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Education Events That Led to NCLB

The requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) seemed to come as a surprise to many educators. More astonishing was the fact that many of them paid little attention to the law after it was passed in January 2002. It was not until some of the sanctions became known and their schools were confronted with potential loss of funds or identified as needing improvement that parents began to take notice. It was not until schools were being required to allow students to transfer to other schools or to allow students to receive supplemental services from commercial providers, or even potentially being required to change curricula or staff and have teachers demonstrate subject knowledge competency, that a “rebellion” began. The National Education Association, a major teachers’ union, and the American Association of School Administrators, an organization that represents school superintendents and other professional organizations, began an ongoing public relations onslaught against what they believed were problems with some provisions of the law. To be fair, they did not condemn the fundamental principles contained within NCLB but, rather, complained about the accountability and sanction

provisions. Schools that for many years had a large majority of their students meeting proficiency on their state assessments and that were recognized as excellent schools were being identified as “in need of improvement” because they failed to make adequate yearly progress (AYP). NCLB required all schools to disaggregate student achievement data, and those students who did not do well in the “other” schools did not tend to do well in the so-called “better schools” either. Also, teachers who had taught for many years were being required to demonstrate subject matter competency in the core academic subjects they taught. These concepts were foreign to the U.S. school culture and thus met with serious opposition from some state education agencies, professional education organizations, and educators in general. To be certain, some of the arguments that were being raised were logical and could inform the future reauthorization of NCLB, or at least have some influence on how the U.S. Department of Education implements the law, but complaints about various provisions of the law were distracting from its fundamental principles—to improve student achievement and raise the requirements for teacher qualifications in the United States.

Although some of the concerns were justified, it is unfortunate that the energy devoted to addressing the problems with the law far exceeded the energy needed to confront the challenges of educating all students. Changing organizational culture in schools is not an easy task. Yet, the performance of U.S. students is not very good compared to that of their international student counterparts on a variety of assessments. The most frequently cited assessment to support the contention that U.S. students did poorly compared to other international students is the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) (www.TIMSS.org). This assessment found that although U.S. 4th-grade students tended to do fairly well in mathematics and science, 8th- and 12th-grade students did poorly compared to students in other countries. Also, the longer U.S. students remained in school, the worse they performed in mathematics and science compared to their international counterparts.

Another international assessment in which U.S. students have had disappointing achievement is the Program for Student Assessment (PISA) (www.pisa.oecd.org). This assessment measures 15-year-old students' knowledge and skills that are essential for full participation in society in reading, mathematical, and scientific literacy. One important difference between PISA and TIMSS is that PISA is also intended to measure if the students have the knowledge and skills needed in adult life. Thus, federal policy-makers set new standards through NCLB that were going to be enforced by the U.S. Secretary of Education. Those new standards would require a new culture in schools of using data and research to improve the academic achievement of students and change the requirements for teacher qualifications.

One of the key issues with NCLB was the implementation process. Those educators charged with the task of NCLB compliance need to know that when leading the change process, it is important to set a context and gain support for the changes. Although there was substantial opposition to NCLB from educators, and in some instances for good reasons, the fact is that since the Soviet Union launched the first space satellite, Sputnik, in 1957, there have been a number of education activities and reports that ultimately became the core requirements of it. It is difficult to believe that for almost 50 years the federal government was gradually assuming a greater role in public education and that so many federal and state policy-makers, governors in particular, business leaders, and education commissions were calling for massive changes and nothing of significance was actually happening.

First, students from poverty, certain racial groups, students with limited English proficiency, and students with disabilities continued to fall increasingly further behind their higher achieving peers. Second, teachers continued to be assigned to classroom teaching responsibilities they were unprepared to teach. Also, the costs for education continued to increase as well as funding from governmental sources to pay for it. Unfortunately, student achievement results did not improve enough with the increased funding. Thus, NCLB became law, with considerable debate and publicity following.

What were the initiatives and reports that should have been a warning that substantial policy changes were forthcoming? Why wasn't there a clear explanation of how those initiatives and reports led to NCLB? Most of the arguments being raised against NCLB were not about its fundamental principles but, rather, the accountability provisions. The attitude of many educators was simply that they did not believe the law's expectations were realistic.

