Nick Fox

11/4/10

Paper #5: Issue Story

**The Effects of No Child Left Behind in the Classroom**

 In 2002 the No Child Left Behind Act was passed, changing the way that

public schools would be judged. The No Child Left Behind Act requires each state to create basic skills assessments to be given to all students of a certain grade, if they are to receive federal funding. The benefits of the act have been improved test scores, better accountability among schools, improved quality of education, and a better public perception of the public school system. However, not all of the effects from the act have been positive, as many public school officials will attest.

 Kenya Davis, a 5th grade teacher from Springfield, Illinois appreciates the spirit of the No Child Left Behind Act, but finds that the law has had several negative effects on her profession. “Every year the percentage of students who must meet the state standards for test scores in math and reading goes up, this year it is 85 percent”, Davis said. “That percentage incudes all students, including special education, and if the standards are not met you are put on the state watch list.”

According to Davis, the state watch list makes a school eligible for corrective action, something that both school administrators and teachers hope to avoid. “When a school takes corrective action, it usually is a School Improvement Plan, which outlines what you are going to do to turn your test scores around”, Davis said.

While Ms. Davis has not heard of any such cases in Illinois, she says she is aware of teachers in other states being relocated or even terminated due to underachieving test scores. “The pressure to perform well on the standardized tests designed for the No Child Left Behind Act, has led to a larger focus on math and especially reading in the classroom, often at the expense of subjects like science and social studies”, said Davis. “Other teachers at my school and I are not totally satisfied with the amount of time we get to spend on science and social studies, but it’s important that we get our students prepared for these tests.” Ms. Davis’ concerns bring up an interesting point, is the No Child Left Behind Act inadvertently harming education in public schools by pressuring teachers to spend an inordinate amount of time on math and reading at the expense of other subjects.

Regardless of the criticisms, Davis knows that the No Child Left Behind Act is here to stay, at least for now. “As a teacher, I have to adjust, and figure out what I can do to improve my students reading ability, without sacrificing too much time from other subjects”, Davis said. “We’ve been targeting students and their families, and explaining to them the importance of reading and getting their children to read, not only for the test scores, but because reading is a valuable life tool that everyone needs.”

Despite her many misgivings with the No Child Left Behind Act, Davis recognizes the good that the law does, especially when it comes to the improved reading skills of students. “The more you read the more you improve your vocabulary and you reading comprehension. Having a good vocabulary and reading comprehension skills at their grade level gives students a much better chance at success in the classroom”, Davis said. Davis believes that success with reading in the classroom coupled with positive reinforcement from parents will encourage students to love reading, which in turn will lead to better reading skills, eliminating the need for teachers to spend so much time on the subject in class.

Whatever the solution may be, it is clear that many public school teachers and administrators will have to adjust to the No Child Left Behind Act. Whether reading and math gaining more of a foothold in the classroom over other subjects is a bad thing or not, has also yet to be determined. Is it better to give an elementary school student a well-rounded education, or is it better to focus heavily on important subjects for statewide testing like math and reading? Davis, who has had a couple of years to adjust to the act has an opinion. “I think the No Child Left Behind Act gives teachers too much pressure to push reading and math over other subjects, but it can have positive effects on students as well, so teachers will adjust.”