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# Federal Involvement in Education Policy: An Analysis of Race To The Top

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**Federal Involvement in Education Policy:  
An Analysis of Race To The Top**

by

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to trace federal involvement in public K-12 education policy and to determine its effectiveness. Specifically, I present a historical analysis of federal education policy leading to the passage of Race to the Top (RTTT) in 2009. My goal is to show that, although the federal government has grown more involved in education policy, especially from the late 1980s (following the 1983 publication of *A Nation At Risk* that showed the failings of the nation's schools) until present, actually students in the K-12 public education system have not progressed as the federal government had hoped. The measurement of progress, Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), has not been met in many states as set forth in the legislation No Child Left Behind (NCLB), passed by the U.S. Congress in 2001 and signed by President George W. Bush in 2002, that set a goal of all students reaching proficiency or advanced in reading and mathematics by 2014. Because of the unrealistic expectations and no additional funding to reach the set goal, many scholars called the law an unfunded mandate and most educators grew weary of trying to meet the goal. As a result of the unfavorable education climate created by NCLB, the U.S. Congress offered relief in the form of RTTT, a grants reward program, passed by the U.S. Congress and signed into legislation by President Barack Obama in 2009. That program offered \$4.35 billion to states whose applications were accepted over other states applications in order to provide funding for creative educational programming within their borders. But, my study shows that the additional funding helped improve AYP modestly or insignificantly as shown in particular by the District of Columbia, which is highlighted in this study. Finally, my study offers a survey of teachers and administrators in a prominent school district in St. Louis County,

Missouri, that confirms that educators are against the notion of relying on an-end-of-the year state assessment to show evidence of student achievement and the notion of tying teachers' and administrators' salaries to student test scores, both of which are elements of RTTT.

Keywords: No Child Left Behind, Race to the Top, Adequate Yearly Progress

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate my dissertation to my mother, Aralean Brown, whose encouragement was key to the completion of this study. I also dedicate my dissertation to my children, Matthew, Amanda, Michael, and Malcolm, whose love and support are unwavering.

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

Education has become a focus of presidential elections, federal bureaucratic policy development and implementation and U.S. congressional legislation. As the federal government has become more involved in education policy, an area in which states traditionally has led, how does the federal government get the states to do what it wants? More importantly, after the federal government gets the states onboard, is federal K-12 education policy effective?

The central question driving this dissertation is the effectiveness of the federal government's involvement in education. To test the effectiveness of federal involvement, I examine the development of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), federal education legislation, which became law in 2002, and use the review as a basis to analyze the federal education policy, Race To The Top (RTTT), also federal education legislation, which was approved in 2009. Those two pieces of legislation, while different in nature at the time of implementation, either built on existing conventional wisdom, in the case of NCLB, or substantially modified the prior situation, as in the case of RTTT. Specifically, NCLB required states to adopt improvement measures, such as testing, accountability instruments, and improved teacher qualifications, as a way to grade schools' performance in an effort to raise student achievement (NCLB, 1444-1446). NCLB has led critics to accuse the federal government of requiring the states to use its own resources to implement the policy, while withholding funds if the policy goals are unmet, thus being tagged as an unfunded mandate (Munich 2005,1). However, annual performance assessment results, as measured by Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) required under NCLB, were low (Center On Education Policy 2011, 2-3). The goal of states meeting 100 percent proficiency in English and math assessments within 12 years of the law's implementation was unmet.

On the other hand, in the case of RTTT, the federal government used its leverage to offer funding in the form of a grant rewards program to states that met criteria to create an environment for education improvement, particularly by showing improvement in the following areas: school assessments; efforts to recruit, prepare and develop effective teachers and principals; data systems to measure student growth and success; and turn-around of their lowest-achieving schools (Race To The Top Executive Summary, 2). However, AYP results showed that states involved in RTTT fared only slightly better in meeting AYP goals than those not involved in RTTT (Center for Education Policy 2011, 2-3).

With the passage of NCLB and RTTT many scholars have concluded that the federal government has become the solid leader in education policy. Indeed, the federal government has shown its fortitude with the passage of NCLB and RTTT, legislation that have required states to prove their effectiveness in order to gain federal funding. Now, most recently, President Barack Obama signed into law in 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which is the latest federal education legislation that reauthorized the 50-year-old Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and updated NCLB. President Obama and Congress have reported that the legislation is a better law to prepare students for their futures (U.S. Department of Education 2015). Examining the historical framework of ESSA, which lies within NCLB and RTTT, will help to clarify federal involvement in education policy and whether it has been effective.

Indeed, given the premise that the federal government has shown leadership in education policy, it is important to find out how effective federal leadership has been. By offering a brief historical account of U.S. education policy through the implementation of NCLB, and then examining RTTT, the effectiveness of federal leadership in education policy can be documented and explained. My research will answer the following questions: (1) What did the authors of

NCLB think they were doing? (2) Did NCLB do what its authors thought it was going to do? (3) What did not happen? (4) What did happen that they did not say they expected? (5) What did the authors of RTTT think they were doing? (6) Did RTTT do what its authors thought it was going to do? (7) What did not happen? (8) What did happen that they did not say they expected? Answering those questions will offer comprehensive policy analysis in the area of education policy that will contribute to the field of political science. Below is an outline of the following chapters.

Chapter two consists of an historical overview of the problem of federal effectiveness in education. Chapter two includes various scholars' historical analyses of the evolution of federal involvement public education. Chapter two particularly demonstrates how the ESEA, signed into law in 1965 under President Lyndon B. Johnson's administration, allowed latitude for the states to develop programs for its critical schools with \$1.5 billion committed to public education. Chapter two's narrative also shows that the latitude afforded under ESEA gradually eroded after slipping SAT scores in the 1970s was followed by the document, *A Nation At Risk*, a report that alarmed the public of the problem of public education in the 1980s. Furthermore, chapter two shows that education politics of the late 1980s and 1990s laid the foundation for the political development of NCLB, which became law in 2002.

Chapter three answers the key question: What did the authors of NCLB think they were doing? To answer that question, chapter three outlines and analyzes important elements of the legislation. Additionally, chapter three's narration shows that Frank R. Baumgartner's and Bryan D. Jones' (2009) framework centering the punctuated equilibrium model of policy change is relevant to understanding the political development and passage of NCLB. Chapter three also shows that John Kingdon's (2011) multiple streams model also helps explain the development of

NCLB. Additionally, chapter three answers the key question: Did NCLB do what its authors thought it was going to do? To answer that question, chapter three presents data to show whether NCLB was effective. Also, chapter three includes various scholars' analyses, which conclude that the weight of the evidence is that NCLB was a failure.

Chapter four discusses the origin, creation, groundwork and goals of RTTT. More specifically, the chapter answers the question: What did the authors of RTTT think they were doing? To answer that question, chapter four outlines and analyzes key aspects of the legislation and offers a review of a state application that won a grant and a state application that failed to win a grant. Also, chapter four is devoted to discussing the background leading to the adoption of RTTT. In this analysis, I rely on the website, Policy Agendas Project, produced by the University of Texas at Austin. The website details several major policy areas and congressional hearings on those areas. Finally, chapter four's narration also shows that Frank R. Baumgartner's and Bryan D. Jones' (2009) framework centering the punctuated equilibrium model and John Kingdon's (2011) multiple streams model of policy change is relevant to the political development and passage of RTTT.

Chapter five consists of answering the following key question: Did RTTT do what its authors thought it was going to do? Based on research, the chapter shows that RTTT only helped states meet AYP objectives at a slightly greater rate. The remaining part of chapter five outlines Phase 2 competition for states in 2010. Specifically, I focus on Washington D.C., whose education officials submitted a successful proposal in Phase 2, and trace how that proposal fared during the review process and one year after implementation. Chapter five also includes a survey from teachers and administrators at a successful suburban school district in St. Louis

County, Missouri. Finally, chapter five concludes by making a few brief generalizations about how the political development surrounding the adoption of RTTT led to the passage of ESSA.

Chapter six offers a conclusion. The research has shown that the adoption of NCLB and political development of RTTT are classic cases of the punctuated equilibrium framework of policy change and multiple streams model of policy change. The politicians and policy actors surrounding both pieces of legislation were so absorbed in satisfying various stakeholders in education to achieve a massive goal—improving the nation’s schools—that they developed policy that yielded low results. In the first case, NCLB was an unrealistic, unfunded mandate, and, in the second case, RTTT, offered funding to help improve the nation’s schools and relief from the confinement of NCLB, but was still caught in the grips of the NCLB legislation, whose renewal was still in the works. Politicians built on provisions of RTTT, especially by providing federal funding to states to meet AYP goals found in ESSA, although it is too early to determine its rate of success as 2016-2017 will be a transition year for ESSA, with implementation beginning the summer of 2017. Chapter six discusses implications of the research, especially the importance of having a strong voice from education professionals when developing future federal education policy and suggests further study, particularly centering on an analysis of ESSA.

## **Chapter Two: Overview of the History of Federal Involvement in Education**

Public education can be traced to colonists who began establishing schools for White males in the early 1600s. Over time, the U.S. public education system has evolved to offer standardized services and a broader range of those services. Additionally, the market for public education has expanded over time to include all groups of people. As a result of those changes, the federal government has become more involved in K-12 public education. By historically tracing federal involvement in education, a clear picture emerges that shows the federal government has become more dominant over time, pushing states to reform their practices to help ensure equality and excellence in education. However, federal involvement in education has led some scholars to conclude that U.S. education policies and practices, while promoting good intentions, actually, have fallen short of reaching their desired objectives to improve the overall K-12 public education environment.

After the colonists established public schools in the 1600s, gradually, the system became more complex, i.e., standardizing curriculum, segregating age for instruction, and instituting mandatory attendance during the 1800s. During the late 1800s and early 1900s, public education expanded to include secondary education. As the education system became more complex and broad, it became a focus of the Progressive Movement reformers' efforts in the early 1900s in order to help rid societal injustices and ills (Education News 2013). Progressive reformers' efforts created bureaucratic and professional organizations designed to take politics out of the educational system. Indeed, the effect of Progressive reformers' efforts was the creation of a U.S. bureaucratic system that grew to become massive and that was, and, currently, is linked to local offices, and oversees most major education decisions. However, the so-called winners of this system, business, middle class, educational professionals, were least concerned about the losers, lower classes, and religious and racial minorities, and rural communities. That system



also left a fight for governance, and institutions were put into place, namely the local school board, superintendent, and district office, which, in turn, were overseen by state governments through their departments of education. Finally, the U.S. Department of Education linked its authority to the state departments. Many major political decisions from busing to sex education are handed down through those offices (Chubb and Moe 1990, 4-6).

In a description of public schools during the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, David B. Tyack (1974) noted that as cities grew in size and complexity, so did the local public school bureaucracy. Tyack showed that in 1889, 484 cities reported an average of four supervisors without teaching duties per city, but from 1890 until 1920, that number grew exponentially. Here are his findings: Baltimore went from 9 to 144; Boston climbed from 7 to 159; Detroit escalated from 31 to 329; St. Louis increased from 58 to 155; Cleveland climbed from 10 to 159; Philadelphia moved from 66 to 268; and New York jumped from 235 to 1,310 (185). In his description of the beginning of the development of that bureaucracy, Tyack stated:

From classroom to central office they (superintendents) tried to create new controls over pupils, teachers, principals, and other subordinate members of the school hierarchy. Although they often used the nonpolitical language of social engineers, they were actually trying to replace village forms in which laymen participated in decentralized decision-making with the new bureaucratic model of a closed “nonpolitical” system in which directives flowed from the top down, reports emanated from the bottom, and each step of the educational process was carefully prescribed by professional educators (40).

Public schools continued to develop in a centralized manner during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The federal government put forth its education reform initiatives to help ensure equality and excellence in education during the 1950s and 1960s when the Civil Rights Movement and Cold War were spreading their influence. After the 1954 U.S. Supreme Court ruling, *Brown v. the Topeka, Kansas Board of Education*, which overturned legal segregation in

public education, one of the federal government's major roles in public education was ensuring school desegregation, which sought to pull African Americans into the mainstream of education services and end the injustices of all-black schools that received the worst materials and a staff that was spread too thin to be effective (Education News 2013). Additionally, during the Cold War, the federal government responded to the launching of the Soviet Union's *Sputnik*—the first satellite to orbit the earth—by calling for “improved guidance services, testing, and instruction in mathematics, science, and foreign languages” through the 1958 passage of the National Defense Education Act or NDEA (Kaestle and Lodewick 2007, 3).

A more important step in federal involvement in K-12 public education came with its Civil Rights agenda and key focus to end poverty in 1960s under the realm of President Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty. Under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the federal government used its fiscal muscle by passing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The legislation authorized such programs as Head Start and reading and math programs targeted to improve opportunities for disadvantaged children identified in high poverty areas. The legislation became a reality in 1965 when President Johnson signed ESEA into law, committing \$1.5 billion to public education. That money was earmarked for the states to use toward their self-developed programs (Spring 2014, 9). Later, ESEA was reauthorized under the names, the Improving America's School Act (IASA) in 1994, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2002, and, more currently, Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015.

The federal government's concern for achieving equality in K-12 public education continued during the 1970s when the Civil Rights Movement broadened its scope to include more groups, such as “English language learners, children with disabilities, Native Americans, Latinos and females” by offering “new legal and fiscal resources for new constituencies.” The

legislative victories of the 1970 agenda included the following: the Bilingual Education Act of 1968; Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972; Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973; the Equal Opportunities Act of 1974; and Education for all Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in 1990) (Umpstead 2008). (Critics voiced concern about these programs' measurable results, and support for them ended abruptly in the 1980s with the election of President Ronald Reagan) (Kaestle and Lodewick 2007, 3).

Joel Spring (2014) summarized his research on the role of federal government in K-12 public education as a means to end poverty, inequality, and increase national wealth. The first objective—ending poverty—especially became a key focus of ESEA during the 1960s. The shift to improving the economy or increasing national wealth occurred in the 1970s, with the development of career education programs, and later in the 1980s and 1990s with a push for (excellence in) public education to help make U.S. corporations dominant in world markets (Spring 2014, 9).

However, achieving all of those lofty goals led to a collision during the 1970s. In fact, many scholars point to the nation's education environment during the 1970s as the beginning of a major downward spiral in K-12 public education. Indeed, national SAT test scores dipped downward during that decade, which led to the publication of the 1983 findings of the National Commission on Excellence in Education in the released report, *A Nation at Risk*. The report offered a grim picture for U.S. education, stating “the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people” (*A Nation At Risk*, 1983). The report offered several recommendations, including the nation's K-12 public schools' administering standardized tests “at major transition points

from one level of schooling to another and particularly from high school to college or work” (*A Nation At Risk*, 1983.)

Diane Ravitch’s (2010) historical assessment of K-12 public education showed that the pendulum has swung from centralization as a cure for failing schools in the 1890s (in order to rid society of corrupt local control by creating a federal bureaucracy) to decentralization as the cure in the 1960s (in order to provide more benefit to minorities) (5). She continued that the 1970s was marked by an experimental environment created by “leftist historians” who attacked schools as “institutions devised by elites to oppress the poor” (5). But, rather than improving education, SAT scores declined, and the federal government responded to the 1970s experiments with the study, *A Nation at Risk*, which issued a plea to make the nation’s schools better (24-25). Since the publication of that report, the federal government’s role has expanded in education policy making, an area traditionally left to the states and local governments. As mentioned, although, the federal government provided money to the states under ESEA, the federal government took a back seat to the states that developed their own programs with the use of the federal funds to help students in need. However, to reiterate, the publication of *A Nation at Risk* began to change the federal government’s role in education.

As a result of the publication, *A Nation at Risk*, the latest major development that impacted federal involvement in K-12 public education has come through a long pathway of education reform measures, where state standards, accountability measures, and school choice are highlighted as a means to reach the highest achievement levels, starting from the late 1980s and continuing until present. The reform measures pushed the federal government into the political forefront of K-12 public education. After the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, the federal government no longer sat around passively, issuing money and letting the states decide how to

use it as the practice under ESEA. Now, the federal government began to take an aggressive leadership role by requiring states to reach the desired outcome—excellence in public education as shown by increased test scores—or risk losing federal funding.

Indeed, Jesse H. Rhodes (2012) verified that the federal involvement in education prior to the 1980s was minimal, but rather focused broadly on achieving equality in education for disadvantaged groups. Rhodes stated:

By the end of the 1970s, the most important, and most expensive, federal education programs were geared to providing aid to the economically, physically and educationally disadvantaged. The federal grant programs were bolstered by laws, regulations, and judicial decisions designed to eliminate racial and sexual discrimination and to promote student rights and the rights of the disabled (27).

That system was supported by liberals and members of Congress seeking to channel federal funding into their districts. However, the various developments had little impact on programs for non-disadvantaged students, and, but rather reinforced “separation between the compensatory and regular school programs” (27). The federal government’s fiscal role in K-12 education was modest, despite efforts by proponents to increase funding. Because of the federal government’s limited role, one could conclude the message was that K-12 “students and schools were performing adequately” (27). By 1979, the federal government’s \$16.6 billion contribution approached 10 percent of all spending for elementary and secondary education (32). The states, following the federal government, also demanded equal treatment of students after the 1960s, but delegated to the local governments decisions centering on curriculum, standards and personnel (27-28).

Although the federal government’s involvement in education following the adoption of ESEA in 1965 until the late 1970s created a climate for ending poverty and achieving equality in

education as evidenced by various interest groups seeking entitlement under that law, the federal government's role still was supportive of the states. Rhodes stated:

Federal responsibilities grew within tightly delimited bounds. In a nod to the prerogatives of state and local policymakers, the ESEA and its progeny delegated substantial discretion to states and localities to design and implement compensatory education programs. Federal regulations sought to ensure that federal education funds reached the students for whom the programs were intended, but they did not hold state and local governments accountable for actually raising the achievement of eligible students (33-34).

However, the state and federal government's direct involvement in education policy escalated after the publication of *A Nation at Risk*. Indeed, from the mid- to late-1980s, the federal government's role transformed from a sideline advocate and supporter of equality in education to a leader in public education by pushing for excellence in K-12 public education. Rhodes (2012) argued that the political developments of the 1980s actually were pivotal and set the tone for education policy today. It was first assumed that states would lead education reform from the early 1980s to the mid-1980s. As Rhodes stated:

Between 1983 and 1985, every state in the union convened at least one commission on the issue of excellence in education; in all, over three hundred state-level reform commissions assembled. This commission activity set the stage for an unprecedented wave of state-level lawmaking during the 1980s. All told, the states adopted more than seven hundred statutes related to graduation requirements, standards, testing, and teacher quality between 1984 and 1986—more than they had in the previous twenty years—and continued to adopt additional policies through the end of the decade (63).

Eventually, the 1980s education dialogue and state reform efforts geared toward excellence in education was transformed into a “standards-based” reform paradigm, “which proposed to strengthen education systems by aligning them around coordinated standards, testing, and accountability policies” (Rhodes 2012, 70). As the standards movement progressed during the 1990s and early 2000s, another more conservative and controversial element arose—

private school choice at the center of improving schools (Rhodes 2012, 91). Although the standards movement with school choice at its core, centered on one goal—improving the nation’s schools—the movements culminated with the 2002 legislation, NCLB, which eventually became the focus of much criticism.

In summary, the federal government had taken an incremental leadership role in public education from the early 1900s until the late 1980s. Federal involvement in K-12 public education can be traced to the 1900s Progressive Era that attempted to take politics out of the schools, but left the nation with a federal bureaucratic system. Federal involvement in education continued to expand with the Cold War and Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s and with a broader constituency of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1970s. But, an escalated zeal centering on federal involvement in education began with a push for excellence in education after the report, *A Nation at Risk*, from the late 1980s to present that has been evident by a long pathway of policies, based on standards, accountability and school choice.

The gradual expansion of federal involvement in K-12 public education over the last 30 years has led many scholars to study the impact of federal involvement and to conclude that federal policies and practices, especially the practice of how the federal government gets the states onboard to achieve desired goals, have left the education environment unimproved. One way the federal government gets the states to do what it wants is by issuing mandates, a practice that many scholars think is ineffective. For example, John Chubb and Terry Moe (1990) concluded from their research that the institution of public education is the problem with education because of the nature of its bureaucratic organization that is riddled with mandates not only from the federal level, but from the state, and local levels as well. The federal mandates gradually became more complicated during the 1990s, finally culminating with the federal

government demanding results in the form of improved test scores or risk teachers' and administrators' contracts not being renewed and school closings. That is, the federal government demanded a system of statewide accountability based on measurement leading to increased school choice, which was the basis of NCLB in 2002, and, more recently, RTTT in 2009. The next section will examine that legislative pathway.

