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## EFFECTS OF FEDERAL EDUCATION MANDATES

The reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 2001, commonly referred to as No Child Left Behind / NCLB

## EFFECTS OF FEDERAL EDUCATION MANDATES

This research brief explores the history and complexities of measuring **td**

## EFFECTS OF FEDERAL EDUCATION MANDATES

(p.XIV).

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 is seen as the beginning of federal legislative policy having a large impact on the United State educational system. ESEA changed federal aid to education from general aid to the more specific categorical aid. A result of the changes to federal aid was linking aid to other national policy issues such as poverty, defense, and economic growth (Kessinger, 2011). ESEA increased funds for public schor





## EFFECTS OF FEDERAL EDUCATION MANDATES

can take over the deeper work of meaningful change when administrators are faced with challenging mandates (Terry, 2010). Seashore and Robinson (2012) stress the importance of the sensemaking stage in external policy mandate implementation. This is where the administrators understanding of the policy is complete enough that the knowledge can then be a springboard into action within their specific school or context. NCLB implementation had the added challenge of negative media attention and public opinion, although Seashore and Robinson (2012) found that administrators had fairly positive perceptions of state policies.

Beyond compliance, commitment, and capability, as seen in the CCCM framework the administrator's role in implementation was found to hinge on the degree to which there was coherence between the policy and the administrator's leadership values and agenda (Seashore & Robinson, 2012). The administrator has the unique position of knowing specifically the context into which the federal or state policies will be implemented at their school. The administrator then has a responsibility to synthesize the policy mandates with the realities of their own school in order to implement the external mandate more effectively. This makes the role of the building administrator critical in any implementation process.

Analysis of student achievement data is one of the key difficulties in answering the question of how has student achievement been affected by federal mandates. Some of the difficulties are making a clear analysis of student achievement, researchers have cited state and national content standard differences, lack of a consistent measure at the state level of proficiency, no longitudinal assessment data available from all states, and additional state and local efforts towards improvement that make establishing a direct link from student achievement changes to NCLB difficult as common challenges (Terry, 2010).

## EFFECTS OF FEDERAL EDUCATION MANDATES

Dee and Jacob (2010) point out another roadblock to researching the question of student achievement related to NCLB, since all public school students are under the mandates of NCLB there is not a control group from which to isolate NCLB's effects from other forces. The suggestion for getting around this roadblock is to compare data from states that were already implementing accountability standards similar to NCLB to those that did not have that type of accountability policies before NCLB was mandated. Mintrop and Sunderman (2009) add that NCLB changed many states accountability systems to be much more exhaustive and that the data required to be published on student achievement and teacher quality is more disaggregated than the previous state accountability systems. Six years later, Husband and Hunt (2015) are still asking the same question, how has NCLB affected student achievement? The majority of descriptions of the effects of NCLB are negative. However most studies are done on related areas such as standardized testing and school reform with the results being connected to NCLB as conceptual arguments.

In addition to the difficulty with studying NCLB effects on student achievement in research studies due to a clear lack of comparison group, analyzing NCLB and student achievement data is difficult, affected to state level decisions, and open to interpretation in many instances. A simplistic answer to how student achievement was affected by the federal mandate of NCLB is that student test scores on state assessments continue to rise as summarized by Mintrop and Sunderman (2009).

An increase in achievement on statewide tests would logically translate into expected higher levels of achievement on the NAEP as well, which is the only national level metric available. Mintrop and Sunderman (2009), indicated that this was not the case and gains on NAEP were not at the same level as the gains at the state level of testing. This leads to an important point for educators to consider when examining student achievement data and when making decisions based on standardized test data, is it the proficiency level, or is student performance actually changing? As NCLB mandated sanctions against



## EFFECTS OF FEDERAL EDUCATION MANDATES

schools that did not make AYP based on state assessment proficiency data, this incentivized states to not raise state proficiency standards at the risk of more students being considered not proficient if the standards were raised (Petersen & Ackerman, 2015).

## EFFECTS OF FEDERAL EDUCATION MANDATES

policymakers, and parents (Lauen & Gaddis, 2016). Growth models are also subject to the same statistical manipulation as a basic proficiency model so the data may still be inadequate to definitively make decisions upon.

Understanding how student achievement data is calculated and analyzed is a must when making decisions based on the given data. This point is highlighted by Murray (2014) in summarizing many studies which found school superintendents, cite use of data, as the most important strategy in improving student achievement. The need for professional development, opportunities to collaborate with colleagues, and ongoing practice with data interpretation is needed to help educators fully use data to make appropriate decisions about curriculum and instruction (Murray, 2014).

