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ARTICLE

Federal Compensatory Education Policies from Lyndon B. Johnson to Barack H. Obama

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Abstract

This article summarizes and assesses federal K-12 compensatory education policies during the past six decades. It focuses on the centerpiece of that effort, Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. Related programs such as America 2000, Goals 2000, No Child Left Behind, and Every Student Succeeds Act are discussed. It analyzes the increasing use of ambitious federal education goals since the 1990s as well as greater reliance on high-stakes testing. It also considers the role of presidents as well as governors in this process.

Keywords: compensatory K-12 education; national goals; testing students; federal education involvement; presidents and governors

Introduction

The 1960s civil rights movement revealed that many children living in low-income areas lacked equal educational opportunities in elementary and secondary public schools. Federal, state, and local governments tried to improve the schools, yet there were major differences of opinion on what needed to be done and who should be responsible for doing it. For example, there were increased calls for more standardized and rigorous testing of all schoolchildren, yet others opposed excessive testing and objected to more federal involvement in local public schools. In the context of these debates, the sixties ushered in the first of the federal compensatory education programs aiming to level the educational playing field in the US.

Many useful monographs on federal compensatory education programs since the 1960s have been written, but they usually have not analyzed the long-term policies or their effectiveness in helping disadvantaged K-12 students. Some accounts mainly justify or oppose different policy or political points of view rather than provide a more balanced assessment based upon the evidence. Nor have many historians worked closely with policymakers as well as doing extensive primary archival research and using published education policy histories.[1]

[1]On the role of scholars involved with education policymakers, see Frederick M. Hess, ed., *When Research Matters: How Scholarship Influences Education Policy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2008).

My involvement in education history dates back to my early work fifty years ago on colonial and antebellum history. A decade later it expanded to analyzing more recent issues as well as participating in national governmental affairs.[2] In the 1990s I worked with both Republicans and Democrats on a variety of education issues.[3] Several education policymaking organizations commissioned me to analyze their activities, and Congress extended invitations to testify about education research and policies in both the House (1997, 1999, 2000) and Senate (1997, 1999).[4] These opportunities broadened my understanding of education policymaking as well as provided me with unusual access to policymakers' records and personnel. They also helped me to write many of the articles and books about education policies and politics cited in this article, and assisted my efforts to encourage policymakers to consider how historians sometimes can be useful in addressing current problems.[5]

This article was written for a special issue of the *History of Education Quarterly* as a brief overview of Title I for readers who may not be familiar with the developments of the program over time. It also may be helpful in courses about education history that cannot assign the multiple books and articles necessary to cover some of the same issues over the sixty-year period of the program's existence. Over the course of teaching undergraduate or graduate courses on education history and policymaking for the past twenty years, it was difficult to find brief overviews that covered these topics. At the same time, it is also important to acknowledge that this article cannot cover all of the issues nor discuss all of the various interpretations of them.[6]

[2]I was the deputy staff director to the US House Select Committee on Population in 1978 and a regular consultant on population and adolescent pregnancy issues in the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare from 1981 to 1985.

[3]In both the George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton administrations I served as the researcher adviser for the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) on questions of educational research and policy in 1992–93. OERI also hired me as a consultant in 1991 and 1993–95. The Clinton administration appointed me to the congressionally mandated Title I Independent Review Panel for Goals 2000 (1995–2001), and I was reappointed by the George Bush administration to review No Child Left Behind (2003–8).

[4]I wrote agency histories for both the National Assessment Governing Board (1998) and the National Education Goals Panel (1998–2001). The National Governors Association asked me to write a chapter on gubernatorial leadership and K-12 education reforms. In addition, I worked on a variety of other education policy projects such as writing reports or evaluating research studies. In 2001 I was appointed a member of the Bush-Cheney Transition Education Advisory Committee and was asked if I would consider becoming the next OERI assistant secretary (which I declined due to other commitments).

[5]Jack Dougherty, "Conflicting Questions: Why Historians and Policymakers Miscommunicate on Urban Education," in *Clio at the Table: Using History to Inform and Improve Education Policy*, ed. Kenneth K. Wong and Robert Rothman (New York: Peter Lang, 2009), 251–62; Hugh Davis Graham, "The Stunted Career of Policy History: A Critique and an Agenda," *Public Historian* 15, no. 2 (Spring 1993), 15–37; Diane Ravitch and Maris A. Vinovskis, ed., *Learning from the Past: What History Teaches Us about School Reform* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1995); Maris A. Vinovskis, *History and Educational Policymakin*g (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999); Maris A. Vinovskis, "Historians and Educational Policy Research in the United States," in *Handbook of Education Policy Research,* ed. Gary Stykes, et al. (New York: Routledge, 2009), 17–26.