Thus, considerable time was devoted to the debate over ideology instead of addressing the key issues and what realistically could be done to narrow or even close the achievement gap in the United States. It is one thing to say that all students should be able to achieve proficiency on state assessments and yet quite another to believe that those who have severe cognitive disabilities or are unable to speak English will achieve the same results as their more able peers. That debate needs to be clarified. Clearly, the foundation for the 100% achievement requirement for all students was not carefully planned with those who were expected to implement it.

The following events and reports are not intended to be all-inclusive but, rather, to provide a brief description and evidence that for more than four decades, policymakers, business leaders, and leading education reformers were putting "blips on the education radar screen" that were basically going undetected by the education profession. The failure to respond to them ultimately led to a law that many educators do not understand, do not agree with, or do not know how to go about implementing. In addition, the process used by the U.S. Department of Education promulgating rules and regulations and disseminating basic information about NCLB was slow and often unclear. State and local school district officials were not getting the information they needed, but more effort could have been made by them to understand the basic provisions of the law. It is my belief that having some background on the history of these activities and reports will help resolve some of the complaints about it and enable educators to avoid making the same mistakes of complacency in the future.

NCLB will most likely be considered for reauthorization in 2007. Most federal laws of the magnitude of NCLB need revision

over time to fit the diverse fabric of the country and their intended outcomes. If one is looking for examples, certainly Medicare and Social Security continue to be debated and are still the subject of philosophical differences among policymakers and recipients. Ironically, it is some of the concerns with NCLB that are being discussed among educators that will likely be some of the revisions when the law is reauthorized. More important, the revisions will be based on evidence, an important concept in the law.

Activities and Reports

Sputnik—1957

Until 1957, education in the United States was the sole responsibility of the states. In fact, there is no mention of education in the U.S. Constitution. Yet when the Soviet Union launched the first space satellite, Sputnik, on October 4, 1957, President Dwight Eisenhower called for training more scientists and engineers. In 1958, the U.S. Congress passed the National Defense Education Act (NDEA). Using national security as the basis for the law, Congress determined that the problem with the United States falling behind the Soviet Union was the result of the education system, particularly mathematics and science education.

Interestingly, there are some parallel issues with the enactment of NDEA and NCLB. First, in both instances there was concern about the federal government becoming involved in public education. This issue was overcome because new funds were an attractive incentive to schools to accept reforms. Second, the primary theme was the space race and rocketry, but teachers had little knowledge about space or teaching resources to integrate them into the curriculum. Sound familiar? Now, approximately 50 years later, the federal government is becoming more involved in public education through NCLB and is using funding as an incentive to force schools to improve or face sanctions—and the emphasis is still on mathematics and science education. There is a real need to offer more support to school administrators and teachers so they

understand NCLB and gain the skills in the use of data, standards-based instruction, and evidence-based pedagogy to ensure student learning success.

Life Magazine—1958

In 1958, there was not the plethora of magazine choices for consumers as there are today. The staple of the day was *Life* magazine. With its wide distribution, *Life* did a three-part series on the “crisis in American education.” Overall, the series concluded that teachers were “wretchedly overworked, underpaid, and disregarded” (“Crisis in American Education,” 1958). Two other key points in the series should resonate with what NCLB requires: The articles stated that teachers did not have enough time to plan lessons and a “discouraging number of them are incompetent.”

Those two points became part of NCLB’s teacher quality provisions. First, there are funds in Title II to provide research-based professional development to improve the quality of teachers and principals. Second, teachers are expected to meet highly qualified provisions set by each state that include at least a bachelor’s degree, full state certification, and demonstrated subject knowledge competency in the courses they teach. It seems ironic that these same issues that were important in 1958 are still being discussed in the same context today, half a century later.

Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965

If the National Defense Education Act of 1958 laid the cornerstone for federal involvement in public education, then the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) “built the house.” ESEA was part of President Lyndon B. Johnson’s Great Society program. The basic purpose of ESEA was to provide assistance to children from low-income families. Throughout the years, federal funding for schools has continued to increase, and these funds are serving more than just children from low-income families. Despite the increases in federal funding for the programs,

students from low-income families continue to do poorly in school. Interestingly, during the past 40 years, students from low-income families have fallen further behind their more affluent suburban peers. It is this “achievement gap” that ultimately led to the concept of NCLB and disaggregating data by subgroup. The idea that no child could be left behind is monitored by requiring achievement data on the performance of the student subgroups.