### **Federal Involvement in Education: Political Development during the late 1980s to early 2000s**

Standards, accountability and school choice, which were key focuses of federal involvement in K-12 public education from the late 1980s until early 2000s, have been the subject of much scholarly research. For example, many scholars have traced that political development and assessed the merits of the school choice approach, including whether the market-based approach is a realistic solution for the so-called product—education—that has been redefined over the years to have various meanings to various so-called consumers—parents and their children. Indeed, for more than 10 years from the late 1980s until early 2000s, much of the major aspect of federal involvement in K-12 public education was built upon the conventional wisdom that school choice based on standards and accountability was the best route for our nation's public schools. That pathway led to the 2002 passage of NCLB and 2009 passage of RTTT. Much of the scholarly research, however, has shown that the approach to federal involvement in K-12 public education was flawed.

To understand the discussion centering on school choice, we must first understand the basic structure of K-12 public education system. The major choice available to most parents opting for public schools is the selection of a community as large metropolitan areas are divided into smaller neighborhoods and suburbs. Families' choice in public school districts is tied to how much they are willing to spend for a house or apartment in that district, given that higher quality



education often coincides with higher property values and incomes. “A significant measure of the market value of a house is the prevailing opinion on the quality of the schools were it is located” (*Making The Grade* 1983, 19).

Another form of school choice is found with the option of private schools, which parents must pay for in addition to property taxes for their local public school. Therefore, parents who are of a higher-income level have a greater choice for their children—either public school districts or private schools (*Making The Grade* 1983, 19). A third form of school choice is found within the realm of charter schools, which are public schools operating under contracts between the schools and agencies operating them (Robertson 2012, 159). Hence, advocates of school choice believe that all parents, regardless of income level, should be able to take advantage of a greater pool of choice geared toward the education for their children.

Such a noble goal as free and universal education should be set and reached in a democratic society that seeks equality for all people. However, the means by which to achieve that reality has been the cause of great debate. Setting minimal standards for schools chosen, which can lead to school closings, is a negative means by which to accomplish the desired goal of school choice.

As noted in the previous section, following the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, state reform efforts centering on standards and accountability were practiced as the key to achieving excellence in education. Following state reform efforts, the federal government began to plunge into education reform by pressing for excellence in education. Four presidents contributed to the eventual passage of NCLB. First, presidents Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush raised the issue in speeches during the late 1980s and early 1990s (Rhodes 2012, 64). Also, during the late 1980s and early 1990s, both presidents Reagan and George H.W. Bush sought to give more

choice to parents by allowing tax credits for the tuition paid by parents of private school children, (Urban, 311). Next, in 1989, President George H. W. Bush went a step further by agreeing “with the nation’s governors on the adoption of six National Education Goals, which detailed performance expectations that schools and students were supposed to meet by the year 2000” (Rhodes 2012, 70). He had teamed at with then Arkansas Democratic Gov. Bill Clinton, who was president of the National Governors’ Association and leader of education reform in his state at that time, at an education conference in Charlottesville, Va. (Congressional Quarterly Researcher, 2005, 482). At the heart of Goals 2000 were “six nonbinding education goals that included competency testing in basic subjects in the fourth, eighth, and twelfth grades,” (Robertson 2012, 160). Then “Bush proposed, and Congress debated the ‘America 2000’ initiative, which called on the federal government to support the establishment of voluntary national standards and voluntary national tests, and to promote private school choice options” (Rhodes 2012, 70). Although America 2000 was not enacted into law, education reform groups, consisting of “business entrepreneurs, civil rights entrepreneurs, educational conservatives, and state leaders in building institutions and relationships capable of maintaining and expanding their agendas” created an atmosphere of “growing enthusiasm for greater federal involvement” in public K-12 education (Rhodes 2012, 70-71). Rhodes stated:

In this early period of federal involvement—when the scope of federal engagement remained modest and ill-defined—these four groups continued to work in parallel (and sometimes in concert) to promote similar reforms. Continuing their work as political entrepreneurs, each of these groups engaged in extensive extra-governmental agenda setting, organizational maintenance, and coalition building to reinforce the cause of school reform at the state and federal levels. The importance of policy knowledge and professional networks was on full display, as entrepreneurs leveraged their expertise, personal relationships with policymakers, and access to foundation funding to influence policy. These processes set the stage for major shifts in education policymaking in subsequent years, dramatically expanding the federal role in education in the United States. (Rhodes 2012, 71).

The education reform groups continued their efforts after their defeat of America 2000 and “drove federal leadership of standards-based reforms to the top of the national education agenda in 1991 and 1992” (Rhodes 2012, 71). The standards-based reforms were later adopted and put into law in the Goals 2000: Educate America Act of 1994 (during the administration of President Bill Clinton) (Robertson 2012, 160). Clinton, as well as his successor, President George W. Bush championed school reform, “dedicating considerable policymaking, as well as rhetorical attention to the subject” during mid 1990s and early 2000s. (Rhodes 2012, 64).

To reiterate, President George H.W. Bush’s initiative also supported the promotion of private school choice options. Diane Ravitch stated that she supported school choice in her position as an assistant secretary and counselor to the secretary in the U.S. Department of Education during the presidency of George H.W. Bush. Ravitch stated:

If kids were not succeeding in their regular public school, why not let them take their federal funds to another public school or to a private—even religious—school? Since affluent families could choose their schools by moving to a better neighborhood or enrolling their children in private schools, why shouldn’t poor families have similar choices? In the decade following my stint in the federal government, I argued that certain managerial and structural changes—that is, choice, charters, merit pay, and accountability—would help to reform our schools. With such changes, teachers and schools would be judged by their performance; this was a basic principle in the business world. Schools that failed to perform would be closed, just as a corporation would close a branch office that continually produced poor returns. Having been immersed in a world of true believers, I was influenced by their ideas (8).

However, Ravitch, said she became disenchanted with choice and accountability because they were too “speculative and uncertain,” and, therefore, she said she reverted to support public education (13).

To understand the push for reform on the federal level for K-12 public education, it is important to review the state reform efforts in the late 1980s and early 1990s. At that time, state

reform efforts produced little substantial improvements with insignificant thought of the reality of implementation on a daily basis in the classroom. Therefore, as reform effort after reform effort was generated in the mid-1980s and early 1990s, some scholars concluded that any positive desired effects or results of the reform efforts actually was lost in the chain of reforms.

These extensive efforts have produced few substantive results, prompting the Rand Corporation's 1995 report *Reinventing Public Education* to begin with the question, 'Why has a decade of work on school reform produced so little?' ...

Quite simply, urban school reform is not really about improving education. Reform represents a district's continuous response to political necessity—not a district's dramatic break with the status quo. In fact, a state of perpetual reform is the status quo. This surfeit of reform is responsible for many of the problems that reforms are then expected to solve. The cruel paradox is that the same impulses that drive reform also ensure that reform will be pursued under conditions that make large-scale success highly unlikely. The most significant reason education reform has not produced results is that reform is not primarily *about* producing results. Instead reforms are intended to rally community support without imposing the costs required by significant and sustained efforts at improvement.

Emphasis on the politically attractive aspects of reform has resulted in inattention to the details of implementing reform. For example, Pauly has observed, 'A clear and consistent finding of education policy research is that policies and reforms often fall apart when they encounter the realities of daily life in the classrooms.' Meaningful change requires time to focus on selected reforms and then to nurture those efforts at the school sites. ... Schools and teachers are given little time to become acclimated to one initiative before the next is launched.

This churning of policy is inimical to long-term improvement (Hess, 1998, 109).

Larry Cuban (1990) suggested that state education reforms had failed to remove the problems intended to solve for several reasons. He argued that reformers must be careful to assess whether they are dealing with the problem or the politics of the problem and reformers must ask what thoughts and metaphors are they using. For example, he stated that relying on business firms as a model for the education environment, i.e., education as a product and parents and students as consumers, may not be the correct fit (as a social institution differs from a business). In summary, Cuban concluded that education reforms return because decision makers

use irrational methods. Cuban correctly has assessed a major problem with state and federal education reform measures since the late 1980s as reformers latch onto metaphors, treat them as factual, and sell their stories and solutions to politicians, education stakeholders, and unwavering supporters, without investing time and effort into solid research that could produce more viable and productive outcomes for all of those concerned.

Frederick Hess (1998) argued that, in reality, K-12 public education is governed by an amateur local school board with little power to generate effective solutions to improve the mediocre performance of its schools. As a result, the board relies on a superintendent who has the pressure to be a “reformist superintendent.” However, due to the short tenure of a superintendent’s term, generally three to four years, he must set initiatives into place, and rely on the following superintendent to put those initiatives into place. That is the nature in which K-12 public education policy is designed, practices oversight and implementation (Hess 1998, 111-112). Therefore, given the amateur manner in which K-12 public education policy is designed and administered and given the rapid change in policy that is so evident, “carefully constructed choice-based plans can be a solution to help discourage policy churn” (Hess 1998, 122).

However, the choice-base plans were not carefully constructed, but rather simply based on test scores. As a matter of fact, due to low test scores, many long-established schools abruptly were closed in historic neighborhoods—a situation that left many parents and students in a quandary where they were left with forced choice. Indeed in Chicago Public Schools (CPS), 44 schools were closed from 2001 until 2009 due to “poor academic performance or underutilization,” two areas of consideration outlined by the state of Illinois (de la Torre and Gwynne, 2009).

To reiterate, the dialogue of school choice began after the 1983 publication of *A Nation at Risk* under Reagan’s presidency, and progressed during the 1990s until present. School choice was put into place using various policy measures that ultimately tied into one goal—school choice as determined by standards and accountability, which led the passage of NCLB in 2002 and later RTTT in 2009. The school choice argument was wrapped around the idea of the federal government issuing to the states a basic mandate—improve their practices or risk losing its federal funding.

The next section of this chapter will look at research regarding the effectiveness of mandates in K-12 public education more critically through the perspectives of two scholars—Chubb and Moe (1990) and Jeffery R. Henig (1994)—who held opposing views during the early 1990s.

### **Federal Involvement in Education: A Difference of Opinion on Education Policy Solutions during the late 1980s to early 1990s**

The importance of this scholarly disagreement is for understanding the nature of the discussions and studies surrounding K-12 public education in the United States during the late 1980s and early 1990s, a time period that laid the foundation for the political development of NCLB in 2002 and RTTT in 2009. The basic point that Chubb and Moe made is that school choice must be the wave of the future of public education in the United States because the market-based approach weeds out unsuccessful schools. Also, they argued that all schools need the autonomy enjoyed by private schools, which have been free from federal, state and local control, and, thereby, have the ability to direct educational programs toward their targeted market, i.e., the families that choose their schools. The basic point that Henig made about Chubb and Moe’s argument is that empirically-based research must be must be balanced with an

element of social analysis before conclusions are reached. The rest of this section looks at those arguments in more detail.

Chubb and Moe showed that public school's bureaucratic organization, which is filled with federal, state, and local mandates, hinder any progress. Moreover, the authors concluded that public education cannot be improved with policy decisions regarding programs and funding until the actual institution is changed. Indeed, Chubb and Moe quoted the 1983 findings of the National Commission on Excellence in Education, which released its report, *A Nation at Risk*. The report sent a shock wave through the state departments of education, which, in turn, held debates and developed solutions: "stricter graduation requirements, more rigorous ladders and (occasionally) merit pay for teachers, stricter disciplinary policy, more homework, longer school days or years, and greater reliance on standardized tests of student performance, among others" (Chubb and Moe, 10).

Those reforms, however, were met with the question of how control was to be exercised by the governmental entities that ran schools in order to improve the schools. Yet, Chubb and Moe argued that the actual institutions that governed schools were never examined in terms of reform (11). The authors argued that true educational reform must be at the institutional level, but the subject never came up, because the educational institution has been polluted over time with factions whose goal was to protect their interests and struggle for power rather than improve the educational system (12). The authors argued that many groups oppose educational reform, because institutions stabilize overtime and develop a natural course of operation that produce benefits to recipients, and those groups of beneficiaries resist fundamental change. Those groups include, "educational administrators, school board members, professionals, teachers and other established players in the educational system" (12).

The authors quoted a myriad of studies that summarized what school reform meant in the 1980s, only to conclude that the reforms were destined to fail because they dealt with policy and not with institutions. The authors stated that 1980 reformers pushed for the following: “clear school goals, rigorous academic standards, order and discipline, homework, strong leadership by the principal, teacher participation in decision making, parental support and cooperation, and high expectations for student performance” (16). The authors continued that “policy changes without institutional change went against the grain of social science” (18). Their rationale is basic: the institutions are the causes of the problems they are trying to solve. They stated: “In our view, these institutions are more than simply the democratic means by which policy solutions are formulated and administered. They are also fundamental causes of the very problems they are supposed to be solving” (18). The authors continued that the problem of the K-12 public school institutions in America is that arrangements for democratic control form a structure for choices for the participants, and that structure is “ill-suited to the effective performance of American public schools.” The authors stated, “If Americans want effective schools, it appears they must first create new institutions that, in their effects on the choices of individuals, naturally function to promote rather than inhibit the right kinds of organizations” (21).

To arrive at their conclusion, the authors collected data from two massive surveys. The data sources include the High School and Beyond (HSB) survey, first administered in 1980 as the largest data set on high schools and their students until that time and the Administrator and Teacher Survey (ATS) in 1983-84 (22). The goal was to go back to the schools of the HSB and talk to those who ran those schools. The conclusions from the data were threefold. The conclusions are based on survey data divided in the following areas: organization of schools, student achievement and institutional context. A summary of their findings is as follows: “One,



schools do indeed perform better to the extent ... they have such general qualities as clear goals, an ambitious academic program, strong educational leadership, and high levels of teacher professionalism. Two, the most important prerequisite for the emergence of effective school characteristic is school autonomy, especially from external bureaucratic influence. Three, America's existing system of public education inhibits the emergence of effective organizations. This occurs, most fundamentally, because its institutions of democratic control function naturally to limit and undermine school autonomy" (23). In other words, the authors concluded from research findings that the very nature of public education, organized in a bureaucratic framework, goes directly against school autonomy, which is a necessary component in order to establish a dynamic and effective school environment.

Chubb and Moe offered several examples to support their argument that the bureaucratic organization of K-12 public schools is detrimental for establishing effective schools. First, regarding authority and decision-making, the authors' research showed that those areas are attached to public officials, but, rather than being democratic, they are instead coercive (28). Losers, in the process, they argued, must support the winners' programs, no matter how much they despise them. However, in markets, the authors argued, government only sets the framework for the rules, rather than impose programs to be followed (29). Second, regarding the goals of schools, the authors' research showed that public schools must provide every service to every kind of student all at once, whereas schools in the private sector do not have to undergo such awesome tasks. "Schools can therefore be asked to move in every direction at once, from sex education to psychological counseling to the socialization of immigrants to vocational training to desegregation to mainstreaming of the handicapped to bilingual education. Somewhere in all of this, they are expected to provide students with 'academic excellence'" (54).

In comparison, in the private sector, schools only need “to find their niche” to be successful. Finally, regarding the practice of schools, the authors’ research showed that the public schools are burdened with rules about everything from curriculum, instructional methods, and time spent on activities, and, thus teachers “are constrained in their efforts to perform their educational tasks as they see fit.” They are also expected to spend time documenting that they have followed rules (Chubb and Moe 59). However, the authors stated that, in the private sector, however, emphasis is placed on academic rigor, personal growth, or artistic expression (60). Hence, according to Chubb and Moe, the very nature of public education—demanding that their employees, namely teachers and administration, meet the needs of the masses, follow regulations, and document tasks, impair their ability to successfully educate its population of children.

The question that Henig (1994) raised in his research is whether democratic institutions that run public schools are more effective in solving the problems associated with public education or whether the private market is the key to success. Henig stated, “School-choice proposals would shift the focus of educational decision making from the government arena—in which elected officials, public bureaucracies, and organized interest groups are central players—to a market-based arena, in which the personal preferences of children and their families presumably will have a more prominent place. To the familiar claim that market forces are *more efficient modes* for allocating scarce resources is added the claim that they are *more responsive* to the felt needs and desires of the average citizen” (5). Henig added that, strangely enough, people who hold the view that private markets are more efficient than the public arena also state that markets are the more democratic approach (5).

However, Henig concluded that privatization is the wrong solution to public education’s problems. Henig said, “market-oriented proposals favored by the ‘restructures’ (those in favor of

privatization) are unlikely to work as projected and more likely than not to make things considerably worse” (5). Henig stated that the reason that the privatization remedy is not a viable option to public education problems is that it is based on faulty notions of the problems associated with public education as well as faulty assumptions about results of privatization. Henig stated, “By selectively retelling the history of education policy, they (advocates of market-based approaches to educational restructuring) have reinforced prejudices about governmental ineptitude, benign markets, and intimate communities” (11). He continued that restructuring education has been viewed by proponents as “low risk with predictable results” (11). He further stated that performance of schools being judged only by the schools’ appeal to the education consumer, neglects the under-mobilized, discounts future generations, and disregards the fact that schools have the responsibility of shaping interests as well as responding to them (11).

Not only did Henig find that privatization is the wrong solution to education problems, but he further asserted that the diagnosis of the extent of the problems associated with public education is inaccurate (5). Henig emphasized that labeling the education problem as a “crisis” should be viewed as extreme and with caution, because with that comes the assertion that “incremental change will not suffice,” based on the assumption that the institutions and processes have failed (31). Even though U.S. public education has experienced problems, the scope of those problems may have been exaggerated. He disputed the urgency of *A Nation at Risk* by stating that Paul Peterson noted that almost every decade, there seems to be a report of crisis: “In the 1920s it was inefficiency, in the 1930s fiscal problems, in the 1950s Russia’s scientific challenge, in the 1960s racial segregation and excessive bureaucratization. The frequency with which crises have been identified in America education suggests that caution be exercised in characterizing educational difficulties, so that the rhetoric used does not automatically escalate

problems into something more” (26). Henig further stated that critics cite declining test scores, poor performance in international competitions and public dissatisfaction as measures of problems associated with public schools. However, Henig noted that a higher pool of students took the SAT in the 1990s, the time when that assessment was the standard measure of academic performance, and especially true for minority students, a group which rose by 13 percent from 1972 to 1991; with more students testing, scores tend to fall, exacerbated by the tendency of lower scores associated with underprivileged minority groups. He also noted that the white average SAT scores also fell by 10 points since 1976. However, he explained that verbal scores have stabilized and math scores improved after 1984 (34). Furthermore, high school standardized test scores as measured by the National Assessment Educational Progress also fell from 1969 to 1977, with 13 percent of 17 year olds considered functionally illiterate, representing three times the number for minorities (34). But, those scores have modestly improved in the late 1980s, Henig noted (36). Internationally, Henig quoted the Second International Mathematics Study, which compared American eighth and 12th graders to students from 20 other countries. The study concluded that Americans were at the bottom 25 percent in geometry, but competitive in computational and other basic math, and advanced in algebra achievement (29). However, in science in 1992, U.S. nine-year-olds performed well on the international science exam (Henig 39). In terms of public dissatisfaction, the public has shown concern in letters to editors, refusal to provide funds, leaving public schools for private schools and answers on surveys. Yet, when asked specifically about schools in their communities, 42 percent of parents gave schools an “A” or “B,” compared to 21 percent giving schools an “A” or “B” in the nation (Henig 42).

Henig argued against the market metaphor as an appropriate model for U.S. education because of the importance of equalizing opportunity. In that metaphor, “goods and services are provided most efficiently and at the highest quality in a market setting, where consumers can compare prices and quality and make informed decisions about how best to allocate the money they have available to spend” (57). Yet, Henig stated that market forces and consumer choice in education have been associated with economic advantage and racial discrimination (58). Such economic advantage and racial discrimination has been discussed previously by the way most public K-12 public education is provided in our nation: higher housing prices in wealthier neighborhoods secure better school districts for those families living there; private schools may be accessed more easily by wealthier families; and lower-priced housing is located in neighborhoods that generally have a higher concentration of minority families, due to socio-economic factors, who mostly have access to struggling K-12 public schools.