[6]One of the best chapter-length overviews of Title I is by Carl Kaestle, "Federalism and Inequality in Education: What Can History Tell Us?," in Irwin Kirsh and Henry Braun, ed., *The Dynamics of Opportunity in America: Evidence and Perspectives* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2016), 35–96. It provides very useful additional information on aspects of the Title I program that are not covered in this essay.

This analysis examines the expanding role of the federal government in K-12 education during the past six decades. It focuses mainly on the Title I program of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, the centerpiece of the federal assistance effort to distribute funding to schools with large numbers of students from low-income families. It considers the ways educators and policymakers tried to develop and apply more effective means of helping students affected by poverty, transience, poor nutrition, lack of health care, and other disadvantages. It also discusses the growing use of high-stakes testing and specific and measurable standards of academic achievement for K-12 students. And it assesses how much students benefited from increased federal involvement and expansion of education standards and testing. Since the 1990s, major changes have occurred. The federal government and state governors increasingly worked together to develop national education goals, use more rigorous national tests, and hire better-trained teachers. Thus, while I focus the discussion on the Title I program, I consider as well several additional education initiatives such as America 2000, Goals 2000, No Child Left Behind Act, and Every Student Succeeds Act. In order to make the article easier to follow, I have subdivided it by presidential administrations, from Presidents Lyndon B. Johnson to Barack H. Obama. Since the mid-1960s, most presidents as well as many governors have played important roles in developing K-12 federal compensatory programs.

Johnson Administration

Before the 1960s, the federal government played only a small part in helping states and local communities improve their K-12 schools. But the federal role in education expanded after the mid-1960s. Growing concern about poverty as well as the election of Democratic president Lyndon B. Johnson in 1964 set the stage for the "War on Poverty," which included several new federal education programs.[7] Congress passed the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, which created Head Start the following year, one of the most popular Great Society programs.[8] Also that year, Title I of the ESEA of 1965 became the cornerstone of federal funding for low-income elementary and secondary public school students.[9] Supporters argued that Title I not only

[7]Eugene Eidenberg and Roy D. Morey, *An Act of Congress: The Legislative Process and the Making of Education Policy* (New York: Norton, 1969); Carl F. Kaestle and Marshall S. Smith, "The Federal Role in Elementary and Secondary Education, 1940–1980," *Harvard Educational Review* 52, no. 4 (November 1982), 384–408; Diane Ravitch, *The Troubled Crusade: American Education, 1945–1980* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

[8]Andrew Karch, *Early Start: Preschool Politics in the United States* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013); Elizabeth Rose, *The Promise of Preschool: From Head Start to Universal Pre-Kindergarten* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Maris A. Vinovskis, *The Birth of Head Start: Preschool Education Policies in the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Edward Zigler and Susan Muenchow, *Head Start: The Inside Story of America's Most Successful Educational Experiment* (New York: Basic Books, 1992).

[9]Stephan K. Bailey and Edith K. Mosher, *ESEA: The Office of Education Administers a Law* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1968); Hugh Davis Graham, *The Uncertain Triumph: Federal Education Policy in the Kennedy and Johnson Years* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984); Julie Roy Jeffrey, *Education for the Children of the Poor: A Study of the Origins and Implementation of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1978).

would help students living in poverty, but also would reduce the large academic gap between poor children and their more fortunate classmates.[10] The Johnson administration's pledge to win the War on Poverty in the next decade as well as its promise of equal educational opportunities for everyone were laudable, though the prospect of achieving these ambitious goals was unlikely under the circumstances.[11]

Under ESEA the role of federal and state governments in public K-12 education increased, but local control of schools was reduced. The federal government now provided about 8 percent of public school budgets in order to help students from low-income families. It also enhanced the role of states by making them responsible for distributing Title I monies to local school districts.[12]

Title V of ESEA provided funds for hiring staff for state education departments. Writing in 2004, Michael Kirst explained that "despite Washington's greatly enlarged role, perhaps the most striking change in U.S. education in the last forty years has been the growth of centralized state control and the ascendance of governors over school policy in most states. Organizations of local administrators, teachers, and school board members dominated state policy no longer."[13]