A Nation at Risk—1983

In 1983, Secretary of Education Terrell Bell released *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (U.S. Department of Education, 1983). This report was based on the findings from the National Commission on Excellence in Education, a commission Bell created to help define the problems with U.S. education and to recommend solutions. A quote in the report summarizes the seriousness of the problem according to the commission: “Our society is being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a nation and a people” (p. 5).

Again, similar to what happened in 1958 with NDEA, education was being cited as the reason for the United States being confronted with serious problems. If education was not improved, there would be consequences in the future. The commission that issued this report was composed of prestigious and influential members, including representatives from business, higher education, state education agencies, and K–12 practitioners. Although it had the “bully pulpit” of the secretary of education, there still was not much education reform.

One other quote from the report should also be considered significant. The commission noted that “(i)f an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war” (U.S. Department of Education, 1983, p. 5).

The report included a number of indicators of the risks if there was no support for the commission’s recommendations, including unfavorable comparisons of U.S. student achievement with their

international peers, the large number of adults and 17-year-olds who were functionally illiterate, the declining achievement of high school students on standardized achievement tests, and the concerns of business and military leaders with regard to the costs for remedial education for the students they were hiring. The report called for the following:

- Increased high school graduation requirements
- Schools, colleges, and universities to adopt more rigorous and measurable standards, and higher expectations for academic performance and student conduct
- Significantly more time be devoted to the learning of the new basics, including consideration of a longer school day and year
- Improve the preparation of teachers and make teaching more rewarding and respected
- Citizens to hold their elected officials and educators responsible for providing the leadership necessary to achieve the recommendations

Many of the ideas and concepts contained in *A Nation at Risk* are included in NCLB. For example, NCLB requires high schools to maintain data on their graduation rates; states must write academic standards and administer assessments to measure whether students are meeting them; there are sanctions for schools that fail to meet certain progress requirements for students, including provisions stipulating that teachers and principals can be removed from the schools that do not meet them; and implementing improved professional development for principals and teachers based on practices that have evidence of success.

Although there is scant evidence that the depth of the reforms called for in *A Nation at Risk* actually took place, it is clear that policymakers incorporated some of the recommendations from it in NCLB. The fact that Congress and the President called for rigid enforcement of NCLB was also an indication that the quotes from *A Nation at Risk* regarding the mediocrity of U.S. education were being taken seriously by them.

1989 President's Education Summit

Prior to 1989, there was an effort by President Ronald Reagan to abolish the Department of Education; that effort failed. When George H. W. Bush became president, he convened governors, some members of his cabinet, and a few high-level administration officials for an education summit. Although the process was bipartisan, it was not always amicable (Achieve, 1999). Interestingly, one of the leaders of the summit was former Arkansas governor and future president William J. Clinton.

The 1989 summit, citing the *Nation at Risk* report, took it to another level by promoting national education goals. Of significance is the fact that the federal role in education was continuing to increase, with greater involvement in state and local policies and even suggesting national education goals. At the summit, President George H. W. Bush and the nation's governors agreed to the following:

- Establish a process for setting national education goals
- Seek greater flexibility and enhanced accountability in the use of federal resources to meet the goals, through both regulatory and legislative changes
- Undertake a major state-by-state effort to restructure the education system
- Report annually on progress in achieving the goals

The participants went on to agree that a task force overseen by the National Governors' Association would work with the President's designees to recommend goals by 1990. The framework for the goals would, if achieved, guarantee that the United States would be internationally competitive related to

- readiness of children to start school;
- the performance of students on international achievement tests, especially in math and science;
- the reduction of the dropout rate and the improvement of academic performance, especially among at-risk students;
- the functional literacy of adult Americans;

- the level of training necessary to guarantee a competitive workforce;
- the supply of qualified teachers and up-to-date technology; and
- the establishment of safe, disciplined, and drug-free schools.