Further, Henig challenged Milton Friedman’s 1960 charge that public schooling is inherently ineffective (58). Henig said that Friedman contended in the 1960s that public schools operate as a monopoly, because most parents cannot afford private schools or are unable to move to other public jurisdictions. According to Friedman’s argument, “the result is that public schools are free to do a poor job without fear of consequences. Even more disturbing, it would be economically irrational for them to expend the energy and resources that would be required to improve the education they provide” (Henig 59). Friedman contended that although the government provides money for education through taxation, it should not provide oversight of schools (61). Henig stated that Friedman’s argument concluded that education acquired from taxes should be used to minimally educate children, but not beyond. An education voucher to educate children most years until graduation would be the correct solution (62). However, Henig

summed up arguments against vouchers based on several constitutional, administrative, and overall societal concerns. Henig stated: “Although numerous objections to vouchers were raised, for the most part they fell into four types. These involved concerns about separation of church and state, inequality, administrative feasibility, and impact on the public schools” (68). Besides vouchers to private and parochial schools, choice also has been manifested in other ways, such as integration through magnet schools and desegregation programs, Henig stated (107). Yet, Henig concluded that no firm evidence existed “as to the superiority of market forces over governmental authority, the process through which educational reforms are adopted is sure to be conflict-ridden and open-ended” (77).

No doubt, public education in the United States has many problems. But, forming adequate solutions to the problems has left policymakers and education stakeholders in a quandary. According to Chubb and Moe (1990), the very nature of public education, a bureaucratic machine riddled with mandates, has jeopardized the service of providing quality education. Their solution, privatization, or putting education in the hands of the private market, is best. On the other hand, Henig (1994) stated that the privatization solution is extreme, because it exaggerates the problems of public education, leads to discrimination, and ignores the fact that public schools shape public interests as well as responds to them. Furthermore, Henig has asserted that he is not sure whether privatizing education will yield predictable results as other societal factors should be considered.

## **Summary**

There has been a movement toward more state and federal intervention in local schools to make them effective since the late 1980s, following the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, a federal study that cited poor performance of our nation’s schools. That movement eventually was

transformed from education dialogue and reform efforts geared toward excellence in education into a standards-based reform paradigm to achieve educational excellence. The standards-based reform paradigm was developed from 1989 until 1992 (Rhodes 2012, 70). As the standards movement progressed, another more conservative and controversial element arose—private school choice at the center of improving schools (Rhodes 2012, 91). Although the standards movement with school choice at its core, centered on one goal—improving the nation’s schools—the movements culminated with the federal 2002 legislation, NCLB, which eventually became the focus of much criticism and failed to improve substantially our nation’s public schools, and, later, RTTT, which passed in 2009, whose results also did not substantially aid failing public schools.

The trends that have developed in education for more than 30 years have created major disputes in the academic literature about what effectiveness means and how we can get there. For example, Chubb and Moe (1990) argued that choice must be the wave of the future of public education in the United States because the market-based approach weeds out unsuccessful schools. Also, they argued that all schools need the autonomy enjoyed by private schools, which have been free from federal, state and local control, and, thereby, have the ability to direct educational programs toward their targeted market, i.e., the families that choose their schools. The basic point that Henig (1994) is making is that empirically-based research must be balanced with an element of social analysis before conclusions are reached.

Henig’s argument, considering social analysis as an important factor for developing education policy, has more merit than that of Chubb and Moe, who treat their solution, privatization, to the problems in education with a one-size-fits-all approach. In other words,

Chubb and Moe's solution, taking public schools out of the public realm and putting them in the private realm, or administering one solution, will solve all problems.

Following that line of analysis led to the 2002 federal policy, NCLB, which passed under President George W. Bush's administration, supported standards-based education reform as demonstrated by states developing assessments and requiring students to take them at certain grade levels, then using scores as a means to measure and diagnose the effectiveness of schools with the threat of losing federal funding for underachieving schools. The federal approach to attempt to achieve excellence in K-12 public education, thereby, fit all of public school children in one box of measure without taking into consideration societal factors, such as socioeconomic levels, background, or experiences. As we will see in chapter three, employing such a simplified approach to education policy threatened school accreditation for struggling schools. Although the federal government attempted to achieve excellence within the K-12 public education system with the passage of NCLB, instead, some scholars say the effect of NCLB was that federal government challenged the states by issuing an unfunded mandate and further exasperated the problems of the K-12 public education system.



### **Chapter Three: No Child Left Behind**

As shown in chapter two, scholars disagree on the validity of the study, *A Nation at Risk*, published in 1983. However, the end result of that study is that it moved the federal government into a more direct role in K-12 public education in our nation. In fact, the study laid the foundation for dialogue, organization, and reform centering on how to achieve excellence in education, culminating the legislation No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2002 as the solution to the K-12 public education problem.

This chapter will center on answering the question: What did the authors of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) think they were doing? In other words, what were the authors' goals or intentions when developing NCLB? Then the chapter discussed the passage of NCLB and policy analysis of the passage of NCLB. Next, the chapter explored the success rate of NCLB. Finally, the chapter examined support and criticism of NCLB.

#### **The Goals of No Child Left Behind**

The authors of NCLB attempted to get the states to do what it wanted, i.e., improving nationwide schools' performance based on the measure of standards and accountability, by issuing consequences in the form of restricted funding to states that underperformed according to guidelines set by NCLB. The authors clearly thought that their aggressive mandate would meet their main goal: improve the nation's test scores, and, thereby, produce an environment of excellence in education that would spur the United States into becoming a worldwide leader in education quality.

The authors of NCLB perceived the problem of K-12 public education to be the high achievement gap between White children and African American, Latino, and poor children. Indeed, research showed that at the time of the passage of NCLB, African American students

were reading and performing math in 12<sup>th</sup> grade at the same success rate that White children were performing in 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Lawmakers considered this to be unacceptable, a violation of equal opportunity, and a threat to U.S. future competitiveness (Hess and Petrilli, 2004, 15). The explanation for the problem centered on lack of resources in needy schools, the effects of poverty, a dysfunctional school culture and a lax atmosphere of governance and incentives. Lawmakers were split on whether to address funding, but a consensus of agreement among Democrats and Republicans developed in the 1990s that poverty and incentives were areas that should be addressed. “Both Democrats and Republicans vehemently rejected the notion that poverty, culture or family background constituted legitimate explanations for mediocre student performance” (Hess and Petrilli 2004, 16).

A brief analysis of NCLB shows that many scholars have concluded that the federal legislation is an unfunded mandate, requiring states to set and meet annual measurable objectives or risk serious consequences. According to the legislation, each state must develop challenging academic standards, a single statewide accountability system for all of its schools that ensures all schools make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), and use sanctions and rewards to hold its schools accountable for achieving AYP (NCLB, 1444-1446). Furthermore, the law specified a timeline, marking the end of the 2001-2002 school year, and continuing 12 years, or until 2014, all students “will meet or exceed the State’s proficient level of academic achievement on the State assessments” (NCLB , 1448). Finally, the law warned that if states fail to meet deadlines established by the Improving America’s School Act (IASA) of 1994 and requirements enacted in 2001, then the secretary of education “may withhold funds for State administration” until the state fulfills the requirements as determined by the secretary of education (NCLB, 1457). In

other words, states would lose vital federal funds, if they did not meet accountability measures for all children receiving public education.

Clearly, the authors of NCLB thought they were designing legislation to meet their main goal: improving the nation's schools based on the measure of standards and accountability. As a secondary goal, the authors of NCLB knew they would change the federal government's role in education by pushing the federal government into the position as the key leader in education policy development and implementation. Rather than the federal government playing a passive role in education policy by simply encouraging the states to identify troubled schools and assisting them with providing funding to help those schools as presented in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), under NCLB, the federal government required states to develop standards and accountability measures and it issued consequences for states with failing schools, thereby, taking a more aggressive role. The federal government, however, allowed some degree of choice by supporting states' decisions to close failing schools.

The NCLB legislation, called a landmark bill signed into law on Jan. 8, 2002, by President George W. Bush, was the most ambitious overhaul of ESEA to date. It allowed the president to deliver a major campaign promise in his first year of presidency after making education his centerpiece during his 2000 campaign. "He (President George W. Bush) called for states to design and administer annual tests to measure student performance as a condition for receiving federal education money. Schools that repeatedly fell short of state-set standards would be subject to sanctions, such as being forced to divert a share of their federal funds to 'vouchers' to pay for private-schooling or tutoring for needy children. ...The six-year bill authorized \$26.3 billion for assistance to elementary and secondary schools in fiscal 2002, an increase of \$8 billion over fiscal 2001" (Congressional Quarterly Inc. 2001).

However, NCLB demanded outcomes in the form of student achievement, did little to assist with that achievement, and affected schools with high numbers of minority and poor children more adversely by administering sanctions when those schools did not reach their achievement goals. Therefore, rather than achieving their main goal and assisting children from disadvantaged backgrounds by closing the achievement gap, NCLB actually accomplished the opposite, and hurt minority students in low achieving schools.

### **The Passage of No Child Left Behind**

Robertson (2012) argued that the impact of “federalism—the division of government authority between the national government and the states—has shaped our nation because it has influenced all the important political battles in American history” (1). Robertson further argued education policy as evident by the passage of NCLB in 2002 as well as many other areas of public policy, including policy relating to poverty, health and the environment, were addressed in ways during the 1990s and early 2000s resulting from a conservative governance during the 1980s that replaced liberalism of the 1970s. The conservative wave set forth by President Ronald Reagan, first elected in 1981, endorsed federalism, but used both centralization and decentralization to carry out its initiatives (148).

### **State Initiatives that led to No Child Left Behind**

According to Robertson (2012), the conservative dominance encouraged a “resurgence of state policy leadership and policy innovation” (148). Some state experiments during the early 1980s consisted of the use of vouchers, or government certificates for education, to pay for public or private schools of the parents’ choice (148). Other plans to increase performance and accountability included instituting pre-kindergarten programs in the 1970s, as noted in Minnesota and Missouri, and the ability to send students to schools in neighboring districts in Minnesota in 1987 (159). In 1991, Minnesota also experimented with charter schools (159). The

state experimental methods continued with Presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush, in the 1990s and early 2000s, who “sometimes used ‘waivers’ to encourage state experiments that would produce outcomes they favored. These state innovations allowed both liberals and conservatives to advance their goals, and in turn allowed state interests to influence major changes in Federal policy” (148). Those state experiments eventually influenced the passage of NCLB in 2002.

Starting in the mid to late 1980s, performance standards for schools became a part of school reform, following after the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, which “recommended new school curriculum standards, performance benchmarks, and accountability requirements” (Robertson 2012, 159). Following that publication, Robertson (2012) stated the following: “The National Governors Association (NGA) made education a top priority, pressing for clearer state-level goals and assessments” (159-160). Thus, a state-led reform effort for public K-12 education had begun.

### **Development of President George W. Bush Administration’s Proposals**

With a state-led reform effort in place, during the early 1990s, President George H.W. Bush, jumped on board to add momentum to the environment of education reform by announcing Goals 2000. Robertson stated:

The NGA endorsed the goals and added more. Democratic governors in Colorado and Oregon embraced the NGA standards, giving performance standards more credibility among liberals. By 2000, nearly all the states had established standards for English, mathematics, science, and social studies, assessed performance in eighth grade, and reported on district level achievement. Governor George W. Bush, for example, had implemented standards and assessment in Texas.

These state innovations laid the foundation for No Child Left Behind. Bush, now president, proposed NCLB and won the support of liberal Senator Edward Kennedy (D-MA). To continue to receive Federal funding, states had to conduct annual assessments in mathematics and reading, to measure the yearly progress of students, and to take steps to close the racial achievement gap. States, not the Federal government, set the standards and the tests. Schools that did not

meet state standards would continue to receive assistance, but after four years they would be subject to extensive restructuring. NCLB also required states to provide teacher certification standards and more choice options for parents. States were authorized to use funds for private, even for-profit entities (160).

Although the states, with their innovations centering on standards and accountability, created the environment for the passage of NCLB, the foundation for that law had been laid by the federal report, *A Nation at Risk*, which called for standards and accountability as a means to improve the nation's public schools. By establishing and implementing standards and accountability within their borders, the states thought they were helping to eradicate any perception of a lax education environment. However, the states were unaware that the federal government would latch on to their reform efforts and pass NCLB, legislation in which the federal government would mandate an improvement in public K-12 education as demonstrated by standards and accountability or risk losing federal funding.

#### **Congressional Hearings, Committee reports, Changes, and Votes**

Although, for three years, Congress debated how far the federal government should influence education before the passage of the bill that eventually became the NCLB legislation in 2002, the end result was its success. The main spearheads of the bill were Reps. John A. Boehner, R-Ohio, and George Miller, D-Calif, as well as Sens. Edward M. Kennedy, D-Mass., and Judd Gregg, R-N.H. (Congressional Quarterly, 2001). President George W. Bush had made education “the centerpiece of his 2000 presidential campaign and a top legislative priority of his new administration. ...By mid-June (2001) both (the U.S. House of Representatives and U.S. Senate) had passed versions of the ESEA reauthorization that required annual testing in reading and math in third through eighth grades, with rewards for the best schools and penalties for the worst.” Both (versions of the bill) tied progress to federal aid, and both turned GOP proposals for

open-ended block grants into pilot programs. Neither bill allowed for private-school vouchers—a proposal Bush abandoned after it became clear it could not win in either chamber”

(Congressional Quarterly, 2001). The two versions of the bills were not reconciled over the summer of 2001, and with the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, the completion of the bill seemed unlikely. However, leaders Boehner, Miller, Kennedy and Gregg, who were the chairmen and ranking member of each chambers’ education committees respectively, worked on differences in the two bills, whose final version was passed by the House on Dec. 13, 2001, and the Senate on Dec. 18, 2001 (Congressional Quarterly, 2001). Here is a timeline of both versions of the bill:

#### **U.S. House of Representatives**

**-May 9, 2001- The House Education and Workforce Committee approved bill to reauthorize ESEA by a vote of 41-7.** “For Democrats’ support, Boehner agreed to a significant increase in authorized funding for education, including a doubling of Title I aid to poor schools over five years. Total ESEA funding would grow from \$18 billion to \$22 billion. Title I funding would rise from \$8.6 billion in fiscal 2001 to \$17.2 billion in fiscal 2006” (Congressional Quarterly, 2001). Another change in the bill was that states that got better academic results would not be able to spend federal funds for virtually any educational purpose, but up to 50 percent for other educational purposes, leaving existing programs intact (Congressional Quarterly, 2001).

**-May 23, 2001-The U.S. House of Representatives approved its reauthorization of ESEA by a vote of 384-45.** The bill was in the same basic form as when it left committee, thus keeping the bipartisan support (Congressional Quarterly, 2001).

## **U.S. Senate**

### **-March 8, 2001-The Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions**

**Committee approved bill to reauthorize ESEA by a vote of 20-0.** The bill was crafted while Republicans still had a majority in the Senate, and called for a seven-year reauthorization of ESEA. "...Democrats persuaded Republicans to steer extra federal money to the neediest schools and give states an additional year—four years rather than three—to begin the new tests. The bill included \$400 million to help states develop the new exams" (Congressional Quarterly, 2001).

### **-June 14, 2001-The U.S. Senate approved its bill to authorize ESEA**

**by a vote of 91-8.** "The message is that help is on the way," said Kennedy, who took over as the bill's manager and remained on the Senate floor throughout most of the proceedings to preserve as much of a Democratic stamp as possible" (Congressional Quarterly, 2001). "The bill proposed authorizing \$33 billion for ESEA programs in fiscal 2002, compared with \$22.8 billion in the House bill. ... The Senate agreed to authorize a \$132 billion increase over 10 years to make sure Title I aid to poor schools reached all eligible children. ... The Senate did adopt, by voice vote, an amendment by Gregg and Thomas R. Carper, D-Del, to authorize \$125 million in grants to help communities that allowed children in underperforming schools to attend better public schools" (Congressional Quarterly, 2001).

## **Conference/Final Action**

After five months of work, the House and Senate members of conference agreed to a final version of the bill. The six-year bill authorized \$26.3 billion for assistance to public K-12



schools, totaling \$3.5 billion more than the House proposed, but \$5.4 billion less than the Senate proposed. The bill proposed \$25 billion for Title I programs over five years until fiscal 2006. Members of the conference agreed to require states to “design and administer annual tests within four years or lose a small portion of federal money. ... States had to set a standard test score for ‘proficiency’ and get all children to that level in 12 years. Schools that consistently failed to reach state goals would lose some federal money and much of their autonomy” (Congressional Quarterly, 2001). “The bill made minor changes to formulas for computing grants for all school districts. For instance, states that worked to distribute their own funds more equally throughout the state instead of using property tax-based formulas also would be eligible for targeted aid. ...\$1 billion in fiscal 2002 for targeted grants and \$793 million for education finance incentive grants” was included (Congressional Quarterly, 2001).

### **The Floor Vote**

Congress overwhelmingly supported the passage of NCLB. The U.S. Senate cleared the bill by 87-10 on Dec. 18, and the House of Representatives adopted it by 381-41 on Dec. 11 (Congressional Quarterly, 2001). Republicans supported the law 44-3 in the Senate and 183-33 in the House. Democrats also showed great support as they backed the law 43-6 in the Senate and 198-6 in the House (Hess and Petrilli, 2004), 13).

### **Reaction**

Tom Loveless (2006) stated that the passage of NCLB changed the federal government’s role in education by shifting its policies from “redistributive objectives” by allocating money for “supplies, personnel, curricula and other educational materials” to improve schools in poor communities, as with the practice under ESEA, and later, the 1994 reauthorization of ESEA under IASA, to policies that can be viewed as an incentive to receive federal money if desired outcomes—student achievement—is obtained. If student achievement falls short, as more

common in communities that have a high concentration of minorities and poor children, sanctions are administered, which can adversely affect children in those schools. Loveless stated: “(Under ESEA), the theory was simple: more money produces better education, and high poverty schools need more money ....The theory of NCLB is different. Resources are viewed as incentives. In exchange for federal monies, local educators agree to produce certain outcomes. If they do not produce the promised outcomes, federal funding is cut off ...The sanctions of NCLB—parental choice, supplemental services, reconstitution of schools—are components of the new incentive structure and do not produce new revenue streams. Schools that do not make adequate yearly progress with black, Hispanic, or poor children face the threat of these sanctions” (2).

The passage of NCLB was explored by Patrick J. McGuinn (2006) who traced education policy from the passage of ESEA in the 1960s to the passage of NCLB in 2002. The roots of NCLB, he argued, are in the educational reforms of the mid 1990s, but that NCLB was more comprehensive than any other policy and received support from both political parties. In order to accomplish such a massive goal, McGuinn explained how the development of education policy over three decades and culminating with the passage of NCLB was due to an evolution of an education policy regime.

First, he stated that ESEA laid the groundwork for the development of a policy regime (21). Basically, the law responded to struggling schools by locating them and providing funds, but leaving control on the local and state levels—control that persisted through the 1970s and 1980s. By doing so, a policy paradigm was created, by the federal government offering support of the schools, but not controlling them (22).

But, McGuinn said that after the publication of the 1983 report, *A Nation at Risk*, the old policy paradigm was undermined as a new push for “standards, accountability, and choice began to emerge” (22). In fact, President George H.W. Bush’s 1988 campaign promoted him as the “education president” and, since then, presidents have jumped on the bandwagon and tried to turn campaign promises into legislation, despite opposition, sometimes from their own parties, so they could increase their electoral arena (22). However, McGuinn maintained that the education regime change was subtle as “guardians” of the old regime held on, especially as seen with Republicans who traditionally favor states’ rights. On the other hand, Democrats, showed more enthusiasm for the regime change, but favored federal funding over standards, accountability, and choice (23). In the 1994 midterm elections, Republicans gained control of both chambers of Congress, the first time in 40 years, a victory in which analysts have called an electoral realignment and education played a prominent role in the unification of the Republican campaign message (106).

However, because their views were unpopular, Republicans lost the education issue, but education was considered a priority with amendments passed to Goals 2000: Educate America Act (107-109). Likewise, in the 1996 presidential election, education became a dominant issue with President Bill Clinton seeking a second term by running as a New Democrat, claiming to limit government, but help the disadvantaged. His opponent Robert Dole, ran and lost on the theme, A New Contract, in which he argued that federal government was counterproductive (106). McGuinn stated, “President Clinton and the Democrats had won a decisive victory in the rhetorical war over education by convincing citizens of the need for expanded federal spending and leadership. As a result, in the late 1990s, Republicans dropped their proposals to eliminate

the U.S. Department of Education (DE), and to cut federal education spending, and put forward their own vision for federal educational leadership” (144).

McGuinn explained that the election of President George W. Bush in 2000 was a further step in the evolution of the new policy regime. Because of Republican presidential defeats in the 1990s, Bush opted against running a traditional conservative campaign (151). McGuinn stated that “Bush emphasized his commitment to education by talking about the issue more than any other candidate, by putting forward a detailed education reform plan, and by visiting more than 100 schools in the first 14 months of the campaign” (153). He also pointed to his reforms in Texas.