During the debates over ESEA there were differences of opinion on the importance of testing requirements for students. Most congressional members were not very interested in evaluating student outcomes. But at the insistence of Senator Robert Kennedy (D-MA), state and local testing of the efficacy of Title I programs was required. He feared that Title I schools might not always use the federal funds to help low-income children as the legislation intended. Therefore, he saw evaluations as a way to ensure that Title I monies were being used properly to educate low-income students.[14]

[10]ESEA is the primary source of federal aid to K-12 education, and Title I has been its largest grant program since 1965. The Title I program changed considerably over time in how the amount of state assistance has been decided and then locally distributed. For example, while initially the funding formula for Title I used Basic Grants, later it later added Concentration Grants, Targeted Grants, and Education Finance Incentive Grants. It will be not possible to explain or discuss this in more detail in this brief essay. Instead, I refer readers to consult the useful 83-page summary by Rebecca R. Skinner and Leah Rosenstiel, "History of the ESEA Title I-A Formulas," *Congressional Research Service Report R44898,* version 4 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2017). https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R44898.

[11]Martha J. Bailey and Sheldon Danziger, ed., *Legacies of the War on Poverty* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2013); Gareth Davies, *From Opportunity to Entitlement: The Transformation and Decline of Great Society Liberalism* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1996); Lawrence J. McAndrews, *The Presidents and the Poor: America Battles Poverty, 1964–2017* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2018); Amity Shlaes, *Great Society: A New History* (New York: HarperCollins, 2019).

[12]Michael W. Kirst, *The Politics of Education at the Local, State and Federal Levels* (Berkeley: McCutchan, 1970); Nicholas A. Masters, Robert H. Salisbury, and Thomas H. Eliot, *State Politics and the Public Schools: An Exploratory Analysis* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964); Arnold F. Shober, *Splintered Accountability: State Governance and Education Reform* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010); Maris A. Vinovskis, "Gubernatorial Leadership and American K-12 Education Reform," in *A Legacy of Innovations: Governors and Public Policy*, ed. Ethan G. Sribnick (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 185–203.

[13]Michael W. Kirst, "Turning Points: A History of American Governance," in *Who's in Charge Here? The Tangled Web of School Governance and Policy*, ed. Noel Epstein (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2004), 28.

[14]Milbrey Wallin McLaughlin, *Evaluation and Reform: The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, Title I* (Cambridge, MA: Ballinger Publishing Company, 1975), 1–15.

Other policymakers questioned Titles I's focus mainly on low-income students. They wanted ESEA instead to be a general source for public school funding. And some feared that federal requirements for local evaluations of Title I was only the prelude to further federal control of local schools. They also were concerned that these assessments would allow comparisons among teachers, schools, and states, which they believed was not only unprofessional, but dangerous.[15]

These mandated local evaluations were difficult to compare because Title I programs and practices differed considerably from each other. As a result, eligible students received a variety of different services, but most included at least the students' removal from some of their regular classes and placement into special remedial programs. The early state and local Title I evaluations often were neither rigorous nor comparable with each other. Moreover, the early results from these assessments were disappointing.[16]

In the early 1960s, US education commissioner Francis Keppel and the country's leading test specialist, Ralph W. Tyler, collaborated to produce K-12 student academic achievement tests with funding mainly from the Carnegie Corporation.[17] The first National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) data collection initiative took place in 1969 with a trial assessment of the aptitude of seventeen-year-olds in the areas of citizenship, science, and writing. By 1972 the federal government had taken over financing and overseeing the NAEP tests. Initially, opponents of state-level comparisons succeeded in restricting reporting, with NAEP results only being reported at four regional levels. But in 1988 state-level mathematical and reading NAEP scores were released. This soon led to the extension of NAEP statewide tests for other subjects.[18]

One of the larger and better Title I assessments in the 1970s was the nationwide Sustaining Effects Study, which investigated 120,000 students from a representative sample of three hundred elementary schools.[19] Project director Launor Carter

[15]Richard A. Dershimer, *The Federal Government and Educational R&D* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1976); Maris A. Vinovskis, "The Changing Role of the Federal Government in Educational Research and Statistics," *History of Education Quarterly* 36, no. 2 (Summer 1996), 111–28.