Furthermore, the summit concluded that states must focus on the achievement of all students, raise academic standards, and be responsible for improving them: "The time for rhetoric is past; the time for performance is now" (Achieve, 1999). Many of those recommendations are included in NCLB. They include dropout rate reduction, safe schools, qualified teachers, performance assessment, and higher standards. Despite the fact that the President convened this summit and many governors from both parties participated, the results were similar to those obtained in the past—that is, very little was done by educators to address their concerns. The simple fact was that the education profession was consistently being advised of potentially serious problems by people who could enact new education policy. Unfortunately, little was done to address their concerns.

National Commission on Time and Learning—1994

The National Commission on Time and Learning was created by a federal law, the Education Council Act of 1991. The Act called for an independent advisory body to conduct a comprehensive review of the relationship between time and learning in the nation's schools. A nine-member panel—three appointed by the secretary of education, three by the president of the Senate, and three by speaker of the House of Representatives—was charged with the responsibility to submit a report by April 1994. Not surprisingly, the panel concluded that

(t)ime is the missing element in our great national debate about learning and the need for higher standards for all students. Our schools and the people involved with

them—students, teachers, administrators, parents, and staff—are prisoners of time, captives of the school clock and calendar.

The report explained that for 150 years, U.S. public schools held time constant and let learning vary. Interestingly, the commission used a quote similar to the one used in *A Nation at Risk*. It quoted Oliver Hazard Perry, who said in a dispatch from the War of 1812, “We have met the enemy and they are (h)ours (sic).”

The Perry quote used by the commission, along with the quote from *A Nation at Risk* stating that our society was being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity, demonstrates the seriousness others were placing on the unacceptable performance of U.S. education. It was apparent, however, that seriousness was not shared by many in the education community. The achievement performance of U.S. students continued to decline, and major accountability reform activities were not being undertaken. The Commission on Time and Learning made eight recommendations:

- Reinvent schools around learning, not time.
- Fix the design flaw: Use time in new and better ways.
- Establish an academic day.
- Keep schools open longer to meet the needs of children and communities.
- Give teachers the time they need.
- Invest in technology.
- Develop local action plans to transform schools.
- Share the responsibility; finger pointing and evasion must end.

These recommendations, along with the other reports, were setting a context for much needed reform to traditional education practices. Whereas NCLB does not proscribe how schools must reach the goals, the study on time clearly described how difficult it would be to achieve the required success without considering structural changes to the school day and year.

The commission's report was followed by a study released by the U.S. Department of Education in 1996 titled *The Uses of Time for Teaching and Learning* (Adelman, 1996). This study was organized to examine three aspects of educational time:

- The quantity of time in school
- The quality of time in school
- Student's use of out-of-school time

The study explored the issues raised by the commission, but for the most part the inefficient use of time in schools continues to be a critical issue for school leaders and teachers.

In October 2005, the Education Commission of the States released an update on the recommendations from the 1994 commission report (Goldberg & Cross, 2005). The report stated that "little has changed regarding time for formal schooling" since the first report was issued more than a decade ago (p. 2). The length of the school day and that of the school year remain virtually the same in most schools today as they did throughout the 20th century.

One new aspect of the report is the emphasis on technology. It is emphasized that students now live in a digital world and use the Internet, cell phones, and digital devices to access information and accelerate communications. The report calls for not only more learning time but also new and better ways of using it.

The release of a new report more than 10 years after the original report acknowledging that not much happens supports the premise I have used as an overarching theme for this chapter: Many call for education reform, but not much happens.

Goals 2000—1994

There is some irony in the fact that President George H. W. Bush, a Republican, convened the 1989 President's Education Summit and it was cochaired by Arkansas Governor William J. Clinton, a Democrat who then defeated Bush in the 1993 presidential election. One cornerstone of the Clinton administration agenda

was education, emboldened by the reauthorization of the ESEA and known as Goals 2000, a law containing a number of principles from the summit convened by President Bush. President Clinton appointed the former governor of South Carolina, Richard Riley, to be his secretary of education, and the plan from President Bush's summit was to become the basis for Clinton's education agenda. Goals 2000 set national goals that called for

- school readiness;
- school completion;
- student academic achievement;
- leadership in mathematics and science;
- adult literacy; and
- safe and drug-free schools.

Although most of the goals were topics that historically addressed education issues regarding student achievement, the list added safe and drug-free schools. This issue was rather new and only added to the tasks with which schools were already struggling.