To reiterate, within the first year of the first term of President George W. Bush’s tenure, Congress passed NCLB in 2001. Frederick M. Hess and Michael J. Petrilli (2004) stated that NCLB thrust K-12 public education into a “new world of federal education leadership” (13). The authors called President George W. Bush a “cheerleader” for NCLB as when the president signed the bill into law on Jan. 8, 2002, he stated, “as of this hour, America's schools will be on a new path of reform, and a new path of results” (13). Indeed, congressional members also overwhelmingly supported the law, as shown above.

With the tremendous congressional support for the passage of NCLB and the signing of the law by President George W. Bush, the new education policy regime, a presidential-backed effort supported by both parties, finally was set in place. The new policy regime had evolved over 30 years, starting with the passage of ESEA, which was dominated by interest-group and congressional actions, according to McGuinn. However, the passage of NCLB was radically different as evident by the level of bipartisan support of the sweeping educational policy and a national accountability framework (194).

## **How No Child Left Behind Became A Law: The Punctuated Equilibrium Theory and Multiple Streams Model**

The goal of this section is to show how NCLB became a law. Specifically, the narration will show that Frank R. Baumgartner's and Bryan D. Jones' (2009) framework centering on the punctuated equilibrium model of policy change is relevant to the political development and passage of NCLB. The model, as other models of policymaking, is based on the principles of incrementalism and negative feedback (9).

First, Baumgartner and Jones (2009) argued that policy is managed by forming new institutions run by power elites, a practice that makes an area of policy appear to be stable as only incremental changes occur. Indeed, from the time of the passage of ESEA in 1965 until the early 1980s, there were new forms of institutions—particularly developed in states' departments of education—in charge of structuring and managing implementation as well as handling some federal incremental changes, creating an illusion of equilibrium run by power elites.

However, second, Baumgartner and Jones argued that long-time institutions and political processes can be rapidly interrupted—action that can be understood with the agenda setting model (4). The agenda setting model actually interrupts what may appear to have been a policy monopoly, “created by iron triangles, policy subsystems and policy networks” (5). Many groups, which previously may not have had an interest in a problem, become interested in order to develop a knowledge base surrounding the problem; some say that interest promotes justice and critics say it harms the political environment by wasting resources (such as time and energy) (8). The disadvantaged group's interpretation of the problem may not be accepted readily and may encounter a fight with the advantaged group's view that promotes the original position (8). The weak may win over the strong (9). Media attention particularly is a necessary part of agenda setting (10). As the media is focused on a problem, incrementalism is undermined as allocation

of attention to a problem is heightened, leading to periodic punctuations that disrupt temporary equilibrium (10). Analyzing the political development of NCLB, we see that the attention brought forth by the 1983 publication of *A Nation At Risk* interrupted the policy monopoly set in place by ESEA; media attention on that report heightened attention to what some experts called an education problem. The attention led to punctuations that disrupted the equilibrium. As a result, subsystems and policy networks began to establish in late 1980s and 1990s, and education moved to the forefront of the agenda in the 1990s. During that time, we see disadvantaged groups converging with advantaged groups, particularly as the 2000 presidential election drew close.

Third, Baumgartner and Jones argue that policy entrepreneurs look for an opportunity to push their initiative to the forefront of the agenda, or make sure it does not arrive (20). Sometimes, the issue has received so much media attention that it becomes too large to be confined to subsystems, and, as a result, political parties may embrace the issue in order to receive an electoral advantage (22). The issue, of course, fits within the framework of the political party—Democrats who favor big government and “the less favored classes” and Republicans who favor less government and the “better off” (22). The education issue received so much media attention that it was embraced by both political parties during the 2000 presidential election. After President George W. Bush was sworn into office in 2001, education policy formation was one of the policies at the forefront of the agenda. After 2002 when President Bush signed NCLB into law, the legislation reached a pinnacle of media attention a few years after adoption, which continued for several years.

John Kingdon’s argument (2011) centering on how issues become issues during the agenda-setting process also is relevant to the adoption of NCLB. Both the governmental agenda

and decision agenda will be explored here as a means to ascertain the relevance of Kingdon's argument centering on coupling of problems and solutions during policymaking streams until they are put on the agenda at the precise moment a window of opportunity is opened.

First, Kingdon stated that problem definitions are important to his analysis. He defined the word agenda in his research to mean "the list of subjects or problems to which government officials, and people outside of government closely associated with those officials, are paying some serious attention at any given time" (3). He stated that the agenda process narrows "conceivable subjects to the set that actually becomes the focus of attention" (3). In describing how the agenda is composed and changed overtime, Kingdon called big agenda items, such as budgetary decisions, as the governmental agenda, and the list of subjects within the governmental agenda as the decision agenda (4). Additionally, Kingdon stated that a set of alternatives related to an agenda item is considered. He described the coupling of problems and solutions as streams, such as the policy stream and political stream, including public mood, pressure group campaigns, election results, partisan or ideological distributions in Congress, and changes of administration. Finally, he stated policy windows are "the opportunities for action on given initiatives, present themselves and stay open for only short periods. If the participants cannot or do not take advantage of these opportunities, they must bide their time until the next opportunity comes along" (166).

In our analysis of NCLB, we see that Kingdon's discussion is relevant. First, we see that education within the governmental agenda centered on a major area on the decision agenda—addressing poverty in education in the 1960s with the passage of ESEA. Using Kingdon's model further, we see that the governmental agenda of education changed over time from the decision agenda item of poverty to the agenda item of equality as seen in the 1970s as depicted by the

important legislation to address equality in education among the masses. Also, using his discussion, we see that as the agenda coupling the problems and solutions as streams, education actors emerging during that time to ensure that their groups were represented in the legislation. Finally, we see a policy window of opportunity opening in 1985, with the publication of *A Nation At Risk* to broaden the education decision agenda to achieving excellence in education, which eventually led the discussion of developing standards as measure of accountability, and, ultimately, the passage of NCLB in 2001 and the signing and implementation of the law in 2002.

### **The Success Rate of No Child Left Behind**

Did NCLB actually accomplished its goals? In other words, this section will analyze the key question: Did NCLB do what its authors thought it was going to do? If it were unsuccessful, what didn't happen? What did happen that they didn't say they expected? The research will show that the legislation failed to accomplish its goals and that many stakeholders and scholars nationwide criticized the legislation as being an unrealistic, unfunded mandate that led to many teachers and administrators unnecessarily losing their jobs.

The Center On Education Policy (CEP), a nonprofit independent organization that has been monitoring Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) data since 2005, reported, although NCLB is legislation geared toward improving the nation's schools, almost half of the states were unable to meet accountability goals as dictated through annual testing reported by AYP targets. According to the CEP, schools that are not making AYP, actually increased over time. The center reported that between 2006 and 2011, the national percentage of schools not making AYP increased from 29 percent to 48 percent, an all-time high (5). CEP issued the following report five years ago:

- An estimated 48% of the nation's public schools did not make AYP in 2011. This marks an increase from 39% in 2010 and is the highest percentage since NCLB took effect.



- In 24 states and the District of Columbia, at least half of the public schools did not make AYP in 2011. In a majority of the states (43 and D.C.), at least one-fourth of the schools did not make AYP.
- The percentage of public schools not making AYP in 2011 varied greatly by state, from about 11% in Wisconsin to about 89% in Florida.

The data, which are based on standards and performance levels increasing each year with every state having a different bar, clearly show the failings of NCLB.

Other data show no real improvement in students' test scores after the implementation of NCLB until 2009. Neal McCluskey and Andrew Coulson (2007) also concluded that there have been no real positive change in test scores during the early 2000s that could be attributed to NCLB. The authors stated that although several lawmakers and bureaucrats said in 2005 and 2006, the law was successful, analysis of data show otherwise. In July 2005 the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) released the report, *Trends in Academic Progress*. John Boehner (R-OH), then-chairman of the House committee on Education and the Workforce, said that academic achievement was on the increase. Former U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spelling said that reading and math scores were increasing and that the nation was closing the achievement gap in the nation's public schools (2). In reality, however, McCluskey and Coulson said NCLB, which became law in 2002, had no impact on fourth-grade reading and scores, which did not change at all between 2002 and 2005, according to data (3). They added that eighth-grade reading scores actually fell during the same period of time. Also, they pointed out that although fourth-grade and eighth-grade math scores rose between 2003 and 2005, the period that could be attributed to NCLB, the rate of increase after the passage of the law in 2002 actually slowed. In other words, they said that data show there was more growth in those scores between 2000 and 2003. The authors stated: "At least according to NAEP scores since NCLB's passage, it seems that the law has achieved nothing of consequence" (3).

Summarizing the NAEP data, Diane Ravitch (2009) stated that the fourth-grade reading gains from 2003 until 2007, after the implementation of NCLB were small, three points, but those gains were exactly the same gains from 1998 until 2003. She further stated that fourth graders in the bottom 10<sup>th</sup> percentile had a five-point gain in scores after NCLB, but that did not compare to their 10-point gain from 2000 until 2002, before the law was effective. She continued that eight-grade reading scores had no gains from 1998 until 2007, before and after NCLB. She also stated that gains in mathematics actually were better before the implementation of NCLB. Here is Ravitch's summary of the mathematics scores: From 2000 to 2003, fourth grade students gained nine points in mathematics, prior to NCLB, but from 2003 until 2007, after NCLB, fourth graders only gained five points. From 2000 until 2003, before NCLB, for fourth-grade students in the lowest decile, there was a 13-point gain, but fourth graders saw a gain of only five points from 2003 to 2007. In eighth-grade mathematics, gains also slowed after the passage of NCLB. Eighth graders saw a five-point gain from 2000 to 2003, before NCLB, but only a three-point gain from 2003 to 2007.

Not only did student test scores remain stagnant or fall after the implementation of NCLB in 2002, underachieving schools faced consequences in the form of replacing school staff members and replacing the principle. The DE released in 2009 an update on its findings on Title I implementation, which is required under the NCLB law. According to the results, in 2006–07, 4 percent of Title I schools in their first year of being identified for improvement reported that they replaced staff members relevant to school's low performance and 13 percent reported that they replaced the principal. That same year, 11 percent of Title I schools in their second year of being identified for improvement reported that they replaced staff members relevant to the school's low performance, while 24 percent reported they replaced the principal. Also, that year,

21 percent of schools in corrective action reported that they replaced staff members relevant to the school's low performance, and 29 percent reported they replaced the principal. Finally, that year, 30 percent of Title I schools in restructuring reported that they replaced staff members relevant to the school's low performance, while 40 percent reported that they replaced the principal (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). Clearly, jobs in teaching and administration in K-12 public education were affected by NCLB. Unfortunately, as test scores decreased or remained stagnant after the implementation of NCLB (as the previous discussion of test score data showed), dire consequences for professionals in public education, in the form of losing their jobs, resulted. In other words, the ineffectiveness of NCLB created an atmosphere of instability and havoc for education professionals, without helping the students.

### **Public Opposition to and Support of No Child Left Behind**

Within a few years after the implementation of NCLB, research showed that public support of and opposition to NCLB has produced peculiar demographics. Indeed, Loveless (2006) research showed that demographic data from a 2005 national poll revealed that support of and opposition to NCLB showed politically polarized opinions. For example, Loveless stated that although the law was passed with bipartisan support, within a few years after implementation, criticism was divided among party lines, places of residence, race, and income earnings. Loveless stated that the poll, conducted by the Education Testing Service (ETS) and analyzed by Peter Hart and Associates, showed that more Democrats were against NCLB, while more Republicans and Independents supported it. Also, suburban and urban residents were less likely to support the law than rural residents. In a surprising finding, the results on race and income deviated from party affiliation. Whites were more likely to oppose the law than Blacks and Hispanics, and people who made over \$75,000 a year were more likely to oppose the law

than people who made under \$75,000 a year. The race and income results are surprising as Republicans, who supported the law, generally tend to be White and earn higher incomes, but results indicated that Whites and people earning higher incomes opposed the law. Furthermore, Democrats, who were against the law, generally tend to be Black and Hispanic and earn lower incomes, but results showed that Blacks and Hispanics and people with lower incomes supported the law (6-7).

Other polls showed that support of the law varied according to sections of the law and how the questions were worded. Loveless stated: “A 2004 poll by Americans for Better Education asked if the federal government should be able to hold states and local schools accountable to make sure student performance is improving, with results showing 71% said that it should and 25% said it should not. But support for the idea begins to drop when the question is worded differently, especially if the meaning of accountability is spelled out. In the 2005 Kappan Poll, for example, 68% say a single test cannot provide a fair picture of student achievement” (7).

Loveless (2006) further showed in his research that states varied in their support of NCLB. He stated: “States that tend to support NCLB are (Republican) states in presidential elections, score in the very bottom or top quartiles of National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), serve student populations that are more than 21.1% African-American or less than 13.6% Hispanic, exhibit narrower than average black-white test score gaps, receive more than 8.3% of K-12 revenue from the federal government, and are located in the South. States that are opposed tend to be (Democratic) states in presidential elections, fall in the middle quartiles of NAEP scores, have relatively small African-American or relatively large Hispanic populations, exhibit larger than average black-white test score gaps, receive less than 8.3% of K-12 revenue

from federal sources, and are located in the East, Midwest, or Western regions of the country” (22). Those results coincide with the results of the individual poll conducted by ETS mentioned above.

Loveless correctly concluded that the peculiar politics of NCLB center on the formation of a political coalition and the dismantling of that coalition. He said the law was guided through Congress by conservatives who promoted testing, accountability, and outcomes and liberals who liked the idea that big government was dedicated to equality in education and opportunity in education. But, that coalition soon ended with both conservatives and liberals in opposition to the law.

### **Organized and Scholarly Opposition to No Child Left Behind**

The states particularly voiced opposition to NCLB. The National Conference of State Legislatures Task Force on No Child Left Behind Final Report issued a statement criticizing NCLB, stating that the federal government rolled many state reforms into a single federal policy, and, by doing so, expanded federal role in K-12 public education administration. The task force also stated the federal government undermined the 10<sup>th</sup> amendment by pitting that amendment against the spending clause of Article I, allowing the federal government to attach conditions to grants provided to states. The task force cautioned that the U.S. Supreme Court has set constraints on the manner in which Congress can exercise its spending liberties in *South Dakota vs. Dole* and other decisions. “The Task Force is concerned that NCLB fails to meet two of the *South Dakota vs. Dole* tests: its grant conditions are not unambiguous and it uses coercion and not financial inducement to attain state participation” (2005).

The task force also questioned methodology of data collection and measurement. The data collection and measurement is accomplished through the use of AYP that relies on “year-to-

year gains in standardized test scores as the primary measure of school quality and progress” (Mathis, 2006). The state legislatures’ task force report further stated, “NCLB mandates that schools be evaluated by comparing successive groups of students against a static, arbitrary standard, not by tracking the progress of the same group of students over time. The AYP requirements constitute a “static” evaluation model because they hold all schools, regardless of demographic factors and prior achievement levels, to the same benchmark. Standardized tests are far from perfect measures of student achievement and function better in combination with other measures, such as student portfolios. The adequate yearly progress provisions are overly prescriptive and rigid” (2005). The task force’s opposition to NCLB is valid as academic literature support concerns about the legislation.

Indeed, the shortcomings of NCLB are documented in the literature. For example, some former bureaucrats who have worked in federal education policy development are not convinced that NCLB was the cure for America’s schools. Hess and Petrilli (2004) discussed that Lawrence Uzzel, a former staff member of the federal education department, attacked NCLB for “virtually guaranteeing massive evasion of its own intent, ordering state education agencies to do things that they mostly don’t want to do” (3). With such large congressional support for NCLB in 2001, it is surprising that by the presidential election in 2004, the NCLB political coalition had dissipated and much criticism had filled the political air. In fact, Democratic Presidential Candidate John Kerry accused President George W. Bush as withholding necessary funding for the law. Kerry stated that the president’s administration had left “funding for NCLB \$27 billion short of the promised levels, literally leaving millions of children behind” (Hess and Petrilli, 2004, 13).

Also, teachers and administrators also criticized the law. In 2005, Nel Noddings, president of the National Academy of Education and a faculty member at Columbia University's Teachers College, attacked NCLB. She stated:

The No Child Left Behind Act is a bad law, and a bad law is not made better by fully funding it. The law employs a view of motivation that many of us in education find objectionable. As educators, we would not use threats, punishments, and pernicious comparisons to 'motivate' our students. But that is how the No Child Left Behind law treats the school establishment. The high-stakes testing associated with the law seems to be demoralizing teachers, students, and administrators. ... We should not waste more valuable resources—human and monetary—tinkering with this law. It is a bad law and should be repealed (Hess and Petrilli, 2004, 19).

Reginia R. Umpstead (2008) addressed the unfunded mandate debate centered on NCLB and concluded that, although NCLB was not an unfunded mandate as it did not violate the conditional spending power of Article 1 Section 8 Clause 1 of the U.S. Constitution, “NCLB represents the most far-reaching manifestation of this powerful federal presence in an area that has, by both law and tradition been reserved to the states” (227).

Criticism of NCLB has spanned other sectors of society. John R. Munich and Rocco E. Testani (2005) reported that federal funding is inadequate for implementation of NCLB, and resulted in the National Education Association (NEA) suing the Department of Education in 2005. According to Munich and Testani, the case, *School District of the City of Pontiac et al. v. Spellings*, was the first major legal challenge to the education law to be filed in federal court. In the case, nine districts in three states, Michigan, Ohio, and Kentucky, the NEA, and several of its affiliates filed suit against the DOE.

The lawsuit named then DE secretary, Margaret Spellings, as the defendant, on the grounds that federal funding was not provided to meet the requirements of the act, and, as a result, school districts were released from being required to follow the law. Munich and Testani

stated that the NEA had a case based on weak factors, including the following: (1) states could simply refuse federal funding, and, thereby be exempt from the requirements of the act; (2) states did not show a real dispute, such as refusal of the federal government for a waiver from requirements of the act; (3) states did not show that they are injured by the law (stigmatizing teachers was a stretch in this area); and (4) states would be hard pressed to prove that they incurred additional expenses for student assessment and accountability as before NCLB was signed into law, the trend toward assessment and accountability was already in place.

However, although the case was dismissed on the district level, a panel of the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals reversed the district court's decision in 2008 on the grounds that federal notice to states and school districts regarding the fact that compliance to the law may require additional funds was not provided by the federal government. In a letter written by Spellings, she disagreed with the decision. She stated:

“In concluding that there was not clear notice to states and school districts, the court relied on its interpretation of the so-called "unfunded mandates provision" in section 9527(a) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), as amended by NCLB.

“I strongly disagree with the Sixth Circuit's decision and am exploring all legal remedies to overturn the decision. NCLB is not an unfunded mandate but rather a compact between a state and the federal government that asks the state and its school districts, in exchange for receiving substantial federal dollars, to demonstrate results. This investment in our children is creating opportunities for every child in America to have access to a high quality education” (U.S. Department of Education, 2008).

The United States Court of Appeals for the Sixth District Court agreed with Spellings and reversed the district court's decision in 2009 (United States Court of Appeal for the Sixth Circuit, 2009). Although the DE secured a victory in the end, the conflict showed the lack of support for NCLB by a prominent teachers' union.



Pedro A. Noguera (2004) criticized NCLB as a quick fix to the nation's education woes. He stated that although politicians, journalists, corporate leaders and other reformers in the field of education supported NCLB as the "medicine" that the field needed, they neglected to realize that many students would be the losers in the end. For example, he cited thousands of students in Massachusetts, Texas, Florida and California, who were facing denial of high school diplomas in what many called a grave injustice to students who live in impoverished districts. Rather than returning to the past when there were no standards, he stated that states should do more to assist struggling schools and accountability standards should be broadened to include more than just test scores.

Michele McNeil (2010) stated that "seven leading civil rights groups, including the NAACP and the National Urban League, called on then U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan to dismantle core pieces of his education agenda," citing school choice and school dismantling as major reasons (1). The group called its agenda, the Opportunity to Learn campaign, which "is reminiscent of a similar push during the failed national standards movement of the 1990s. In both cases, the emphasis is not just on common standards that students, teachers, and schools should meet, but common inputs—such as money, good teachers, and a college-bound curriculum—that should be provided" (1).

Rather than improving the nation's schools, McCluskey and Coulson (2007) said NCLB actually produced negative unintended consequences. To understand those consequences, the authors stated it is important to understand the politics behind the passage of the law. They stated that the law was passed by Republicans who traditionally are against federal involvement in education to a large extent, but who were attracted to NCLB because it called for "proficiency," but left the establishment of proficiency standards in the hands of the states (6).