[16]Geoffrey D. Borman, Samuel C. Springfield, and Robert E. Slavin, ed., *Title I: Compensatory Education at the Crossroads* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2001); Maris A. Vinovskis, "Do Federal Compensatory Education Programs Really Work? A Brief Historical Analysis of Title I and Head Start," *American Journal of Education* 107, no. 3 (May 1999), 187–209.

[17]Morris Finder, *Educating America: How Ralph W. Tyler Taught America to Teach* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004); Lyle Jones and Ingram Olkin, eds., *The Nation's Report Card: Evolution and Perspectives* (Bloomington, IN: Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation, 2004); Maris A. Vinovskis, "History of Testing in the United States: PK-12 Education," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 683 (May 2019), 22–37.

[18]Jones and Olkin, *The Nation's Report Card*; James W. Pellegrino, Lee R. Jones, and Karen J. Mitchell, eds., *Grading the Nation's Report Card Evaluating NAEP and Transforming the Assessment of Educational Progress* (Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 1999); Maris A. Vinovskis, *Overseeing the Nation's Report Card: Evaluating the Creation and Evolution of the National Assessment Governing Board* (Washington, DC: National Assessment Governing Board, 1998); Maris A. Vinovskis, "The Federal Government and the Development of State-Level NAEP Student Assessments," in *A Faithful Mirror: Reflections on the College Board and Education in America*, ed. Michael C. Johanek (New York: College Board, 2001), 271–301.

[19]Launor F. Carter, "The Sustaining Effects Study of Compensatory and Elementary Education," *Educational Researcher* 13, no. 7 (August 1984), 4–13.

found "no demonstrated relationship . . . between the costs of the instruction the students received and changes in academic achievement."[20] About 25 percent of the Title I students were promoted back into typical classes and managed to stay there. Most of the gains were made by the students identified as "high achieving" in the Title I program, but even they did not perform as well as their peers in the typical classrooms. Particularly discouraging was the finding that "that low achieving students did not seem to benefit from the Title I program."[21]

Nixon and Ford Administrations

Republican president Richard M. Nixon was not as involved with domestic policies as he was with foreign affairs. Moreover, when it came to K-12 education, he personally devoted more attention to opposing school busing than determining how to improve the academic skills of low-income students. Nixon supported compensatory education programs such as Head Start and Title I, but worried about the immediate and long-term benefits for children they served. As a result, Nixon called for more education research while opposing the increase of federal education funding until more demonstrably effective programs were available. Nixon called for voluntary national education testing, but insisted that it should be treated as a state and local responsibility rather than a federal initiative.[22]

Congressional Democrats, on the other hand, defended programs such as Title I and Head Start as already well run and effective. Congress passed the bipartisan Comprehensive Child Development Act of 1971, which would have significantly expanded childcare and preschool education, but Nixon successfully vetoed it. Differences of opinion about the formula for distributing Title I funds and other issues delayed the 1974 ESEA reauthorization. Congress finally passed the bill just before Nixon resigned in August 1974 because of the Watergate scandal. His successor, Vice President Gerald R. Ford, signed the reauthorization.[23]

President Ford continued the Nixon administration's elementary and secondary public school policies. He tried to restrain additional federal education spending by opposing two education appropriations, but the Democratic Congress overrode his vetoes. As Lawrence Andrews wrote, "Like Nixon, Ford was largely unsuccessful in transferring federal school programs to the states. Despite broad public support for

[20]Carter, "The Sustaining Effects Study of Compensatory and Elementary Education," 5.

[21]Carter, "The Sustaining Effects Study of Compensatory and Elementary Education," 11.

[22]Sally S. Cohen, *Championing Child Care* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001); Christopher T. Cross, *Political Education: National Policy Comes of Age* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2010); Chester E. Finn Jr., *Education and the Presidency* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 1977); Dean J. Kotlowski, *Nixon's Civil Rights: Politics, Principle, and Policy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001); Lawrence J. McAndrews, *The Era of Education: The Presidents and the Schools, 1965–2001* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006); Daniel P. Moynihan, *The Politics of a Guaranteed Income: The Nixon Administration and the Family Assistance Plan* (New York: Random House, 1973); Gilbert Y. Steiner with Pauline H. Milius, *The Children's Cause* (New York: Brookings Press, 1976).