Clearly, Goals 2000 was the actual forerunner to NCLB. The cornerstone of the NCLB reauthorization was contained in Goals 2000. Congress and President Clinton had truly set the stage for more federal involvement in state and local education policy.

1996 National Education Summit

Governors from more than 40 states and national business leaders met on March 26 and 27, 1996, to discuss the state of U.S. education. It was the sense of many of the nation's business leaders that the U.S. education system was in need of significant change, and since the educators had not taken it upon themselves to do it, the task would fall upon others who could. The summit was led by Louis Gerstner, then chairman and CEO of IBM. Of note is the fact that no education organizations were invited to participate in this summit. The summit briefing materials provided background on seven key questions:

- Why do we need high academic standards?
- Does the public support high academic standards and accountability?
- Does the business community support high academic standards and accountability?
- Do other nations have academic standards and is the United States competitive?
- What exactly is a standard?
- How much progress has been made by the states in their efforts to implement high academic standards, assessment, and accountability?
- How can technology be an effective tool to help students and schools reach high academic standards?

These seven questions clearly delineated the trends in education that had been emerging and the emphasis that business leaders and governors were going to place on them to ensure that changes took place in state education systems. It was apparent that standards, assessment, and accountability, key provisions of NCLB, and international comparisons of student achievement would be used to determine how well U.S. students were doing in core subjects. In addition, how technology could effectively be implemented to improve the process of education was going to continue to receive attention from these individuals, who believed they could actually make changes in a system that had been resisting them for many years.

The governors and business leaders left their summit recommending that there be clear academic standards and better subject matter content at the state and local levels. No longer were they viewing U.S. education as separate and distinct by states; they were now working within a national paradigm.

National Commission on Teaching and America's Future—1996

The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (1996) operated on the basis of three premises:

- What teachers know and can do is the most important influence on what students learn.
- Recruiting, preparing, and retaining good teachers is the central strategy to improving our schools.
- School reform cannot succeed unless it focuses on creating the conditions under which teachers can teach and teach well.

The commission set a goal for implementation of its recommendations by 2006. What was particularly eye opening was what the commission saw as the barriers to achieving its recommendations. It noted that there were low expectations for student performance, unenforced standards for teachers, major flaws in teacher preparation, painfully slipshod teacher recruitment, inadequate induction for beginning teachers, lack of professional development and rewards for knowledge and skill, and schools that were structured for failure rather than success. Again, the themes were eerily similar, with nothing new being added to the proposals for school reform:

- Get serious about standards for both students and teachers.
- Reinvent teacher preparation and professional development.
- Fix teacher recruitment, and put qualified teachers in every classroom.
- Encourage and reward teacher knowledge and skill.
- Create schools that are organized for student and teacher success.

Noteworthy from this commission was its complete and total focus on teaching. All its recommendations and the acknowledged barriers reinforced what had been said about the problems with U.S. education for many years.

1999 National Education Summit

The 1999 National Education Summit included approximately 30 governors, business executives, and educators. Three core principles were the focus of the summit:

1. Reform begins with a commitment to set the highest academic standards.
2. Quality assessments are essential to measure progress against those standards.
3. Implementation of comprehensive systems is required to guarantee full accountability for results, starting with real improvements in student achievement (Achieve, 1999).

The participants at this summit affirmed their commitment to raising student achievement to world-class standards. They also set a 6-month deadline for states to respond to the summit action statement urging progress on the following key challenges:

- Improve educator quality
- Help all students achieve high standards
- Strengthen accountability

It is apparent that the gradual and consistent evolution of the call for rigorous standards, accountability, and improving teacher quality was gaining a foothold with an increasing number of people. To improve educator quality, the participants committed to

- strengthen entrance and exit requirements of teacher education programs;
- target professional development programs that give teachers the content knowledge and skills to teach to higher standards; and
- develop competitive salary structures to attract and retain the best qualified teachers and school leaders with pay for skills and performance.

To help all students achieve high standards, the participants agreed to work together in states to ensure that every school had a rigorous curriculum and professional development program aligned with state standards and tests, expand public school choice

and charter schools, and develop extended day and year programs for students at risk.

To strengthen accountability, they agreed to work together in the states to create incentives for success and consequences for failure, strengthen the ability of principals and teachers to select their own colleagues and control school budgets, provide students who were at risk of failure with opportunities for extra help, and recognize highly successful schools and intervene in low-performing schools.