Also, it was passed by Democrats, who have strong ties to teachers' unions, school administrators and civil rights groups, all of whom discourage rigorous standards because they do not want to punish schools with high concentrations of minorities who may not be able to meet those standards due to socio-economic concerns. The authors pointed out that those groups of Democrats, however, generally desire federal funding for those minority populations. As a result, the authors asserted that, because of a collision of interests, NCLB was passed with states in control of standards, but with federal funding backing states who meet their standards. The authors, as a result, accused the states of setting as low standards as possible (6). The authors concluded: "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. Moreover, neither federal interventions in general nor NCLB in particular have lived up to the expectations set out for them" (15).

Dorie Turner (2012) reported that NCLB had been up for renewal since 2007 (before the passage of ESSA last year), but, although federal lawmakers agreed the law needed to be changed, they disagreed on how to accomplish that goal. As a result, eight states had been approved for waivers from the law (1). Three years later, Alyson Klein (2015) reported that 42 states and the District of Columbia, holding waivers from certain provisions of NCLB, would like to renew the flexibility for up to four more years.

Ravitch (2009) concluded: "It is time to pull the plug on No Child Left Behind. It has had adequate time to prove itself. It has failed. After seven years of trying, there is no reason to believe that the results of NCLB will get dramatically better. Now is the time for fundamental rethinking of the federal role in education."

## Summary

Research clearly shows the flaws and shortcomings of NCLB. The research has shown that what actually happened was that local administrators and teachers, whose voice was minimized during the development process, felt trapped as they tried to meet the unrealistic, unfunded mandate that NCLB unveiled. Clearly, the authors of NCLB did not expect the high number of firings of teachers and administrators in Title I schools. The legislation had been up for renewal from 2007, but legislators were in disagreement on how to fix the problem, until, finally, they reached agreement in 2015 with the passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

President Obama signed into law ESSA in 2015. The law, while requiring state assessments, accountability measures and instruments, and AYP attainment, it does provide funding to help states meet desired goals. (“Every Student Succeeds Act” [www.ed.gov/ESSA](http://www.ed.gov/ESSA)). The effectiveness of that piece of legislation is yet to be determined as it is too early. But, the groundwork leading to the passage of ESSA had been set after the passage of NCLB when the research shows criticism of NCLB and a departure from it with the passage of RTTT in 2009. Chapter four will examine the origin creation, groundwork, goals, passage, and policy analysis of RTTT.

## **Chapter Four: Race To The Top**

President Barack Obama, acutely aware of the negative educational climate created by No Child Left Behind (NCLB), promptly acted on a campaign promise in January 2009 by attempting to help state departments of education financially create a climate of educational excellence. His solution was termed Race to the Top (RTTT). As a grants reward program, RTTT provided a creative avenue for states to gain federal educational funding to meet the criteria set by NCLB, which by 2009, seemed like an unfunded mandate for student performance. Although RTTT only proposed to help schools meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) goals set by NCLB at only a slightly greater rate, it did offer states an opportunity to gain additional resources to strive toward meeting desired policy goals directed toward achieving excellence in education. This chapter answers the question: What did the authors of RTTT think they were doing? The chapter outlines the origin, creation, groundwork and goals of RTTT. Furthermore, the chapter reviews the program and offers a comparison of a state application that won a RTTT grant and a state application that was not approved for a grant. Finally, the chapter summarizes the passage and policy analysis of the legislation.

### **The Origin, Creation, Groundwork and Goals of Race To The Top**

Clearly, the authors of RTTT thought they were offering financial relief from the lack of funding needed to meet educational outcomes set forth in NCLB, which had left many state departments of education weary as they tried to meet the guidelines of the legislation without additional financial resources. Rather than issuing a mandate, RTTT substantially modified the legislation by offering a voluntary grants reward program without any imposition of penalty to states. Under RTTT guidelines, the states were given an option to choose to be a part of the grants reward program by submitting a plan that met federal guidelines in place to help create an

environment for education improvement, and that won over other states' applications. States competing for a RTTT grant particularly had to show improvement in the following areas: school assessments; efforts to recruit, prepare and develop effective teachers and principals; data systems to measure student growth and success; and turn-around of their lowest-achieving schools ("Race to the Top Program Executive Summary," 2009, U.S. Department of Education, 2).

To understand the origin, creation and groundwork of RTTT, it is important to answer the following question: What was the political crisis when RTTT was created? With the election of President Obama in 2008, education policy actors saw an opportunity to push for monetary support to aid states as they attempted to create a climate of educational excellence within their borders. Shortly after being sworn in office in January 2009 in the midst of an economic recession, President Obama signed on Feb. 17, 2009, into legislation the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), which included \$53.6 billion earmarked for the U.S. Department of Education (DE) to assist and improve all levels of our nation's schools. RTTT, a \$4.35 billion grants reward program, was a part of that stimulus package ("American Recovery and Reinvestment Act," 2009, 111<sup>th</sup> U.S. Congress).

ARRA was created to offer economic assistance and promote economic recovery. The historic legislation was "designed to stimulate the economy, support job creation, and invest in critical sectors, including education." The ARRA included a provision for \$4.35 billion for RTTT funds, defined as "a competitive grants program designed to encourage and reward States that are creating the conditions for education innovation and reform". The grants program awarded states for specifically achieving significant improvement in making substantial gains in the following areas: student achievement; closing achievement gaps; improving high school

graduation rates; and ensuring student preparation for success in college and careers (“Race to the Top Program Executive Summary,” 2009, U.S. Department of Education, 2). Clearly, RTTT was created to offer financial assistance to states that developed unique programs to meet desired educational outcomes, and, thereby, departed from NCLB, which offered no financial support to achieve desired outcomes.

President Obama unveiled RTTT to the public in July 2009. The overall goal of the four-year grants program, which ended in 2014, was to improve the nation’s K-12 public schools. According to President Obama’s administration, RTTT’s goal is “to reshape America’s educational system to better engage and prepare our students for success in a competitive 21<sup>st</sup> century economy and workplace. Designed to incentivize excellence, spur reform, and promote the adoption and use of effective policies and practices, the Race to the Top is a comprehensive vision for school reform ...” (“Fact Sheet: The Race to the Top,” 2009, White House,1). An important key to the grants reward program was that states were given a leadership role as they were offered an incentive to improve and reform, rather than being issued a one-size-fits-all unfunded mandate, as in the case of NCLB, which, although that legislation allowed states to develop their own turnaround programs, it also penalized states for falling short of desired outcomes. Quoting the DE, Elaine Weiss (2014) stated that the overall goal of RTTT was that states and districts “will offer models for others to follow and spread the best reform ideas across the states and across the country” (60).

States were given similar latitude to develop their own programs to achieve desired outcomes in RTTT as in the case of NCLB, but, in RTTT, they were given broad categories by which to set their goals in order to obtain points. Weiss (2014) offered the following summary of

categories: “develop teacher (and principal) evaluation systems that rely on measures of student achievement and growth; strengthen teacher preparation programs and improve access to and quality of professional development programs; identify alternative routes to certification to remove barriers to teaching for potentially strong teachers who might be impeded by existing systems or processes; and identify and turnaround lowest performing schools using one of several strategies along the lines of federal school improvement grants, including firing the principal and/or much of the staff, turning the school over to a charter or other outside manager, or closing it altogether (60-61).”

All 50 states and the District of Columbia were eligible to apply and compete for RTTT grants. The DE provided training on writing applications, determined which policies would be awarded, how much states would receive, how many states would receive awards, what amount the awards would be, and oversight for compliance (Howell 2015).

The grants reward program included three phases of competition. Phase 1 and Phase 2 included “specific education policy priorities on which each applicant would be evaluated.” Those policy priorities were included in several scoring categories that were assigned points. The categories and points are following: (1) state success factors, including state’s education agenda, “raising achievement and closing gaps, and advancing standards and assessment,” 125 points; (2) standards and assessments, including “developing common core standards and high-quality assessments,” 70 points; (3) data systems to support instruction, including ‘instituting a longitudinal data systems and using data to improve instruction,”47 points; (4) great teachers and leaders, including “providing a high quality pathway for aspiring teachers and principals, improving teacher and principal effectiveness based on performance, and improving teacher and principal preparation programs,” 138 points; (5) turning around the lowest-achieving schools, 50

points; (6) general, including “successful conditions for high-performing charter schools,” 55 points; and (7) competitive preference priority, including providing “a rigorous course of study in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) subjects,” 15 points (Howell 2015).

For Phase 1, 40 states and the District of Columbia submitted RTTT applications. On March 10, 2010, the DE announced two winners, Tennessee winning \$500 million, which was 10 percent of its yearly state education budget, and Delaware winning \$120 million, or about 5.7 percent of its yearly state budget (Howell 2015).

For Phase 2, 35 states and the District of Columbia submitted RTTT applications. On Aug. 24, 2010, the DE announced that 10 winners were awarded Phase 2 funding. The winners and amounts of funding are following: (1) Florida, \$700 million; (2) New York, \$700 million; (3) Georgia, \$400 million; (4) North Carolina, \$400 million; (5) Ohio, \$400 million; (6) Maryland, \$250 million; (7) Massachusetts, \$250 million; (8) The District of Columbia, \$75 million; (9) Hawaii, \$75 million; and (10) Rhode Island, \$75 million (Howell 2015).

After exhausting the original RTTT funds, for Phase 3, Congress allocated additional funds. Only losing finalists from Phase 2 could participate. Phase 3 grant amounts were significantly smaller than those awarded in the first two phases. On December 23, 2011, the DE announced the following seven winners and grant amounts for Phase 3 winners: (1) Illinois, \$43 million; (2) Pennsylvania, \$41 million; (3) New Jersey, \$38 million; (4) Arizona, \$25 million; (5) Colorado, \$18 million; (6) Kentucky, \$17 million; and (7) Louisiana, \$17 million (Howell 2015).

The substantive work began after states received their grants, including DE monitoring to help ensure that states met goals and timelines. A vital component was that meeting those



objectives was contingent on final disbursement of funds. “States that won Race to the Top grants were subject to a nontrivial monitoring process, complete with annual performance reports, accountability protocols, and site visits. After receiving an award letter, a state could immediately withdraw up to 12.5 percent of its overall award. The remaining balance of funds, however, was available to winning states only after (DE) received and approved a final scope of work from the state’s participating local education agencies. Each winning state’s drawdown of funds, then, depended upon its ability to meet the specific goals and timelines outlined in its scope of work” (Howell 2015).

The adoption of RTTT revealed that the grants reward program had impact, not only on the states that won, but also on those states that were not winners. In the aftermath of the grants reward program, many states nationwide adopted relevant education reform measures that actually fit RTTT criteria. Those reforms include “charter schools, data management, intervention into low performing schools, and use of test scores for school personnel policy.” Other control policies also were tracked, including “increased high school graduation requirements, the establishment of 3rd-grade test-based promotion policies, and tax credits to support private school scholarships” all similar to RTTT policies but were neither mentioned nor rewarded under the program (Howell 2015).

States that completed applications, but did not receive RTTT grants showed lacking elements in their applications as demonstrated by some negative comments from RTTT evaluators. For example, evaluators stated that Missouri’s application lacked a narrative showing commitment, although the state provided a summary table of data showing commitment in the area, “State Success Factors,” within the category, “Articulating States Education Reform Agenda and Local Education Agency’s (LEA’s) Participation.” Missouri’s score for that

category showed a loss of considerable points, 46 out of 65. Also, evaluators stated that Missouri's application lacked in the same area, "State Success Factors," but this time, within the category, "Demonstrate Significant Progress In Raising Achievement and Closing Gaps." The evaluator wrote, "The impact on standards and assessments is not addressed nor were there data clarifying the number of people served by the Learning Center or the number of low performing schools where progress has been made." Evaluators scored Missouri's application low in that area as well, and the state received 15 out of 30 points (U.S. Department of Education, States' Applications for Phase 2).

In contrast, a winning application was strong across nearly all categories. For example, Florida's application received high marks in the area, "State Success Factors," within the category, "Articulating States Education Reform Agenda and Local Education Agency's (LEA's) Participation." Evaluators wrote, "The FL (Florida) application offers a clear and ambitious agenda, tightly organized around the four federal reform areas." Florida's application received 59 out of 65 points in that category. Likewise, in the same category, "State Success Factors," but this time, within the category, "Demonstrate Significant Progress In Raising Achievement and Closing Gaps" evaluators scored Florida particularly high as well, and wrote, "The application provides a concise and convincing table with accompanying text that demonstrates a strong state commitment (including STEM activities) and progress in the past several years across the four reform areas." Florida earned a score of 28 out of 30 points in that category.

RTTT's qualifying criteria and the control policies that have helped reformed state departments of education actually were not created overnight. In fact, the role of markets and interest groups had a profound effect on the origin of RTTT. According to Catherine R. Barnes

(2011) in the article, “RTTT Only Benefits Big Government,” the national standards found in RTTT were developed by the National Governors Association (NGA) and Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). Barnes continued that “the NGA and the CCSSO launched in April 2009 their Common Core Standards Initiative that became the basis of the \$4.35 billion RTT Program.”

Additionally, the origin of RTTT must be reviewed in context of the overall framework of NCLB. As the prevailing federal education policy, NCLB’s requirements still were in place, but the federal department of education issued waivers to states that showed plans to meet criteria set forth in RTTT. In the article, “8 states get waiver from ‘No Child Left Behind,’” the Associated Press (2012) reported a total of 19 states received waivers. The reason for the waivers was to offer states flexibility to develop unique education programs, according to then U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. “These states are getting more flexibility with federal funds and relief from NCLB’s one-size-fits-all mandate in order to develop and implement locally tailored solutions to meet their unique educational challenges,” Duncan said (1). By articulating that states have different local populations of students, and, therefore, different needs to successfully educate their children, Duncan highlighted a major flaw in the NCLB policy, which offered states little flexibility in their plans. By giving states waivers from plans developed under NCLB and greater flexibility to develop new, locally-tailored education programs showed how the federal education department’s goal was to create and promote a new, more flexible education environment under the RTTT program.

To understand the groundwork of RTTT, it is important to describe President Obama’s use of federalism. In an article, “Inflection Point? Federalism and the Obama Administration,” Timothy Conlan and Paul Posner (2011) examined President Barack Obama’s “hybrid model of

federal policy innovation and leadership.” The scholars painted the dire conditions of the economy that President Obama inherited upon the onset of his first term as president, and, as a result, they stated that the president quickly used the federal government’s role to alleviate financial distress, going beyond the normal limits of centralization to reach corporations, states, local schools, among other areas. In describing the state of the nation during late 2008 when President Obama was elected and early 2009 when he was sworn into office, the authors stated:

When Barack Obama was inaugurated on January 20<sup>th</sup>, 2009, the US economy had been in recession for more than a year, the financial system was still teetering near the brink of collapse, and jobs were being lost at an accelerating rate each month. In short, the new president was faced with the worst economic crisis since the 1930s, and the effects on public sector finances were staggering. Federal revenues had declined 18% percent –or \$463 billion-- from FY 2007 to FY 2009, and revenues are not estimated return to FY 2007 levels until 2011. State tax revenues fell an average of 11.8% from fiscal year 2008 to fiscal year 2010, with state income tax revenues collapsing by more than 20% in nearly a dozen states. On the expenditure side, the recession caused spending for safety net programs like Medicaid and unemployment benefits to rise, and such expenditures were reinforced by the \$700 billion Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP) enacted in October 2008. As a result, the federal budget deficit grew to \$459 billion in fiscal year 2008, which ended in September of that year, and the projected deficit for 2009 bequeathed by President George W. Bush to President Obama was estimated in January 2009 to be \$1.2 trillion. In short, President Obama inherited the most challenging fiscal and economic situation of any new president since Franklin D. Roosevelt (4-5).

Because of the “complexity and nuance of the economy” in 2008 and 2009, and because he relied on his “own style and intellect,” President Obama went beyond centralization to develop a comprehensive plan to restore the economy, Conlan and Posner stated. The scholars said, “The scope and reach of initiatives is truly breathtaking, including the largest economic stimulus package since the New Deal, comprehensive health care reform, major financial reform, climate change regulations, and substantial new investments in new energy, health care, and transportation technologies. In short, Obama’s initiatives represent the most ambitious domestic policy agenda since LBJ’s

Great Society. Moreover, like the Great Society's —creative federalism, all rely heavily on state and local governments for effective implementation, and many seek to emulate Johnson's emphasis on accomplishing reform by using federal grant programs to drive innovation and change at the state and local levels" (5).

As shown above RTTT was created to help struggling schools in order to provide financial assistance to improve the performance of K-12 public education nationwide. To reiterate, the overall goal of the grants reward program was to offer an economic incentive for schools to develop new locally, tailored programs to achieve excellence in education throughout our nation's K-12 public schools.

### **The Passage of Race To The Top**

The research shows that RTTT was adopted as a solution for states' departments of education to gain financial strength to help them through the economic recession and assist with the overall objective of NCLB—improving our nation's schools as documented through meeting AYP. NCLB was up for renewal in 2007, but Congress was at a standstill in regards to its improvement. However, a summary of the bill, H.R.648, considered by the 110th Congress, 2007-2008, showed that the climate of NCLB was unfavorable. The bill, called the No Child Left Behind Improvements Act of 2007, was introduced to the U.S. House of Representatives on Jan. 23, 2007, but did not move beyond the House. It called for the following:

No Child Left Behind Improvements Act of 2007 - Amends the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) to alter requirements for adequate yearly progress (AYP) assessments of student groups by: (1) allowing states to vary the number of students sufficient for such an assessment from local educational agency (LEA) to LEA and from school to school; (2) lowering the percentage of students in a failing group who must show improvement from the preceding year for a school to avoid corrective action; (3) changing the method of counting students in more than one group; (4) allowing states to use alternative methods of defining AYP; (5) exempting a higher percentage of students from such assessments; (6) giving states greater flexibility

in the use of alternative assessments for disabled students and those not proficient in English; and (7) allowing multiple assessments of the same student prior to the following school year and measurement of the achievement of students as if they were in their prior grade (H.R. 648, 110<sup>th</sup> U.S. Congress, 2007).

The requirements from the bill clearly show a departure in the one-size-fits-all approach to NCLB. Given that the political climate was unfavorable for NCLB in 2007, the 2008 political campaign offered an opportunity to talk about changes to the law.

Another example of the unfavorable climate produced by NCLB is a summary of the bill, H.R.6239, considered by the 110th Congress, 2007-2008, called NCLB Recess Until Reauthorization Act, which was introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives on June 11, 2008. It also did not move beyond the House. It called for the following:

Amends the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 to suspend, during the 2008-2009 school year, new identifications of schools or local educational agencies as needing: (1) improvement, after they fail to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) toward state academic performance standards for two consecutive years; (2) corrective action, after they fail to make AYP for an additional two years after being identified as needing improvement; or (3) restructuring, after they fail to make AYP after a year of corrective action.

Lifts such suspension on the earlier of the last day of the 2008-2009 school year or the authorization of FY2009 appropriations for title I (Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged) of the Act. (H.R. 6239, 110<sup>th</sup> U.S. Congress, 2008).

Clearly, the U.S. House of Representatives attempted to respond to the public by taking action on measures that would offer relief to NCLB.

### **Race To The Top: The Punctuated Equilibrium Framework of Policy Development and Multiple Streams Model of Policy Development**

Specifically, the narration of the passage of RTTT shows that Frank R. Baumgartner's and Bryan D. Jones' (2009) framework centering the punctuated equilibrium model of policy change is relevant to the political development and passage of RTTT.

First, Baumgartner and Jones argue that new policy is managed by forming new institutions run by power elites, a practice that makes an area of policy appear to be stable as only incremental changes occur. Indeed, from 2002 when NCLB was passed until about 2006 when the deadline for the law's renewal drew near, there were new forms of institutions—particularly developed in states' departments of education—in charge of structuring and managing implementation as well as handling some federal incremental changes, creating an illusion of equilibrium run by power elites.

However, second, Baumgartner and Jones argue that long-time institutions and political processes can be rapidly interrupted—action that can be understood with the agenda setting model (4). The agenda setting model actually interrupts what may appear to have been a policy monopoly, “created by iron triangles, policy subsystems and policy networks” (5). Many groups, which previously may not have had an interest in a problem, become interested for a typical reason—understanding the policies—a reason some say promotes justice to critics who say it harms the environment with problems such as wasting resources (8). The disadvantaged group's interpretation of the problem may not be accepted readily and may encounter a fight with the advantaged group's view that promotes the original position (8). The weak may win over the strong (9). Media attention particularly is a necessary part of agenda setting (10). As the media is focused on a problem, incrementalism is undermined as allocation of attention to a problem is heightened, leading to periodic punctuations that disrupt temporary equilibrium (10). Indeed, as shown by the political development of RTTT, although many of those NCLB established institutions have remained in place until present, starting about 2006, public interest groups, scholars and other stakeholders began pressuring congressional leaders to amend or substantially modify the law, and, thereby, secured media attention. When public officials were

under media pressure to turn their attention to amending or substantially modifying NCLB, interest groups had created an atmosphere ready for political change.

