

Chapter XXXIX

Career and Technical Education in Light of the No Child Left Behind Legislation

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ABSTRACT

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 is considered to be the most comprehensive and highly scrutinized piece of educational legislation that has been enacted in history. With its focus on core academic content areas, the CTE community has desired to understand its impact on CTE programs. Based on a review of the recent literature on NCLB and CTE, this chapter examines the primary NCLB legislation provisions, presents the issues and challenges that have manifested as a result of the enactment of NCLB, investigates its impact on CTE, and assesses the coordination of NCLB and the new Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act of 2006. This chapter concludes with solutions and recommendations for further research.

INTRODUCTION

In an era of increased high-stakes accountability with regards to student achievement in P-12 education, the need for the examination of career and technical education (CTE) has never been greater.

Accordingly, one of the most comprehensive, pervasive, and challenging pieces of educational legislation that had been enacted in history is the current No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2002. The objectives of NCLB are to raise student academic achievement and to enhance the quality of P-12 schooling.

Despite the pressing need for student achievement as well as the need for the increased quality in schools, the NCLB legislation has been highly controversial, widely debated, and closely scrutinized. Critics cite numerous concerns inherent in the legislation such as its emphasis on standardized assessments, its unforgiving consequences for students, administrators, teachers, and schools, and its impact on the academic achievement gap between majority and minority students. Consequently, schools have struggled to provide rigorous curricula to prepare students to meet the requirements of NCLB, particularly with its mandated assessments, and to escape the unsympathetic consequences that schools face by not meeting Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).

Further, some have called into question the relevancies of curricula in which students are not being assessed, particularly in the area of CTE. However, concomitant with the NCLB directive, CTE has attempted to reconfigure its goals with the enactment of the new Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act of 2006. The objectives of the latest CTE legislation emphasize the need for CTE curricula to prepare students for the workforce as well as postsecondary educational opportunities. Accordingly, an examination of how CTE is meeting both legislative goals may in fact, be quite beneficial.

Based on a review of the literature, this chapter first provides a brief historical account of legislation leading up to the enactment of the NCLB legislation. Secondly, this chapter articulates the issues, controversies, and problems of the NCLB legislation by describing its emphasis on standardized assessments, its consequences for students, administrators, teachers, schools, and school districts, its impact on the academic achievement gap between majority and minority students, its influence on the field of CTE, and a comparison of legislative objectives with the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act. Concluding the chapter are solutions and recommendations for further research.

BACKGROUND

U.S. federal legislation has influenced educational objectives and ignited school reform since the 1950s (Umpstead, 2008). Historically, U.S. students have not always had equal access or equal rights to an education. In fact, gaining an education in the U.S. was predicated on an individual's race, ability, or gender while individual states were granted control for policy implementation (Hardman & Dawson, 2008). More inclusive educational policies were not crafted until the 14th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution was written, the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s was promulgated, and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1997 was instated. In 1954, the Supreme Court *Brown v. Board of Education* case decision was one of the most profound events in American history, particularly for education (Blanchett, Mumford, & Beachum, 2005). That case determined that education would be equal for all citizens and that segregation in schools denied individuals of their constitutional rights. In addition, the *Brown v. Board of Education* case overturned the *Plessy v. Ferguson* "separate but equal" policy.

During Johnson's administration, Title I of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 was enacted with the intent of providing incentives to motivate states and local school districts to provide services for schools with large groups of educationally and financially disadvantaged students (McDonnell, 2005).

During Reagan's administration, a provocative report entitled *A Nation at Risk* was announced and disseminated by the National Commission on Excellence in Education (NCEE) of 1983 which discussed the condition of education in America (Hardman & Dawson, 2008). This report emphasized the failings of P-12 schools as well as the significance of the federal role in making states and local agencies accountable for student learning. Part of this accountability was in providing states with incentives to increase student course require-

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