These commitments were all a significant part of NCLB. It would be logical to conclude that the work of the 1999 National Education Summit had a significant influence on the law. For educators, the recommendations from the summit should have served as notice that policymakers were getting more serious about what they believed were the needed reforms with respect to the weaknesses in U.S. education and that more should have been undertaken by educators to address them.

National Commission on Mathematics and Science Teaching for the 21st Century—2000

In 1999, Secretary of Education Richard Riley appointed a commission to make recommendations for improving mathematics and science teaching in the 21st century. Since Sputnik, there had been a steady stream of reports calling for improvements in U.S. student achievement in both of these subjects. The National Commission on Mathematics and Science Teaching, known as the Glenn Commission (named for its chairman, former astronaut and Ohio senator John Glenn), began its work with the knowledge that U.S. student achievement in mathematics and science was far from acceptable after reviewing students' performance on the (TIMSS). TIMSS provided data that demonstrated that the longer U.S. students remained in school, their performance declined in mathematics and science compared with students from other countries. Although U.S. students did fairly well in both subjects in 4th grade, their performance declined considerably by the time they reached 8th and 12th grades.

The Glenn Commission identified four key points and made three recommendations (U.S. Department of Education, 2000). First, the commission was convinced that the future well-being of the nation and people depends not just on how well we educate our children generally but also, specifically, on how well we educate them in mathematics and science. Again, the future of the nation was superimposed in a major education report citing the importance of education in solving a critical national problem.

Second, it is abundantly clear from the evidence that we are not doing the job that we should do—or can do—in teaching our children to understand and use ideas from these fields. After Sputnik, a number of education reports emphasized that the quality of mathematics and science education was not of an acceptable caliber for U.S. students to be globally competitive. The Glenn Commission actually reemphasized much of what *Life* magazine wrote in 1958.

Third, after an extensive, in-depth review of what was happening in U.S. classrooms, the commission concluded that the most powerful instrument for change, and therefore the place to begin, was at the very core of education—with teaching. Very few reports prior to this included the importance of teaching in their recommendations. During the previous 40 years, there was minimal change in teacher preparation programs and ongoing learning opportunities in professional development for teachers, despite the increasing complexity of actually teaching mathematics and science.

Fourth, the commission believed that committing the nation to reach three specific goals could go far in bringing about the needed basic changes. The goals went directly to the issues of quality, quantity, and an enabling work environment for teachers of mathematics and science. The commission issued three recommendations:

1. Establish an ongoing system to improve the quality of mathematics and science teaching in grades K–12.
2. Increase significantly the number of mathematics and science teachers, and improve the quality of their preparation.

3. Improve the working environment, and make the teaching profession more attractive for K–12 mathematics and science teachers.

2001 National Education Summit

The 2001 National Education Summit was held in October despite being scheduled so soon after the catastrophic events of the September 11 terrorist attacks. The fact that the summit was held affirms the serious commitment the participants had for reforming U.S. education. The opening page of the briefing book explained their position regarding the meeting (Achieve, 2001):

The governors, corporate leaders, and educators who organized this meeting extend their deepest sympathies to those who lost loved ones in the terrorist assaults of September 11th. Events of that day have profoundly affected every American. The people of the United States can draw on great reservoirs of patriotism, decency, courage, and resilience as they respond to this unpardonable tragedy. The participants in this meeting, united in the belief that healthy public schools are the foundation of our democracy, dedicate this Summit to the task of building a stronger America.

Like the other compelling statements about the security of the United States in 1957 after the launch of Sputnik, about society being eroded in 1983 in *A Nation at Risk*, and the Oliver Hazard Perry quote used in the National Commission on Time and Learning report in 1994, the 2001 National Education Summit began with an affirmation that U.S. education was an important part of creating national success in a global environment and its decline was a serious problem for the country. This summit was the third time in 5 years that prestigious policymakers and corporate executives gathered to discuss education. Certainly, the fact that they were devoting so much time and attention to education was a clear signal that significant policy changes to reform public education

were on the way. Also, not long after this summit convened in October, President George W. Bush and a bipartisan leadership group from Congress met to finalize NCLB.

