federal government plays a significant role, setting the foundation for the entire system; then each state government makes decisions regarding finances and budgets, school personnel, student regulations, and classroom curriculum. Though the U.S. Federal government contributes almost 10% to the national education budget, education is primarily the responsibility of state and local government (Corsi-Bunker, n.d.). Yet, the last 15 years have been filled with immense dissatisfaction and calls for legislative changes...changes that can only be made by the Federal government. The dissatisfaction is in regards to the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001; an Act signed into law under President George W. Bush to address the failing education system of the United States.

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act came at a time of wide public concern about the state of education and set in place requirements that reached into virtually every public school in America (Education Week, 2011). It expanded the federal role in education and took particular aim at improving the educational lot of disadvantaged students (Education Week, 2011). The achievement gap that developed over time between disadvantaged, or minority students, and non-minority students, was becoming a major impediment. The idea behind NCLB was to close those achievement gaps and increase the academic success of minority students and those in poorly performing schools. And the main component of the NCLB Act that would be used to measure its effectiveness would be accountability. Unfortunately, accountability would not lay at

the hands of the students or their parents, but another important stakeholder in education...the teachers. Through standardized assessments, student achievement would be measured. If students were not meeting grade level proficiency or making significant progress, the teachers and schools would be held accountable. With schools, those that don't meet goals for their overall student bodies or specific categories of students are sanctioned (GreatSchools, n.d.). With teachers, their jobs could be on the line. And this is an added pressure to their already demanding jobs. If their students were not passing the required standardized tests, they could lose their jobs and their schools could lose valuable funding, or even worse, be shut down. And after years of questionable progress, many were starting to wonder if the NCLB Act was working at all. As the law's effects began to be felt, some educators and policymakers questioned the feasibility and fairness of its goals and time frames (Education Week, 2011). Teachers, especially, were starting to wonder how they could help their students meet the goals of NCLB and, more importantly, how they could do it without jeopardizing their jobs. This study will delve into the teacher's perspective of NCLB and their opinions of its goals and requirements.

There have been considerable studies completed on NCLB and its effectiveness. While opinions vary, it's apparent that the majority of those surveyed have adverse feeling about the legislation. There have been several updates to the Act; however, the accountability portion of it has not changed for the teachers. Students must be tested annually in reading and math in grades 3 through 8 and at least once in grades 10 through 12 (GreatSchools, n.d.). Additionally, students must be tested in science in at least one grade in elementary, middle and high school (GreatSchools, n.d.). When teachers give these tests at the end of the course or school year, several teaching methods have been used to help prepare the students for success. What this study wanted to uncover was whether teachers have resulted to changing the way they teach in

order to meet the requirements of the NCLB Act. Are the teachers teaching the test to ensure their students pass them?

Through an intensive interview made up of almost all open-ended questions, the study examines the opinions of teachers, mostly Black, on the NCLB Act. It is also important to note that all of the teachers, except one, teach at a Title I school. From the NCLB Act's benefits and drawbacks, to accountability and teacher's instruction methods, those interviewed were able to give deep, rich thought to each question and provide insight into their world as a teacher under the NCLB. It is abundantly clear that although the Act has been revised under the Obama administration, its effects are still present and buried in the hearts of teachers. Analysis of the interview will likely show a compelling theme among the teachers that supports past literature. The results will also lead to a discussion that will identify ways to modify the Act in order to achieve its primary goal of closing the achievement gap among disadvantaged students, all while placing accountability equally across all educational stakeholders.

Chapter 2: Literature Review