Third, Baumgartner and Jones argue that policy entrepreneurs look for an opportunity to push their initiative to the forefront of the agenda, or make sure it does not arrive (20). Sometimes, the issue has received so much media attention that it becomes too large to be confined to subsystems, and, as a result, political parties may embrace the issue in order to receive an electoral advantage (22). The issue, of course, fits within the framework of the political party—Democrats who favor big government and “the less favored classes” and Republicans who favor less government and the “better off” (22). In our RTTT example, the issue of modifying NCLB had become so large that it became an issue of political parties during the 2008 presidential election. Indeed, the campaign and election of President Obama in 2008 created an opportunity for education policy entrepreneurs to push their initiative, a substantial modification of NCLB, to the forefront of the agenda using the political parties. Our RTTT example shows the 2009 swearing in office of President Obama further solidified the political environment for a policy punctuation as shown by President Obama’s early action—the July 2009 unveiling of RTTT, which, actually was included in that year’s stimulus package, passed in February 2009.

In summary, the research clearly shows that the political development of RTTT can be seen as a classic case embedded in the punctuated equilibrium model of policy development.

The development of the policy also can be framed in the Multiple Streams Model of Policy Development. Indeed, in our analysis of NCLB, we see that John Kingdon’s (2011) discussion is relevant. First, we see that education within the governmental agenda centered on a major area on the decision agenda—developing relief from NCLB



from 2005. Using Kingdon's model further, we see that the governmental agenda of education changed overtime from the decision agenda item substantially modifying the legislation to give quick relief from the grip of the legislation. Also, using his discussion, we see that as the agenda coupling the problems and solutions as streams, education actors emerging during that time to ensure that their groups were represented in the legislation. Finally, we see a policy window of opportunity opening in 2008, with the election of President Obama, and, ultimately, the passage of RTTT within the bounds of ARRA in 2009.

### **Criticism of Race To The Top**

Although RTTT was developed to help financially strapped states' departments of education during the economic recession of 2008 meet education requirements, some scholarly criticism arose during the time of its passage. Grover J. "Russ" Whitehurst (2010) stated in an article of opinion, "Did Congress Authorize Race to the Top?" that the text of the ARRA, Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and the America Competes Act (ACA), does "not authorize, require or suggest" the very specific language found in RTTT. Whitehurst said that the ARRA, ESEA and ACA does not specifically say "that states competing for funds would need to adopt common state standards, create more charter schools, evaluate teachers and principals based on gains in student achievement, emphasize the preparation of students in careers in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, or restructure the lowest 5 percent of their schools. Yet, (within) the grant program the administration designed to implement the provisions of the ARRA, the education department's Race to the Top initiative, included each of these policy priorities, and states had no chance of winning unless their applications were built around them" (*Education Week*).

According to two national daily newspapers, the passage of RTTT received some negative feedback from the start from some interest groups and officials, while others were more neutral.

In the article, “Obama Uses Funding to Pressure Education Establishment for Change,” Michael Shear and Nick Anderson explained potential obstacles to RTTT when President Obama was set to unveil the incentive program. One potential obstacle was whether teachers’ unions, a group that had previously endorsed President Obama, would embrace the incentive program. The authors compared RTTT with NCLB, a law in which President George W. Bush did not consider teachers’ unions during the formation stages. They quoted President Obama who stated, “There are going to be elements within the teachers’ union where they’re just resistant to change, because people inherently are resistant to change. Teachers aren’t any different from any politicians or corporate CEOs. There are going to be certain habits that have been built up that they don’t want to change.” They further quoted President Obama who stated, “What we’re saying here is, if you can’t decide to change these (ineffective) practices, we’re not going to use precious dollars that we want to see creating better results; we’re not going to send those dollars there. And we’re counting on the fact that, ultimately, this is an incentive, this is a challenge for people who do want to change.” The authors also indicated that Republicans were leery of the incentive program. They quoted Rep. John Kline (R-Minn.), the top Republican on the House Education and Labor Committee, who stated: “We just took a big old checkbook with a \$5 billion total behind it and handed it to the secretary (former Department of Education Secretary Arne Duncan) and said, ‘Write a whole bunch of checks. I’m uncomfortable we’re doing that.’” The authors reported that U.S. Department of Education Secretary Margaret Spellings, Duncan’s predecessor, worked with a fraction of that amount of funding (*Washington Post*, July 24, 2009).

Also, in the article, “Dangling \$4.3 Billion, Obama Pushes States to Shift on Education,” Sam Dillion explained that while many educators were in favor of RTTT, others had reservations, especially relating to linking students’ test scores to teachers’ evaluations, a practice that would increase student testing rather than decrease it (*New York Times*, Aug. 16, 2009). In fact, educators represented by two primary teachers’ unions criticized segments of the proposal, but expressed overall satisfaction with the final legislation. According to Nick Anderson, in the article, “Scoring system for school aid; Obama program assigns points to reform efforts in completion for funds,” representatives of both the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association, overall were satisfied with the final legislation, though one representative was unhappy with tying test scores to job evaluations (*The Washington Post*, November 2009). Other criticism stemmed from academia. Dillion also quoted Diane Ravitch, an education historian at New York University, who stated in comments filed with the Department of Education: “The Department of Education should respect the requirements of federalism and look to states to offer their best ideas rather than mandating policies that the current administration likes” (*New York Times*, Aug. 16, 2009).

Further research showed that the federal government encouraged states to participate in RTTT on a voluntary basis, but the federal government’s use of voluntarism eventually would give way to coercion on the path toward developing national standards. In other words, the research showed that RTTT was developed as a stepping stone toward getting states on board on a path leading to national standards. Therefore, the voluntary incentive program offered to states was developed to be voluntary only for a period of time, according to Barnes (2011) in her article, “RTTT Only Benefits Big Government.” In that article, Barnes asserted that the voluntary four core standards found in RTTT actually were intended to be required past 2015

due to language in its blueprint. Quoting the RTTT blueprint, Barnes wrote: “Beginning in 2015, funds will be available only to states that are implementing assessments based on college and career-ready standards that are common to a *significant number of states*”. Barnes and others concluded that “there is indication that if states choose not to participate in adoption of standards promoted by RTTT now, they will be forced to eventually adopt those standards or lose their Title I funding.”

### **Summary**

RTTT was developed to be a creative solution toward helping states’ departments of education financially to meet the requirements of NCLB. Using the input of political actors on the scene, RTTT was intended to help states that were experiencing financial stress not only to meet the AYP requirements of NCLB, but also ease further financial stress caused by the recession of 2008. However, some criticism has shown that the grants reward program included language that required states to meet qualifying criteria, which had not been stated in previous education legislation, and that language has brought scholars to conclude that the program may have not been within the boundaries of education policy. Still, other scholars stated that the program firmly set the federal government on the pathway to support more rigorous state standards, which previously had been discussed, but abandoned by political actors. Despite the criticism, RTTT was intended to help states meet NCLB educational goals and AYP requirements, and not hinder education progress. The next chapter will investigate whether the grants reward program was successful.

## **Chapter Five: The Success Rate of Race To The Top and A look at the Second Round of States' Proposals**

Chapter five will discuss whether Race To The Top (RTTT) was successful, or, whether it actually accomplished what its authors thought it was expected to do. According to research, RTTT only helped states reach Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) at only a slighter greater rate. Data from the Center on Education Policy (CEP) show (AYP)—the criteria for grading school effectiveness found in the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation—results for 2010-2011 that reveal states participating in RTTT fared only slightly better at meeting objectives than states that did not participate. Specially, the chapter will answer the following questions: If RTTT were unsuccessful, what didn't happen? What did happen that authors didn't say they expected?

### **The Success Rate of Race To The Top**

To review AYP data, the CEP, an independent non-profit data collecting organization that has been collecting AYP results and trends since the 2005-2006 school year, will be used. Analyzing the year 2011 is important because RTTT, which was adopted in 2009, had 10 Phase 2 winners (and another two Phase 1 winners) that were disbursed initial funds in 2010 and used them for the 2010-2011 school year. Therefore, it is important to see how those RTTT winners fared at the end of the 2010-2011 school year. First, a review of the AYP results in 2011 is in order. The CEP summarized AYP results in 2011 in the following manner:

An estimated 48% of the nation's public schools did not make AYP in 2011. This marks an increase from 39% in 2010 and is the highest percentage since NCLB took effect.

- In 24 states and the District of Columbia, at least half of the public schools did not make AYP in 2011. In a majority of the states (43 and D.C.), at least one-fourth of the schools did not make AYP.
- The percentage of public schools not making AYP in 2011 varied greatly by state, from about 11% in Wisconsin to about 89% in Florida.

For state-by-state AYP results, see Table 5.1 below, published by the CEP:

**Table 5.1: Estimated percentage and number of schools in the nation and each state that did not make AYP in 2011 based on 2010-11 testing**

| <i>State</i>      | <i>% did not make AYP</i> | <i>% made AYP</i> | <i># not making AYP</i> | <i>Total # of schools</i> |
|-------------------|---------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| <b>U.S. total</b> | <b>48%</b>                | <b>52%</b>        | <b>43,942</b>           | <b>91,618</b>             |
| Alabama           | 27%                       | 73%               | 366                     | 1,381                     |
| Alaska            | 54%                       | 46%               | 273                     | 503                       |
| Arizona           | 42%                       | 58%               | 814                     | 1,938                     |
| Arkansas          | 35%                       | 65%               | 380                     | 1,075                     |
| California        | 66%                       | 34%               | 6,465                   | 9,871                     |
| Colorado          | 58%                       | 42%               | 1,001                   | 1,714                     |
| Connecticut       | 47%                       | 53%               | 452                     | 964                       |
| Delaware          | 22%                       | 78%               | 44                      | 201                       |
| D.C.              | 87%                       | 13%               | 166                     | 191                       |
| Florida           | 91%                       | 9%                | 3,449                   | 3,776                     |
| Georgia           | 27%                       | 73%               | 613                     | 2,246                     |
| Hawaii            | 59%                       | 41%               | 169                     | 287                       |
| Idaho             | 38%                       | 62%               | 252                     | 662                       |
| Illinois          | 67%                       | 33%               | 2,548                   | 3,807                     |
| Indiana           | 49%                       | 51%               | 895                     | 1,837                     |
| Iowa              | 26%                       | 74%               | 354                     | 1,363                     |
| Kansas            | 16%                       | 84%               | 217                     | 1,366                     |
| Kentucky          | 57%                       | 43%               | 651                     | 1,148                     |
| Louisiana         | 22%                       | 78%               | 283                     | 1,282                     |
| Maine             | 63%                       | 37%               | 380                     | 602                       |
| Maryland          | 45%                       | 55%               | 614                     | 1,375                     |
| Massachusetts     | 82%                       | 18%               | 1,502                   | 1,824                     |
| Michigan          | 15%                       | 85%               | 523                     | 3,409                     |
| Minnesota         | 55%                       | 45%               | 1,231                   | 2,250                     |
| Mississippi       | 48%                       | 52%               | 425                     | 891                       |
| Missouri          | 75%                       | 25%               | 1,656                   | 2,202                     |
| Montana           | 28%                       | 72%               | 228                     | 821                       |
| Nebraska          | 27%                       | 73%               | 260                     | 952                       |
| Nevada            | 53%                       | 47%               | 335                     | 629                       |
| New Hampshire     | 71%                       | 29%               | 326                     | 458                       |
| New Jersey        | 53%                       | 47%               | 1,235                   | 2,314                     |
| New Mexico        | 86%                       | 14%               | 718                     | 831                       |
| New York          | 47%                       | 53%               | 2,165                   | 4,589                     |
| North Carolina    | 72%                       | 28%               | 1,827                   | 2,533                     |
| North Dakota      | 53%                       | 47%               | 245                     | 461                       |
| Ohio              | 40%                       | 60%               | 1,454                   | 3,628                     |
| Oklahoma          | 30%                       | 70%               | 526                     | 1,777                     |
| Oregon            | 46%                       | 54%               | 586                     | 1,270                     |
| Pennsylvania      | 25%                       | 75%               | 769                     | 3,096                     |
| Rhode Island      | 19%                       | 81%               | 55                      | 296                       |
| South Carolina    | 76%                       | 24%               | 851                     | 1,126                     |
| South Dakota      | 17%                       | 83%               | 113                     | 667                       |
| Tennessee         | 49%                       | 51%               | 793                     | 1,635                     |
| Texas             | 28%                       | 72%               | 2,190                   | 7,826                     |
| Utah              | 24%                       | 76%               | 236                     | 981                       |
| Vermont           | 72%                       | 28%               | 217                     | 301                       |
| Virginia          | 61%                       | 39%               | 1,126                   | 1,847                     |
| Washington        | 62%                       | 38%               | 1,356                   | 2,203                     |
| West Virginia     | 48%                       | 52%               | 361                     | 757                       |
| Wisconsin         | 11%                       | 89%               | 223                     | 2,107                     |
| Wyoming           | 7%                        | 93%               | 24                      | 348                       |

(Usher, 2012, Center on Education Policy)

The two Phase 1 winners of RTTT grants were Delaware and Tennessee and the 10 Phase 2 winners were the District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Maryland, Massachusetts, New York, North Carolina, Ohio and Rhode Island (“Nine States and the District of Columbia Win Second Round of Race to the Top Grants,” U.S. Department of Education, 1). According to Table 5.1, we see that RTTT states and the District of Columbia only fared slightly better at meeting AYP objective than other states not participating in RTTT.

Although Arne Duncan, then secretary of the U.S. Department of Education (DE), had high hopes of the RTTT states succeeding with desired educational outcomes, the data show in Table 5.1 that nearly half of the 12 winning states and District of Columbia for Phase 1 and Phase 2 grants from the RTTT fund did not make AYP. In fact, five of the 12 winners, or 42 percent of the winners, had more than 50 percent of their schools that failed to make AYP in 2011, consisting of the following: the District of Columbia, with 87 percent of its schools failing to make AYP; Florida, with 91 percent of its schools failing to make AYP; Hawaii, with 59 percent of its schools failing to make AYP; Massachusetts, with 82 percent of its schools failing to make AYP; and North Carolina, with 72 percent of its schools failing to make AYP. Behind those states were the following RTTT winning states that failed to make AYP in 2011: Maryland, with 45 percent of its schools failing to make AYP; New York, with 47 percent of its schools failing to make AYP; Ohio, with 40 percent of its schools failing to make AYP; and Tennessee with 49 percent of its schools failing to make AYP. Only three winning RTTT states had fewer than one third of its schools failing to make AYP in 2011, and consisted of the following: Delaware with 22 percent of its schools failing to make AYP; Georgia,

with 27 percent of its schools failing to make AYP; and Rhode Island with 19 percent of its schools failing to make AYP.

Considering that 48 percent of the nation's schools did not make AYP in 2011, we see that RTTT winners did not contribute much in helping that number decrease as 42 percent of RTTT schools did not make AYP in 2011. Clearly, the authors of RTTT did not expect such dire results, but rather they expected for the percentage of schools failing to make AYP to decrease substantially.

However, according to the federal education department, RTTT states did see a modest improvement in graduation rates, number of students taking Advanced Placement(AP) tests, number of students scoring 3 or higher on AP tests, which qualified them for college credit for those scores. The DE also maintained that, for the first 12 grantees, the states' role in teaching and learning in our nation's K-12 public schools has changed as state leaders and superintendents have forged partnerships with principals, teachers, local leaders, nonprofits and other stakeholders ("Fundamental Change Innovation in America's Schools Under Race to the Top Executive Summary," 2015, U.S. Department of Education Office of State Support).

The DE reported that 46 total states and the District of Columbia submitted RTTT applications for Phase 1 and 2 competitions, but only 12 states and the District of Columbia received awards in 2010 for Phase 1 and 2 competitions. The awards ranged from \$75 million to \$700 million to make "systemwide, coordinated educational improvements for students and teachers in the four core areas. State work under the grants ended in summer 2015, except Hawaii, where grant work ended in September 2014" ("Fundamental Change Innovation in America's Schools Under Race to the Top Executive Summary," 2015, U.S. Department of Education Office of State Support).



Duncan stated the following on Aug. 24, 2010, when he announced the Phase 2 winners:

Today, 10 applicants have won grants in the second phase of the Race to the Top competition. Along with Phase 1 winners Delaware and Tennessee, 11 states and the District of Columbia have now been awarded money in the Obama Administration's groundbreaking education reform program that will directly impact 13.6 million students, and 980,000 teachers in 25,000 schools.

The 10 winning Phase 2 applications in alphabetical order are: the District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Maryland, Massachusetts, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, and Rhode Island.

These states show what is possible when adults come together to do the right thing for children.

Every state that applied showed a tremendous amount of leadership and a bold commitment to education reform. The creativity and innovation in each of these applications is breathtaking. We set a high bar and these states met the challenge. ("Nine States and the District of Columbia Win Second Round of Race to the Top Grants," U.S. Department of Education, 1).

Although Duncan and the authors of RTTT projected that our nation's schools would create an atmosphere of education excellence with RTTT funds, data show otherwise.

### **The Second Round of Competition for Race To The Top Funding: The District of Columbia Public Schools**

In this section, I will answer questions such as the primary question: What is the main generalization that can be made about a winning application? After viewing the requirements of RTTT, basically a winning application included a solid plan that met the RTTT objectives. The applications won the following points based on specified categories, including the following: state success factors, 125 points; standards and assessments, 70 points; data systems to support instruction, 47 points; great teachers and leaders, 138 points; turning around the lowest achieving schools, 50 points, and general selection criteria, 55 points. ("Race to the Top Program Executive Summary," 2009, U.S. Department of Education, 3).

Specifically, to answer that question, I will focus on the District of Columbia Public Schools, whose education officials submitted a successful proposal in Phase 2, and trace how that proposal fared during the review process. The District of Columbia was selected because it beat all 50 states with the highest percentage of its schools, or 91 percent of its schools, that failed to make AYP during the 2010 school year, the year it won a RTTT grant reward (Usher, “Update with 2009-10 Data and Five-Year Trends: How Many Schools Have Not Made Adequate Yearly Progress?” Center on Education Policy, 6). Also, the District of Columbia only had one state beating it in having the highest number of schools not making AYP in 2011. As mentioned earlier, the District of Columbia had 87 percent of its schools failing to make AYP in 2011, with only Florida beating it with 91 percent of its schools failing to make AYP in 2011 (Usher, 2012, “AYP Results for 2010-11 — November 2012 Update,” Center on Education Policy).

In 2010, the District of Columbia was awarded a \$74,998,962 RTTT grant reward, and was able to use 12.5 percent of the grant during the 2010-2011 school year, which equaled \$9,374,870 in accordance with the submitted plan. After one year, the DE reviewed its plan and results before issuing the remaining balance (“Scopes of Work Decision Letters” [District of Columbia], 2010).