The rationale for the 2001 summit was to support the goal of high standards. The participants' briefing book acknowledged that although there were examples of schools turning things around, the goal of high standards for all had not been met (Achieve, 2001). They also acknowledged that the President and Congress were poised to enact legislation that would accelerate the pace of the reforms they were recommending. Interestingly, they noted that states were "working hard but they would have to work even harder in the months and years ahead" (p. iii).

The three primary categories for this summit were public support, teaching, and learning as it related to closing the achievement gap and using data to drive improvement from testing and accountability. With respect to the belief that there was public opposition to standards and testing, the participants at the summit were told that the claims were overblown. Their report noted that testing represented a "minor investment of time for a worthwhile goal." They affirmed their belief that schools needed to use standards to raise achievement and not narrow instruction. Their support for standards was based on the notion that higher standards would raise expectations for student learning. Furthermore, they believed testing would be the best way to measure progress toward attaining the standards.

To close the achievement gap, the commission cited a number of characteristics of successful schools. It noted that researchers identified the following characteristics from those schools:

- A relentless focus on academic performance for all students
- A shared sense among the faculty and staff that they are all responsible for the learning of every student
- Frequent and regular assessment of student progress for diagnostic purposes
- Principals who are true instructional leaders
- A flexible use of time

As primarily policymakers, members of the commission discussed how states could improve instruction by creating a supportive policy environment. Their recommendations were clearly aligned with the provisions that would be contained in NCLB. First, they called for clear standards: "The best standards are clear, are measurable, and provide appropriate guidance to teachers, parents, and test developers. They are comprehensive yet allow for in-depth treatment of essential content" (Achieve, 2001, p. 16).

Another familiar discussion in the commission report was the use of disaggregated assessment data, ultimately a provision in NCLB that has become quite controversial. The report said that "(d)isaggregated testing data by race/ethnicity, income, special education status, and limited English proficiency is essential" (Achieve, 2001, p. 16). The commission noted that simply knowing that a certain percentage of students in a school meet standards can hide differences among students that may never be remedied.

Finally, the commission emphasized the importance of attracting and retaining qualified educators. It discussed the fact that too often the students who needed the best teachers were taught by those teachers who had the least experience and qualifications. To close the achievement gap, that problem had to be rectified (Achieve, 2001, p. 17).

Professional development also received considerable attention. Commission members recognized that the movement to a standards-based, assessment-driven education reform would require professional learning opportunities for teachers. Interestingly, they noted that in other professions (i.e., law and medicine), such opportunities are provided routinely. In addition, they mentioned that onetime workshops were not the answer, and that educational professional development was often ineffective because it was delivered in ineffective ways (Achieve, 2001, p. 18).

The 2001 National Education Summit recommendations came the closest to modeling what would become NCLB. The last of these summits brought together the concepts that became the fundamental underpinnings of NCLB.

No Child Left Behind Act—2001

In January 2002, President George W. Bush signed into law NCLB, the most comprehensive federal education law ever written and one that imposed serious sanctions for states and schools that failed to abide by its provisions. It was clear that our nation's leading policymakers, both Democrats and Republicans, were serious about ensuring that schools would improve the achievement of their students.

This book is not intended to be an overview of NCLB but instead offers a model for building the organizational capacity to comply with its provisions. Arguably, the real goal is for schools to improve and base their improvement work on practices and programs that have evidence they work. Nonetheless, it is important to summarize the basic ideas contained in NCLB to set the context for the remainder of this book.

NCLB is intended to improve the achievement of U.S. students by requiring states to write rigorous standards and assessments to measure whether students are meeting those standards. The assessments are required to provide data that are disaggregated by subgroups so that educators can make informed decisions regarding the appropriate actions to take to ensure that all students successfully meet their state's proficiency standards. Even schools with one subgroup not meeting those proficiency standards can be identified as "in need of improvement." The law emphasizes accountability, a concept that was consistently identified during approximately the past 50 years in most education reports as essential for improving schools so that all students meet proficiency standards.