The question persists as to how NCLB has affected student achievement. Dee and Jacob (2010) report that a study from the Center on Education Policy, achievement scores in both reading and math have increased on state assessments and scores have increased similarly but to a smaller degree on the NAEP. The report was specific in stressing that the achievement gains could not necessarily be attributable to NCLB but nonetheless math achievement did increase for 4th and 8th graders. In addition when looking at NAEP data from 4th graders specifically, student achievement growth has slowed since the implementation of NCLB mandates. Additionally student achievement data is reported half a decade later with Breiner (2015) stating that the high-stakes testing movement prompted by NCLB actually showed math achievement progress as measured by the NAEP. Narrowing the achievement gap was one of the goals of NCLB. The achievement gap which did show narrowing during the 1990's did not continue to narrow in the 2000's.

## EFFECTS OF FEDERAL EDUCATION MANDATES

high-stakes accountability systems by teachers and administrators is more negative. Husband and Hunt (2015) found that teachers have a negative or frustrated viewpoint of NCLB as a result of perceived loss of instructional time, professional freedom, and strict mandates. Cobb (2012) focused on new teachers who had gone through much of their own schooling under NCLB mandates and had spent their whole teaching career under the mandates. These new teachers profiled in the study were found to be more likely to want scripted curriculum and relied more heavily on practices that were dictated to them. These teachers operated under the assumption that high test scores equated with improved student learning.

NCLB mandates also generated positive effects in regards to teachers in the areas of professional development. In the era of NCLB the number of highly qualified teachers and professional development opportunities offered to teachers did increase their sense of self-efficacy in teaching reading and math (Husband & Hunt, 2015). As a precursor to NCLB, the standards movement also showed positive effects on student achievement when content standards are defined and implemented. Those standards help to systematize the expectations, accountability, and understanding of learning targets for all stakeholders (Berger, 2000).

Cobb (2012) clearly states that using high stakes testing as a means to control an education system results in the curriculum being narrowed and instructional methods being limited. This narrowing of the curriculum has been shown to impact students in poverty or minority t c 2 students by limiting their choices to include only a curriculum that they will need in order to pass a high-stakes tests (Erskine, 2014). Cobb (2014) found that students not at-risk, those in moregh(1)



## EFFECTS OF FEDERAL EDUCATION MANDATES

what changes are being proposed and how those will affect their organization.

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## EFFECTS OF FEDERAL EDUCATION MANDATES

truly student achievement that is changing or the reporting system that has changed. If the data is not correctly interpreted this can result in making changes unnecessarily or based on false assumptions. Changing standards and changing proficiency scales or rating may in turn produce data that shows an overall decrease in student achievement proficiency numbers but in the end result in higher levels of student achievement or increased rigor. The message is to look more closely at an education system rather than just bottom line numbers.

This brief touches on the effects of federal mandates on curriculum and instruction. This is a topic that could be elaborated upon to create a separate brief. The basics are that increasingly federalized education system decisions about teaching and learning are made by legislators further removed from local school districts. The brief highlights research that shows that curriculum becomes narrowed and instruction less varied as more emphasis is put on proficiency levels and meeting a certain benchmark of achievement. In schools where students are less likely to meet the benchmarks, the curriculum and instruction becomes more narrowed and opportunities for students at those schools becomes more limited. This has implications for MOEC members at all levels in terms of school districts who are examining new curriculum standards and evaluating instruction and for higher education into which those students will enroll to continue their education and as a role in developing pre-service teachers who will then go back into the public school setting.

One of the most important implications from this brief and one having a direct impact on MOEC school districts is the information shared by the author.

## EFFECTS OF FEDERAL EDUCATION MANDATES

the bus) in order to be most effective. This is true when implementing policies at a school. As the research shows personal beliefs of principals can influence mandate implementation, therefore having an administrator that has personal beliefs aligned with an understanding of a particular school's needs will ~~increase~~ increase the likelihood of successful implementation.

The implications of the information from this research brief to MOEC broad in scope. Developing an understanding of history and context helps an education organization to be stronger in that it is armed with past results and an understanding of context of education policy decisions. Having a firm grasp on the nuanced and complicated world of education data will empower MOEC members to have more productive and ultimately more accurate discussions surrounding student achievement data. As the saying goes, knowledge is power, and knowing how data can be presented and what the limits of achievement data are helps to make more informed leaders. The final implication and one of the most powerful is a better understanding of the role and the influence of a building administrator in implementation of mandates. Without structuresol's ll

## EFFECTS OF FEDERAL EDUCATION MANDATES

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## EFFECTS OF FEDERAL EDUCATION MANDATES

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## EFFECTS OF FEDERAL EDUCATION MANDATES

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## EFFECTS OF FEDERAL EDUCATION MANDATES

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