A look at the District of Columbia Public Schools reveal that enrollment has increased steadily by several hundred to 1,000 students each year for the past five years, with 48,653 total students enrolled during the 2015-16 school year. Also, that school year, there were 4,000 teachers, 109 principals and more than 100 schools (The District of Columbia Public Schools, <http://dcps.dc.gov/page/dcps-organization>). According to the District of Columbia’s application,

the district planned to accomplish the following as presented on the table below taken from the District of Columbia’s RTTT application:

**Table 5.2: Washington D.C.’s Practice/Plans by Assurance Area for RTTT Application**

| <b>Assurance</b>                           | <b>Current Practice</b>   | <b>RTTT Plans</b>  |
|--|---|--|
| <b>Standards and Assessments</b>           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DC’s state standards are among the strongest in the nation, having received a grade of “A” from Stanford University’s <i>Hoover Digest</i></li> <li>• Many DC schools (but not statewide) have interim assessments aligned to summative assessments, providing real-time information about student strengths and weaknesses</li> <li>• Move swiftly to adopt the new Common Core Standards, with the meeting date for the State Board’s approval already set</li> </ul>                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Move swiftly to adopt the new Common Core Standards, with the meeting date for the State Board’s approval already set</li> <li>• Create new summative assessments aligned with the Common Core Standards with non-RTTT funds, with a consortium of states</li> <li>• Require LEAs to use interim assessments that will be aligned with the Common Core Standards</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Data Systems to Improve Instruction</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instructional improvement systems exist in DCPS and in several charter schools</li> <li>• Data-driven instructional practices are beginning to proliferate across the District</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fund the development of instructional improvement systems for LEAs that lack sufficient systems to support data-driven instruction</li> <li>• Fund capacity-building for school-level data analysis to ensure that student data are analyzed and used to improve instruction</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Great Teachers and Leaders</b>          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DC has extensive experience working with a large local network of national partners</li> <li>• Alternative certification providers for teachers and principals contribute significantly to DC’s human capital pipeline</li> <li>• Teacher evaluations that use student growth as a primary component are being informed by DCPS</li> <li>• Human capital decisions such as targeted intervention, additional compensation and dismissal are becoming enabled by evaluations</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hold all certification providers, including alternative providers, to evaluations based on graduates’ effectiveness; program approval will be subject to revocation if graduate performance does not meet DC standards</li> <li>• Build and support stronger pipelines for effective teachers and principals</li> <li>• Require all participating LEAs to have evaluations in place for principals and teachers based on at least 50% student growth</li> <li>• Support human capital decisions based on evaluations through investment in systems for decision-making, as well as professional development systems aligned to evaluations</li> <li>• Create professional development collaboratives to support the dissemination of teacher effectiveness across the system</li> </ul> |
| <b>School Turnaround</b>                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DC has an established track record of closing low-achieving schools</li> <li>• Each of the four RTTT turnaround models has already been used in DC schools</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adopt a statewide definition of “persistently lowest-achieving” schools and ensure that turnaround plans exist for all schools in this category</li> <li>• Fund planning and support efforts of school turnaround teams</li> </ul>  |

(“Race to the Top Application Assurances,” 2010, by the District of Columbia Public Schools, U.S. Department of Education, 10-11)

Here is a summary of the District of Columbia’s scores:

**Table 5.3: Washington, D.C.’s Scoresheet for RTTT Application**

|  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| State Success Factors 125<br>Total Points Available                  | D.C. (Tier 1) 103.6<br>Total Points Earned | D.C. (Tier 2) 113<br>Total Points Earned   |
| Standards/Assessments 70<br>Total Points Available                   | D.C. (Tier 1) 68<br>Total Points Earned    | D.C. (Tier 2) 68.4<br>Total Points Earned  |
| Data Systems 47<br>Total Points Available                            | D.C. (Tier1) 34.6<br>Total Points Earned   | D.C. (Tier 2) 35.4<br>Total Points Earned  |
| Great Teachers/Leaders 138<br>Total Points Available                 | D.C. (Tier 1) 114.6<br>Total Points Earned | D.C. (Tier 2) 117.8<br>Total Points Earned |
| Turn Around Lowest<br>Achieving Schools 50<br>Total Points Available | D.C. (Tier 1) 46<br>Total Points Earned    | D.C. (Tier 2) 47.6<br>Total Points Earned  |
| General 55<br>Total Points Available                                 | D.C. (Tier 1) 52.8<br>Total Points Earned  | (Tier 2) 52.8<br>Total Points Earned       |
| Overall Total 500<br>Points Available                                | D.C. (Tier 1) 434.6<br>Total Points Earned | D.C. (Tier 2) 450<br>Total Points Earned   |

(“Race to the Top Panel Review by Applicant for District of Columbia Phase 2,” 2010, U.S. Department of Education, 1).

The District of Columbia’s ambition plan and high scores earned for the plan fell short of desired outcomes in terms of achieving AYP in 2011. As shown in Table 5.3, within each category, the District of Columbia earned 12 points or fewer from the total points available, and such high scores clearly secured RTTT funds.

In the District of Columbia’s application, under standards and assessments, it is particularly clear that the district’s goal was to meet RTTT guidelines, despite some criticism directed toward those guidelines. As shown in Table 5.2, the District of Columbia’s application stated the district was committed to accomplish the following with RTTT funds under standards and assessments: “move swiftly to adopt the new Common Core Standards, with the meeting date for the State Board’s approval already set; create new summative assessments aligned with the Common Core Standards with non-RTTT funds, with a consortium of states; require LEAs (local education agencies) to use interim assessments that will be aligned with the Common Core Standards” (“Race to the Top Application Assurances,” 2010, U.S. Department of Education, 10-11). Creating Common Core standards with other states, which was a move toward a requirement of national standards, along with having interim assessments that were aligned with Common Core standards, was an area that differed from No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in that there was a requirement for standards in which assessments must have been aligned in RTTT and not in NCLB. As mentioned earlier, some criticism of RTTT surfaced because national standards were not previously required by established education policy. Also, the RTTT expectations under the category “Great Teachers and Leaders” was that teachers’ and administrators’ evaluations be tied to students’ assessment scores, another area of concern of RTTT mentioned earlier. As expected, as shown in Table 5.2, the District of Columbia’s application stated that the district would “require all participating LEAs to have evaluations in place for principals and teachers based on at least 50% student growth” (“Race to the Top Application Assurances,” 2010, U.S. Department of Education, 10-11). Clearly, despite criticism of RTTT in terms of common standards being required and evaluations being based on student

growth, officials at the District of Columbia Public Schools geared their plan to be a winner, which was to secure funds using guidelines set by RTTT.

Not only did the District of Columbia fail to meet desired educational outcomes in 2011, but it has drastically failed in meeting AYP for each year during a five-year span of time prior to 2011. To understand the District of Columbia's shortcomings, it is important to first review their projections. The following charts were included in the "District of Columbia Consolidated State Application Accountability Workbook" plan submitted to the federal education department on Feb. 9, 2010. The plan, which had been revised nearly every year from 2003 until 2010 "details the policies and procedures relating to the educational assessment and accountability policies of the District of Columbia," as required by NCLB ("District of Columbia Consolidated State Application Accountability Workbook," by the District of Columbia Office of the State Superintendent of Education, 2010, U.S. Department of Education, 2).

**Table 5.4: NCLB Targets 2002-2014  
Elementary Reading (Grades 3-6) – Annual Targets and (Six) Intermediate Goals  
for SY2002-2014 (Percentage Scoring at the Proficient or Above Level)**

|              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |            |
|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|------------|
|              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              | <b>100</b> |
|              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              | <b>86.85</b> | <b>86.85</b> |            |
|              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              | <b>73.69</b> | <b>73.69</b> |              |              |            |
|              |              |              |              |              |              | <b>60.53</b> | <b>60.53</b> |              |              |              |              |            |
|              |              |              |              | <b>47.37</b> | <b>47.37</b> |              |              |              |              |              |              |            |
|              |              | <b>34.21</b> | <b>34.21</b> |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |            |
| <b>21.05</b> | <b>21.05</b> |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |            |
|              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |            |
|              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |            |
|              |              | <b>1</b>     |              | <b>2</b>     |              | <b>3</b>     |              | <b>4</b>     |              | <b>5</b>     |              | <b>6</b>   |
| 2002         | 2003         | 2004         | 2005         | 2006         | 2007         | 2008         | 2009         | 2010         | 2011         | 2012         | 2013         | 2014       |

(“District of Columbia Consolidated State Application Accountability Workbook,” by the District of Columbia Office of the State Superintendent of Education, 2010, U.S. Department of Education, 41.)

**Table 5.5: NCLB Targets 2002-2014  
Elementary Mathematics (Grades 3-6) – Annual Targets and (Six) Intermediate Goals for  
SY2002-2014 (Percentage Scoring at the Proficient or Above Level)**

|              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |            |
|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|------------|
|              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              | <b>100</b> |
|              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              | <b>85.07</b> | <b>85.07</b> |            |
|              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              | <b>70.14</b> | <b>70.14</b> |              |              |            |
|              |              |              |              |              |              | <b>55.21</b> | <b>55.21</b> |              |              |              |              |            |
|              |              |              |              | <b>40.27</b> | <b>40.27</b> |              |              |              |              |              |              |            |
|              |              | <b>25.35</b> | <b>25.35</b> |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |            |
| <b>10.42</b> | <b>10.42</b> |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |            |
|              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |            |
|              |              | <b>1</b>     |              | <b>2</b>     |              | <b>3</b>     |              | <b>4</b>     |              | <b>5</b>     |              | <b>6</b>   |
| 2002         | 2003         | 2004         | 2005         | 2006         | 2007         | 2008         | 2009         | 2010         | 2011         | 2012         | 2013         | 2014       |

(“District of Columbia Consolidated State Application Accountability Workbook,” by the District of Columbia Office of the State Superintendent of Education, 2010, U.S. Department of Education, 41.)



**Table 5.6: NCLB Targets 2002-2014  
 Secondary Reading (Grades 7-11) – Annual Targets and (Six) Intermediate Goals for  
 SY2002-2014 (Percentage Scoring at the Proficient or Above Level)**

|              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |            |
|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|------------|
|              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              | <b>100</b> |
|              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              | <b>85.90</b> | <b>85.90</b> |            |
|              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              | <b>71.79</b> | <b>71.79</b> |              |              |            |
|              |              |              |              |              |              | <b>57.69</b> | <b>57.69</b> |              |              |              |              |            |
|              |              |              |              | <b>43.58</b> | <b>43.58</b> |              |              |              |              |              |              |            |
|              |              | <b>29.48</b> | <b>29.48</b> |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |            |
| <b>15.38</b> | <b>15.38</b> |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |            |
|              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |            |
|              |              | <b>1</b>     |              | <b>2</b>     |              | <b>3</b>     |              | <b>4</b>     |              | <b>5</b>     |              | <b>6</b>   |
| 2002         | 2003         | 2004         | 2005         | 2006         | 2007         | 2008         | 2009         | 2010         | 2011         | 2012         | 2013         | 2014       |

(“District of Columbia Consolidated State Application Accountability Workbook,” by the District of Columbia Office of the State Superintendent of Education, 2010, U.S. Department of Education, 41.)

**Table 5.7: NCLB Targets 2002-2014  
Secondary Mathematics (Grades 7-11) – Annual Targets and (Six) Intermediate Goals for  
SY2002-2014 (Percentage Scoring at the Proficient or Above Level)**

|             |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |            |
|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|------------|
|             |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |             | <b>100</b> |
|             |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |             | <b>85.1</b> | <b>85.1</b> |            |
|             |             |             |             |             |             |             |             | <b>70.2</b> | <b>70.2</b> |             |             |            |
|             |             |             |             |             |             | <b>55.4</b> | <b>55.4</b> |             |             |             |             |            |
|             |             |             |             | <b>40.5</b> | <b>40.5</b> |             |             |             |             |             |             |            |
|             |             | <b>25.6</b> | <b>25.6</b> |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |            |
| <b>10.8</b> | <b>10.8</b> |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |            |
|             |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |            |
|             |             | 1           |             | 2           |             | 3           |             | 4           |             | 5           |             | 6          |
| 2002        | 2003        | 2004        | 2005        | 2006        | 2007        | 2008        | 2009        | 2010        | 2011        | 2012        | 2013        | 2014       |

(“District of Columbia Consolidated State Application Accountability Workbook,” by the District of Columbia Office of the State Superintendent of Education, 2010, U.S. Department of Education, 41.)

The above projections were made by the District of Columbia Public Schools to comply with the expectations of meeting AYP found in NCLB. But, in reality, none of the projections were met. According to the CEP, the District of Columbia Public Schools' AYP results from 2006 until 2010 show the following failure: in the 2005-2006 school year, 85 percent of D.C. schools failed to meet AYP; in the 2006-2007 school year, 75 percent of D.C. schools failed to meet AYP; in the 2007-2008 school year, 77 percent of D.C. schools failed to meet AYP; in the 2008-2009 school year, 75 percent of D.C. schools failed to meet AYP; and in the 2009-2010 school year, 91 percent of D.C. schools failed to meet AYP (Usher, 2010, "Update with 2009-10 Data and Five-Year Trends: How Many Schools Have Not Made Adequate Yearly Progress?, Center on Education Policy, 6). Also, as we have seen, even with a RTTT grant for the 2010-2011 school year, as shown, 87 percent of D.C. school failed to meet AYP in the 2010-2011 school year (Usher, 2012, "AYP Results for 2010-11 — November 2012 Update," Center on Education Policy, 4).

As shown, the District of Columbia has consistently failed to meet AYP goals from 2006 until 2011, despite winning a RTTT grant to improve its failing schools.

### **An Overview and Survey of A Successful School District: The School District of Ladue in St. Louis County, Missouri**

Although the District of Columbia Public Schools have struggled in meeting AYP goals since the inception of NCLB, the School District of Ladue in St. Louis County, Missouri, has performed better at meeting those goals. However, it is important to note that Ladue Schools do not share average characteristics. Ladue is one of the wealthiest school districts in the State of Missouri, (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Finance Data and Statistics Summary, 2016). More importantly, Ladue Schools have consistently exceeded annual proficiency targets for the State of Missouri from 2002 until 2011, with 77.8 percent of students

scoring proficient in 2011, exceeding the state goal of 75.5 proficiency target (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Comprehensive Data System, 2016). In fact, Ladue Horton Watkins High School (LHWHS) was rated as the top school in the State of Missouri by *U.S. News and World Report* in 2016. The school district is socioeconomically diverse with an operating budget of \$58.8 million and anticipated revenue of \$59.6 million in 2016. Of the total district revenue, 94 percent is derived from local sources, the majority of which comes from property taxes. Ladue is very small in comparison to the District of Columbia Public Schools. Ladue Schools experienced an enrollment increase starting in 2003, with enrollment increasing 23 percent over the next ten years and exceeding 4,000 students (for the first time since 1978) during the 2013-14 school year. Ladue Schools' total enrollment was 4,165 students in 2015, (compared to 48,653 students' total enrollment in the District of Columbia Public Schools during the 2015-16 school year). Ladue Schools reported 297 full-time teachers, 23 administrators, and seven schools serving K-12 students during the 2015-16 school year. (In comparison in the District of Columbia, there were 4,000 teachers, 109 principals and more than 100 schools) (Ladue Schools District Profile, 2016). Ladue has 37 percent minority enrollment, which is 10 percent higher than the average minority enrollment in the State of Missouri (Public School Review, 2016).

Because the Ladue School District has performed in such an exemplary fashion, the district was chosen as a source for a survey of teachers and administrators centering on RTTT. The survey has revealed important opinions concerning the grants reward program. Teachers and administrators at LHWHS, Ladue Middle School (LMS), and Spoede Elementary School (SES) were asked three closed-ended questions in which they checked boxes to report their opinions and one open-ended question in which they wrote responses. The three checked

questions are following: 1) Student performance on state tests should be the main data source to determine whether students are at least proficient in a content area; 2) Student performance on state tests should be used as one measure of effectiveness on teachers’/administrators’ evaluations; and 3) National standards are a good idea. Teachers and administrators had the following choices: 1) strongly agree; 2) moderately agree; 3) agree; 4) neutral; 5) disagree; 6) moderately disagree; and 7) strongly disagree. At LHWHS, 22 teachers and two administrators responded to the survey. At LMS, 19 teachers and one administrator responded to the survey. At SES, three teachers and one administrator responded to the survey. The following charts show results:

**Table 5.8**

**Ladue Horton Watkins High School Teachers’ and Administrators’ Survey Results**

| Question  | Strongly Agree | Moderately Agree | Agree    | Neutral  | Disagree | Moderately Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|----------------|------------------|----------|----------|----------|---------------------|-------------------|
| State tests should determine student proficiency.                             | <b>0</b>       | <b>1</b>         | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>5</b> | <b>4</b>            | <b>9</b>          |
| Student performance should determine teacher and administrator effectiveness. | <b>0</b>       | <b>1</b>         | <b>4</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>5</b> | <b>2</b>            | <b>10</b>         |
| National Standards are a good idea.   | <b>1</b>       | <b>4</b>         | <b>9</b> | <b>4</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>0</b>            | <b>4</b>          |

**Table 5.9**

**Ladue Middle School Teachers' and Administrators' Survey Results**

| Question  | Strongly Agree | Moderately Agree | Agree    | Neutral  | Disagree | Moderately Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|----------------|------------------|----------|----------|----------|---------------------|-------------------|
| State tests should determine student proficiency.                               | <b>0</b>       | <b>1</b>         | <b>3</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>4</b> | <b>3</b>            | <b>7</b>          |
| Student performance should determine effectiveness of teachers/ administrators. | <b>1</b>       | <b>1</b>         | <b>5</b> | <b>0</b> | <b>4</b> | <b>1</b>            | <b>8</b>          |
| National Standards are a good idea.   | <b>5</b>       | <b>9</b>         | <b>4</b> | <b>0</b> | <b>1</b> | <b>0</b>            | <b>1</b>          |

**Table 5.10**

**Spoede Elementary School Teachers' Survey Results**

| Question  | Strongly Agree | Moderately Agree | Agree    | Neutral  | Disagree | Moderately Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|----------------|------------------|----------|----------|----------|---------------------|-------------------|
| State tests should determine student proficiency.                               | <b>0</b>       | <b>0</b>         | <b>0</b> | <b>0</b> | <b>1</b> | <b>1</b>            | <b>2</b>          |
| Student performance should determine effectiveness of teachers/ administrators. | <b>0</b>       | <b>0</b>         | <b>0</b> | <b>0</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>0</b>            | <b>2</b>          |
| National Standards are a good idea.   | <b>2</b>       | <b>0</b>         | <b>2</b> | <b>0</b> | <b>0</b> | <b>0</b>            | <b>0</b>          |

(Tables 5.8-5.10, Results from Angela Early's original survey conducted with teachers and administrators at Ladue Horton Watkins High School, Ladue Middle School, and Spoede Elementary School, St. Louis County, Missouri, 2016).

An analysis of Table 5.8 showed that teachers surveyed at LHWHS disagreed at a rate of 77 percent (in the combined categories of disagree, moderately disagree, and strongly disagree) that students' performance on state tests should be the main data source to determine whether students are at least proficient in a content area. The results also showed that LHWHS teachers surveyed disagreed at a rate of 68 percent (in the combined categories of disagree, moderately disagree, and strongly disagree) that students' performance on state tests should be used as one measure of effectiveness on teachers' evaluations. Finally, the results showed that teachers surveyed at LHWHS only slightly agreed at a rate of 59 percent (in the combined categories of strongly agree, moderately agree and agree) that national standards are a good idea (Results from

Angela Early's original survey conducted with teachers at Ladue Horton Watkins High School, Ladue Middle School, and Spoede Elementary School).

Results from Table 5.8 also included two administrators who completed surveys. The administrators surveyed at LHWHS were split at a rate of 50 percent (in the combined categories of strongly agree, moderately agree, and agree and the combined categories of disagree, moderately disagree, and strongly disagree) that students' performance on state tests should be the main data source to determine whether students are at least proficient in a content area, with one moderately in agreement and one strongly in disagreement. Results from administrators surveyed at LHWHS also showed that they disagreed at a rate of 100 percent (in the combined categories of strongly, disagree, moderately disagree and disagree) that students' performance on state tests should be used as one measure of effectiveness on administrators' evaluations. Finally, results showed that administrators were split by a rate of 50 percent (in the combined categories of strongly agree, moderately agree, and agree and the combined categories of disagree, moderately disagree, and strongly disagree) on whether national standards are a good idea, with one administrator moderately agreeing and one administrator disagreeing (Results from Angela Early's original survey conducted with administrators at Ladue Horton Watkins High School, Ladue Middle School, and Spoede Elementary School).

An analysis of Table 5.9 showed similar results among LMS teachers, as chart eight among LHWHS teachers and administrators. Teachers surveyed at LMS disagreed at a rate of 73 percent (in the combined categories of disagree, moderately disagree, and strongly disagree) that students' performance on state tests should be the main data source to determine whether students are at least proficient in a content area. Results for LMS teachers surveyed also showed they disagreed at a rate of 68 percent (in the combined categories of disagree, moderately



disagree, and strongly disagree) that students' performance on state tests should be used as one measure of effectiveness on teachers' evaluations. Finally, results showed that teachers surveyed at LMS agreed at a rate of 89 percent (in the combined categories of strongly agree, moderately agree and agree) that national standards are a good idea (Results from Angela Early's original survey conducted with teachers at Ladue Horton Watkins High School, Ladue Middle School, and Spoede Elementary School).

Results from Table 5.9 also included one administrator surveyed at LMS. The results from the LMS administrator differed from teachers and administrators at LHWHS. The survey of the LMS administrator showed the administrator agreed that students' performance on state tests should be the main data source to determine whether students are at least proficient in a content area. Results from the LMS administrator also showed that the administrator agreed that students' performance on state tests should be used as one measure of effectiveness on administrators' evaluations. Finally, results showed the LMS administrator strongly agreed that national standards are a good idea (Results from Angela Early's original survey conducted with administrators at Ladue Horton Watkins High School, Ladue Middle School, and Spoede Elementary School).