Flexibility and local control are part of NCLB, despite complaints from many state and local educators that it actually takes away their decision-making authority. In defense of the states, it would be beneficial if they had timely knowledge of what other states submitted to the U.S. Department of Education and received approval for rather than keeping them in the dark on what is acceptable in their compliance plans. There is no formal, expedient process to find out what other states received approval for to help inform them of what might be acceptable in their plans. There is

clearly a need for continuity with respect to the acceptable standards that states are required to meet in their compliance plans. Finally, the law allows some states and schools the flexibility to transfer their federal funds to other purposes if approved by the U.S. Department of Education.

The idea of focusing on what works is embedded in NCLB. Using scientifically based research is mentioned more than 100 times in the law. Congress was serious about the use of research- or evidenced-based programs in schools and reauthorized the former Office of Education Research and Improvement into the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) when it approved the Education Sciences Reform Act of 2002 after NCLB. The IES is developing a What Works Clearinghouse on its Web site (www.w-w-c.org) to help educators identify programs that have met research-based criteria to help them make decisions on what interventions to adopt in their schools.

Finally, NCLB requires states to set standards for determining highly qualified teachers. Many of the reports issued throughout the years indicated that the students who needed the most qualified teachers were being taught by teachers with less experience and often not fully certified for their teaching assignment. NCLB requires teachers in core subjects to have a bachelor's degree, full state certification, and to demonstrate subject matter competency. The states are allowed considerable latitude in determining the process to meet these requirements through their High Objective Uniform State Standards of Evaluation (HOUSSE).

In sum, NCLB incorporates the concepts that were discussed for many years and imposes sanctions for failing to meet certain requirements. Clearly, the law incorporates accountability, assessment, academic standards, and teacher quality as its cornerstones. All four of these concepts have been subjects of concern in nearly every report on education since 1957.

Summary

The No Child Left Behind Act became law in 2002 and thus began the implementation of education reform concepts that had been

discussed in many meetings and reports since 1957. What was new this time, however, was that NCLB included serious sanctions for those states and schools that did not take “educating all students to meet their standards with qualified teachers” seriously. For nearly 50 years, the numerous commissions, studies, and reports have been remarkably similar in their recommendations and consistent in their call for improving U.S. education. It was not until the governors and business executives started their series of three national summits, however, that the policymaking process began to address requiring the changes being proposed. In many respects, NCLB is the culmination of all the reports and commissions’ work. The themes are remarkably similar—accountability for all students learning, rigorous academic standards, assessment aligned to those standards, high-quality professional development, improved teacher preparation, and highly qualified teachers.

Knowing that most of these ideas have deep historical roots in the calls for education reform, there is no excuse that not much education reform was implemented that resulted in significant improvement in U.S. education during the past four decades. Now that many of those reforms are written into the NCLB law, what can be done to build organizational capacity to produce successful results? As a metaphor, U.S. education is not unlike the U.S. auto industry. The auto industry suffered from poor quality and an inability to compete with foreign competitors not too many years ago. It took time for the industry to transform itself and make the needed changes to improve its quality to even compete with foreign carmakers. For U.S. education to improve, the concepts of schooling will need to undergo significant change based on contemporary organizational thinking and building the capacity of workers to implement those changes. These thoughts are not intended to be perceived as a “bashing” of U.S. education but, rather, as a call to action to successfully meet the challenges imposed by NCLB.

An Action Idea

Spend time with your school improvement team discussing the key reform ideas, not only from the past but also what is being

proposed in the future. This chapter described in detail some of the reforms pertaining to education standards, assessment and accountability, teacher quality, and closing the achievement gap. On the horizon is the call to reform high schools. President George H. W. Bush proposed a legislative initiative for high school reform in 2005, but it did not receive much attention from Congress. Business leaders and governors, however, are taking an active role in promoting the reform. Although the concept of reforming high schools may be a popular theme, what that reform means must be clearly defined. For example, is the reform for smaller schools, for more rigorous curriculums, or for new programs to prepare students for the workforce? In a poll conducted by the Alliance for Excellent Education, 83% of respondents believed improving high schools was extremely urgent or very urgent compared to only 79% for middle schools and 76% for elementary schools (Shek, 2005).

One action step to do now: Facilitate a meeting to discuss the importance of education reform and include material supporting both sides of the issues. By discussing the diverse viewpoints, you will begin to set a context for organizing your own school improvement work. Be sure to include data regarding the local issue you are working on to improve and the research that might be useful to support the discussions.