Additionally, an analysis of Table 5.10 showed that teachers and one administrator surveyed at SES agreed with their peers at LHWHS and teachers at LMS. Results showed that SES teachers surveyed disagreed at a rate of 100 percent (in the combined categories of disagree, moderately disagree, and strongly disagree) that students' performance on state tests should be the main data source to determine whether students are at least proficient in a content area. Furthermore, results for SES teachers surveyed showed teachers disagreed at a rate of 100 percent (in the combined categories of disagree, moderately disagree, and strongly disagree) that

students' performance on state tests should be used as one measure of effectiveness on teachers' evaluations. Finally, results showed that teachers surveyed at SES agreed at a rate of 100 percent (in the combined categories of strongly agree, moderately agree and agree) that national standards are a good idea (Results from Angela Early's original survey conducted with teachers at Ladue Horton Watkins High School, Ladue Middle School, and Spoede Elementary School).

Finally, results from Table 5.10 showed that the one SES administrator were in line with teachers and administrators at LHWHS and teachers at LMS. The SES administrator disagreed that students' performance on state tests should be the main data source to determine whether students are at least proficient in a content area. Results from the SES administrator also showed that the administrator disagreed that students' performance on state tests should be used as one measure of effectiveness on administrators' evaluations. Furthermore, survey results showed the SES administrator strongly agreed that national standards are a good idea (Results from Angela Early's original survey conducted with administrators at Ladue Horton Watkins High School, Ladue Middle School, and Spoede Elementary School).

In summary, all teachers' survey at Ladue School District showed that they disagreed that students' performance on state tests should be the main data source to determine whether students are at least proficient in a content area. They also disagreed that students' performance on state tests should be used as one measure of effectiveness on teachers' evaluations. However, they agreed that national standards are a good idea (Results from Angela Early's original survey conducted with teachers at Ladue Horton Watkins High School, Ladue Middle School, and Spoede Elementary School). Because only four administrators completed surveys at Ladue School District, results are limited and inconclusive as to whether students' performance on state tests should be the main data source to determine whether students are at least proficient in a

content area, whether students' performance on state tests should be used as one measure of effectiveness on administrators' evaluations, and whether national standards are a good idea (Results from Angela Early's original survey conducted with administrators at Ladue Horton Watkins High School, Ladue Middle School, and Spoede Elementary School).

Overall, it is important to note that survey results from one of the premiere school districts in the state of Missouri showed that teachers' disagreed on two important aspects of the RTTT application and one important aspect of NCLB. Ladue teachers disagreed on the notion that students' performance on standardized state assessments should be the main data source to determine whether students are at least proficient in a content area and the teachers disagreed that students' performance on standardized state assessments should be used as one measure of effectiveness on teachers' evaluations. Both requirements were a part of the RTTT grant application and annual state tests are a part of NCLB. However, the results also showed that teachers agreed that national standards were a good idea, also embedded in RTTT applications. The point here is that if teachers at a successful district are opposed to annual standardized testing, then it may be fair to suppose that teacher opposition is a key element in the politics of annual standardized testing that NCLB and RTTT promote.

Further analysis of survey results reveals that answers to an open-ended question on the teachers' survey offered some important insights regarding effective teaching as measured by national standards and standardized state assessments. Most LHWHS teachers who answered the question stated that national standards and yearly state assessments are not required to determine effective teaching. The question is as follows: Do you think effective teaching requires the use of national standards and yearly state assessments? If no, how do you think effective teaching should be measured on the state level (in order to satisfy federal requirements)? One LHWHS

teacher wrote: “The issue is that these ‘standards’ are nebulous and do not take the developmental arc of students into consideration enough. The heterogeneous groupings in our public schools are incredible—not every child has the capability or capacity to perform at a standard level in a given time frame, and the one-size-fits-all tests do not adequately take this into consideration. As a nation, we have a woefully inadequate social support system that ensures inequality will persist. From access to prenatal health, quality preschools and early intervention programs, to accessible mental health providers and family leave policies—we leave entire populations to figure it out through local programs (most under-funded), but demand these benchmarks of academic success by teachers who are also in many places—overworked, underpaid, and not supported. Teachers definitely have an obligation to make sure students learn as best they can, but to tie the profession and the students up to expectations that do not reflect reality is simply damaging to all concerned” (Results from Angela Early’s original survey conducted with teachers at Ladue Horton Watkins High School, Ladue Middle School, and Spoede Elementary School).

A LMS teacher, although stating national standards were a good idea, disagreed with the idea that effective teaching required using those standards and annual standardized state assessments. The teacher stated, “I feel that the premise of national standards to level the playing field and create common expectations is not a bad idea. However, effective teaching really doesn’t have anything to do with national standards and yearly testing” (Results from Angela Early’s original survey conducted with teachers at Ladue Horton Watkins High School, Ladue Middle School, and Spoede Elementary School).

Two LMS teachers strongly were against the use of national standards and yearly assessments to determine effective teaching. One LMS teacher wrote, “I don’t think state

assessments should be used to ‘grade’ teachers—some kids don’t do well on tests. Looking at student growth from beginning to end of the year would be a good measure. Performance tasks would be more meaningful.” The second LMS teacher wrote, “No (effective teaching does not require the use of national standards and yearly state assessments). So far, the state assessments have been used to label districts as failing, and, thus losing their accreditation. I don’t have another clear idea, but it needs to be a more wholistic approach” (Results from Angela Early’s original survey conducted with teachers at Ladue Horton Watkins High School, Ladue Middle School, and Spoede Elementary School).

At the elementary level, the results of the open-ended question showed that SES teachers mostly were against the notion that effective teaching required the use of national standards and annual standardized state assessments. One SES teacher wrote, “Since each student is learning at their instructional level, effective teaching should be assessed by assessments that show student progress or growth. So, assessments should be given throughout the year, not just once a year. All students should show some growth based on their level of learning. Not all students should be required to be proficient. That’s like saying every person should be able to hit a homerun out of Busch Stadium. Every child is unique and assessments should embrace that” (Results from Angela Early’s original survey conducted with teachers at Ladue Horton Watkins High School, Ladue Middle School, and Spoede Elementary School).

In summary, the open-ended question showed that, although Ladue teachers surveyed may think national standards are a good idea, when asked whether those standards coupled with annual standardized state assessments are required to determine effective teaching, the teachers were, overall, unfavorable of that notion. The views of education professionals, such as teachers and administrators, should be considered as vital components when developing K-12 federal

public education policy, especially important policy such as NCLB, RTTT, and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). The next section will provide an overview of ESSA.

### **Every Student Succeeds Act**

This section will answer the following question: How did the political development surrounding the adoption of RTTT led to the passage of ESSA? To review, the political climate of NCLB was so harsh and the economic climate so severe, that President Barack Obama, who acted on a campaign promise, signed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), which included \$53.6 billion earmarked for the education department for assistance and improvement to all levels of our nation's schools. RTTT, a \$4.35 billion grants reward program, was a part of that stimulus package. The overall goal of RTTT was to improve our nation's K-12 public schools by financially helping them to meet AYP as called for in NCLB and to give states an option to develop new, locally tailored plans to meet those requirements without financial penalty, but rather with a grant reward. However, a result of having a winning application was to meet guidelines set by RTTT. Those guidelines included developing standards with a consortium of other states and tying teachers' and administrators' evaluations to students' test scores.

In many ways, RTTT was a stepping stone to the adoption of ESSA. While tying teachers' and administrators' evaluations to students' test scores are not provisions found in ESSA, statewide college- and career-ready standards, a statewide accountability system that required meeting AYP requirements, and a grants program designed to help with achieving statewide accountability goals are provisions found in ESSA (Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 As Amended Through P.L. 114–95, 2015).

Published in 2010, two education department documents showed modifications to the education policy climate in which NCLB had generated. The climate represented a shift from limited direction and no funding for states to achieve educational excellence in our nation's K-12 public schools as in the case of NCLB to an atmosphere that emphasized adopting national standards and federal funding as a way to achieve education excellence in our nations K-12 public schools. To be sure that the direction of education policy shifted after the adoption of RTTT, the DE outlined its short-ranged goals and a way to achieve them in 2010. According to the federal education department, the U.S., although ranked first in college graduation rate one generation ago, has lagged behind 10 other countries in graduation rate, as highlighted in "A Blueprint For Reform: The Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act" (1). Hence, a foremost goal was that the U.S. lead other nations in college completion by the year 2020, according to the "Blueprint for Reform" (1). To accomplish that goal, a second document, entitled "ESEA Reauthorization: NCLB and the Blueprint" further explained the "Blueprint for Reform" by comparing the "Blueprint for Reform" to NCLB. Here are some of those comparisons: "(1) NCLB includes a 'Race to the Bottom' for state standards, whereas in the Blueprint, states adopt college- and career-ready standards; (2) NCLB is not focused enough on building the profession and teacher voice, whereas the Blueprint utilizes surveys of teachers centering on working conditions and professional development and support; (3) NCLB had a narrow vision of the school's role, whereas the Blueprint provides funding for providing comprehensive services so that students are safe, healthy, able to focus on learning" (1-6). Clearly, the federal government showed the shortcomings of NCLB by proposing modifications to help improve America's schools and reporting those changes as shown in the two above documents.

The result of the push of the federal government's involvement in education from NCLB in 2001 led to support for the passage of ESSA in 2015. In 2001 when the federal government voiced its concerns about NCLB, interest groups began to work on policy solutions. Common Core was the solution of The National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (COSS). Common Core is "a set of K-12 math and English standards that students must master at each grade level. The standards are designed to prepare high school graduates to enter the workforce or take introductory college courses. Forty-two states and the District of Columbia have approved Common Core" (Benton 2015). To note, the NGA and COSS idea of Common Core actually fell in line with a RTTT provision in and federal government movement toward national standards. Although Common Core was not adopted in ESSA, as stated above, ESSA does require states to develop their own standards based on helping students meet state higher-education entrance requirements (Benton 2015).

The bill that became ESSA was introduced on April 30, 2015 in the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2015–2017, and sponsored by Sen. Lamar Alexander-R-Tenn. The bill, which received bipartisan support, was passed on Dec. 2, 2015, by the U.S. House of Representatives by a vote of 359 to 64, and passed on Dec. 9, 2015, by the U.S. Senate by a vote of 85 to 12. The law, PubL 114-95, was enacted after being signed by President Obama on December 10, 2015 (S.1177 Every Student Succeeds Act 2015, Government Track).

The political development of ESSA can be framed in the Multiple Streams Model of Policy Development. Indeed, in our analysis of ESSA, we see that John Kingdon's (2011) discussion is relevant. First, we see that education within the governmental



agenda centered on a major area on the decision agenda—developing new legislation that would be more supportive to states departments of education than NCLB. Using Kingdon’s model further, we see that the governmental agenda of education changed overtime from the decision agenda item by substantially modifying NCLB by offering financial assistance to states for their struggling schools in order to help meet AYP requirements and to require states develop standards common to other states as found in RTTT. Also, using his policy analysis model, we see that as the agenda coupling the problems and solutions as streams, education actors emerging during that time to ensure that their concerns were represented in new federal education legislation. Finally, we see a policy window of opportunity opening in 2014, when NCLB was up for renewal. Ultimately, the passage of ESSA resulted in 2015.

### **Summary**

This chapter has shown that a winning RTTT application had to meet the grants reward program’s guidelines in a profound way. In reviewing the District of Columbia Public Schools’ application, we saw that the success of that application was based on meeting RTTT criteria, despite criticism of that criteria. The chapter also showed that despite winning nearly \$75 million, with nearly \$10 million being administered during the 2010-2011 school year, the District of Columbia Public Schools’ AYP results did not help national averages as the district had 87 percent of its K-12 public schools failing to meet AYP in 2011. The chapter also provided results of a survey of education professionals administered at the Ladue School District, a top school district in the State of Missouri. The results showed that teachers surveyed at the district disagreed with the notion that students’ performance on state tests should be the main data source to determine whether students are at least proficient in a content area. The survey also

showed that teachers disagreed that students' performance on state tests should be used as one measure of effectiveness on teachers' evaluations. Furthermore, the results showed that teachers surveyed, overall, thought that national standards were a good idea. But, the survey's open-ended question showed that, although teachers surveyed thought national standards were a good idea, when asked whether those standards coupled with the requirement of yearly state tests to determine effective teaching was a good idea, the teachers were unfavorable of that notion. However, it is important to note that a successful RTTT application required states to show proof of provisions of those areas, even though they were seen as unpopular among teachers. Finally, the chapter showed that RTTT set a firm foundation toward the adoption of ESSA by requiring college- and career-readiness standards and grants to help meet AYP accountability goals. It can be concluded that, although RTTT differed from NCLB in that it was not an unfunded mandate, but rather a grants reward program, it was, indeed, a stepping stone toward the adoption of ESSA, which included provisions for funding for the nation's schools to meet AYP accountability goals and required states to develop college- and career-readiness standards.

## **Chapter Six: Conclusion**

The federal government turned toward greater involvement in K-12 public education after the 1983 publication of a *Nation At Risk*, which portrayed America's schools and students as struggling and issued recommendations to help remedy the situation. After a long pathway of state accountability measures with school choice at the core in the 1990s, in 2002, President George W. Bush signed into law No Child Left Behind (NCLB), which required states to measure and document the Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) of their students through yearly tests. The legislation stated that federal funds could be withheld if states did not meet achievement goals. The legislation was hurled by educational professionals as unrealistic, as all students, regardless of socioeconomic levels and background, were required to score proficient or advance on tests, or states could face serious consequences. As a result, many scholars called the legislation an unfunded mandate.

After much criticism and many states' continual failure to meet AYP objectives, the legislation was substantially modified in 2009 with Race To The Top (RTTT), a grants reward program that provided states with winning applications monetary support in their attempt to satisfy federal education requirements. Passed by the U.S. Congress and signed into law in 2009 by President Barack Obama, the grants reward program also only achieved modest success with AYP gains in the short-term. Also, teachers have criticized portions of the requirements of the program, including the requirement of standardized testing to show student achievement and the requirement of tying teachers' evaluations to test scores. However, standardized testing to show student achievement and documentation of student achievement continued to be a part of the latest federal education policy, ESSA, signed into law by President Obama in 2015.

The research has shown that the political development of RTTT is a classic

case of the punctuated equilibrium framework of policy change as developed by scholars Frank R. Baumgartner and Bryan D. Jones (2009). To review, the scholars argued that new policy is managed by forming new institutions run by power elites, a practice that makes an area of policy appear to be stable as only incremental changes occur. Indeed, from 2002 when NCLB was passed until about 2006 when the deadline for the law's renewal drew near, there were new forms of institutions—particularly developed in states' departments of education—in charge of structuring and managing implementation as well as handling some federal incremental changes, creating an illusion of equilibrium run by power elites.

However, second, Baumgartner and Jones argued that long-time institutions and political processes can be rapidly interrupted—action that can be understood with the agenda setting model (4). The agenda setting model actually interrupts what may appear to have been a policy monopoly, “created by iron triangles, policy subsystems and policy networks” (5). Media attention particularly is a necessary part of agenda setting. As the media is focused on a problem, incrementalism is undermined as allocation of attention to a problem is heightened, leading to periodic punctuations that disrupt temporary equilibrium (10). Indeed, as shown by the political development of RTTT, although many of the NCLB established institutions have remained in place until present, starting about 2006, public interest groups, scholars and other stakeholders began pressuring congressional leaders to amend or substantially modify the law, and, thereby, secured media attention. When public officials were under media pressure to turn their attention to amending or substantially modifying NCLB, interest groups had created an atmosphere ready for political change.

Third, Baumgartner and Jones argue that policy entrepreneurs look for an opportunity to push their initiative to the forefront of the agenda, or make sure it does not arrive (20).

Sometimes, the issue has received so much media attention that it becomes too large to be confined to subsystems, and, as a result, political parties may embrace the issue in order to receive an electoral advantage (22). In the case of RTTT, the issue of modifying NCLB had become so large that it became an issue of political parties during the 2008 presidential election. Indeed, the campaign and election of President Obama in 2008 created an opportunity for education policy entrepreneurs to push their initiative, a substantial modification of NCLB, to the forefront of the agenda using the political parties. The passage of RTTT showed the 2009 swearing in office of President Obama further solidified the political environment for a policy punctuation as shown by President Obama's early action—the July 2009 unveiling of RTTT, which, actually was included in that year's stimulus package, passed in February 2009. Indeed, the research clearly has shown that the political development of RTTT can be seen as a classic case embedded in the punctuated equilibrium model of policy development.

The development of the policy also can be framed in the Multiple Streams Model of Policy Development. Indeed, in our analysis of NCLB, we saw that John Kingdon's (2011) discussion is relevant. First, we saw that education within the governmental agenda centered on a major area on the decision agenda—developing relief from NCLB from 2005. Using Kingdon's model further, we saw that the governmental agenda of education changed overtime from the decision agenda item substantially modifying the legislation to give quick relief from the grip of the legislation. Also, using his discussion, we saw that as the agenda coupling the problems and solutions as streams, education actors emerging during that time to ensure that their groups were represented in the legislation. Finally, we saw a policy window of opportunity opening in 2008, with the

election of President Obama, and, ultimately, the passage of RTTT within the bounds of ARRA in 2009.

Clearly, the passage of RTTT showed that politicians and policy actors were so absorbed in satisfying various education stakeholders and seizing the moment of a policy punctuation or window of opportunity to achieve a massive goal—improving the nation’s schools—that they developed policy that yielded modest or insignificant results. Although RTTT offered funding to help our nation’s schools and improved NCLB, legislation that many scholars called an unfunded mandate, it still was caught in the confinement of the NCLB legislation, which required schools to meet unrealistic AYP goals. While satisfying education stakeholders’ and other policy actors’ plea for assistance with meeting NCLB objectives (by providing funds for states to develop creative education plans and offer relief from the one-size-fits all plans under NCLB), RTTT still used the same measurement of success, AYP goals in which struggling districts are hard-pressed to meet. Thus, although RTTT provided necessary funding to winning states with struggling districts, states appeared still to fail even after employing RTTT funds under the existing AYP standards. In fact, the research showed that the District of Columbia, although winning a RTTT grant in 2010, fell short of meeting AYP goals in 2011. Additionally, survey results showed that teachers in a top school district in the State of Missouri did not strongly support key provisions of a RTTT application, including requiring usage of standardized testing to show student achievement and tying teachers’ evaluations to test scores.

With the passage of RTTT, politicians prepared the pathway for the passage of Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) by providing a mechanism for funding, requiring college- and career-readiness standards, and creating an avenue to develop locally-tailored programs in order to meet AYP goals, although it is too early to determine the rate of success of ESSA.

## **Implications**

The main implication of this dissertation is that federal involvement in K-12 public education policy has been on an upward swing since the mid- to late-1980s, but many political actors in the education field think federal involvement is low in effectiveness. Many education actors consistently have voiced opposition to major federal policies that have changed the nature of teaching and learning in the nation's schools, particularly policies that have required students to take annual yearly assessments in order to document student achievement, necessitating that all children reach proficiency or advanced on assessments, or failing districts may risk losing federal funding, and potentially face other severe ramifications such as teachers' and administrators' contracts not being renewed and school closings. Additionally, national research has shown that NCLB has been ineffective from the time of its implementation in 2002 as struggling districts continued to struggle, even with the passage of state education grants in 2009 the form of RTTT that showed modest or insignificant short-term gains for winning states as AYP goals continued to be hard-pressed to meet.

## **Future Research**

Future research needs to be conducted on the effectiveness of ESSA, particularly showing results of annual state testing, especially within districts that qualify for federal grants to determine the long-term effectiveness of the grants. Also, future research should involve strongly education professionals' views, particularly those of K-12 public education teachers, in order to effectively develop any future federal education policy. Additionally, future comprehensive research should be conducted on areas with large struggling student populations, such as the District of Columbia, in order to effectively identify and resolve complex, counterproductive situations so that teaching and learning can occur within those populations. Furthermore, future

research should include monitoring the federal education climate as another punctuation in the education environment may be in the midst as highlighted by the recent election of President Donald J. Trump, whose education secretary, Betsy DeVos (narrowly confirmed by the U.S. Senate by an unprecedented tie-breaking vote by Vice President Michael Pence after protest largely due to her lack of public education experience) is an advocate of charter schools (*The New York Times*, Feb. 7, 2017). DeVos may push for school closings for failing schools as she is a strong supporter of school choice. Such action potentially could minimize or negate any future positive long-term effects of RTTT if struggling schools are shut down rather than aided with federal grants. Finally, future research should investigate other measures of student success, such as the development of student portfolios throughout a school year, rather than relying solely on student testing as measured by AYP goals to determine student success.

Through continued research, monitoring, and advocacy, the end result will be the production of effective federal education policy that helps create an education climate that consists of meeting students' environmental, emotional, and intellectual needs, buffered with the appropriate resources, in order to obtain excellence in education for children in our nation's K-12 public schools.



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