[23]Cross, *Political Education: National Policy Comes of Age*, 45–60; John Robert Greene, *The Limits of Power: The Nixon and Ford Administrations* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992); Yanek Mieczkowski, *Gerald Ford and the Challenges of the 1970s* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 2005).

the concept and Ford's repeated pleas to 'get moving' on revenue sharing, Congress was reluctant to abandon its newly won control of eight cents of every education dollar."[24]

Carter Administration

Democrat Jimmy E. Carter defeated President Ford and supported the expansion of Head Start as well as ESEA. President Carter also favored voluntary state adoption of national student testing. The 1978 Title I reauthorization now allowed schoolwide projects if at least 75 percent of all the school's students were eligible for Title I participation.[25]

Carter's major contribution to federal education, however, was the closely contested creation of a separate cabinet-level Department of Education in October 1979. This was important because it expanded the federal role in education and made it more visible. But its impact depended to a large degree on whether the Democrats or Republicans controlled the White House and Congress. It also contributed to the national politicization of education issues, which had both positive and negative political effects. Most Democrats supported the new Department of Education and favored more federal involvement in K-12 education. On the other hand, most Republicans continued to oppose the Department of Education and tried to minimize the federal role at state and local levels.[26]

During the 1970s and 1980s, governors also played a larger role in K-12 state and local education. Southern governors were especially concerned about the low economic productivity of their states and believed that substantial improvements in elementary and secondary public schools and testing were needed.[27] Low-stakes testing, consisting of quizzes and exams with no meaningful impact on students' educational outcomes, had been a normal part of K-12 education prior to 1960. Moreover, some states switched to criterion-referenced tests, which reported on how well students had mastered subjects (rather than just comparing students to each other). Depending on how educators use the results of any examination, it can function as a low-stakes or high-stakes test. For example, if a criterion-referenced test is used only to provide general information about how students are performing, with no consequences for anyone, it probably would be categorized as a low-stakes test. On the other hand, if the results are used to determine whether a student will

[24]McAndrews, *The Era of Education*, 36; Bernard J. Firestone and Alexej Ugrinsky, eds., *Gerald R. Ford and the Politics of Post-Watergate America*, vol. 2 (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1993).

[25]Cross, *Political Education: National Policy Comes of Age*, 2nd ed., 56–70; Hugh Davis Graham, "Civil Rights Policy in the Carter Presidency," in *The Carter Presidency Policy Choices in the Post-New Deal Era*, ed. Gary M. Fink and Hugh Davis Graham (Lawrence: University of Kansas, 1998), 202–23; Deanna L. Michael, *Jimmy Carter as Educational Policymaker: Equal Opportunity and Efficiency* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008).

[26]Robert V. Heffernan, *Cabinetmakers: Story of the Three-Year Battle to Establish the U.S. Department of Education* (Lincoln, NE: iuniverse.com, 2001); Beryl A. Radin and Willis D. Hawley, *The Politics of Federal Reorganization: Creating the U.S. Department of Education* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1988).

[27]Paul Manna, *School's In: Federalism and the National Education Agenda* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2006); Vinovskis, "Gubernatorial Leadership and American K-12 Education Reform."

be promoted to the next grade, receive a high school diploma, or be admitted to a competitive high-quality college, the same test becomes a high-stakes test.[28]

Beginning in 1960, testing slowly became more sophisticated, more widely used, and more high-stakes. The first statewide minimum-competency testing program, introduced in 1971, required that students now had to pass an exit exam before receiving a high school diploma. By the end of the decade, thirty-five states had adopted the minimum-competency test program. As Daniel Koretz noted in 2008, "The shift from using tests for information to holding students and educators directly accountable for scores is beyond a doubt the single most important change in the past half century. Test-based accountability has taken varying forms . . . but the basic principle of shaping educational practice by means of accountability to test scores has grown only more central to educational policy in the United States (and in many other nations as well). It is not an exaggeration to say that it is now the cornerstone of American policy."[29]

Reagan Administration

The election of Republican Ronald W. Reagan and a Republican Senate in November 1980 renewed GOP efforts to reduce the federal role in K-12 education. During the campaign, Republicans called for abolishing the Department of Education, but lacked congressional support to do so. Nevertheless, President Reagan continued downsizing the federal government, including the new Department of Education.

In 1981, Congress passed the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act with the aim of reducing the federal regulations of Title I. As a result, Chapter 1 of the ECIA replaced Title I. The program continued supporting services for low-income children, but although both Chapter 1 (formerly Title I) and Head Start survived, many other categorical federal education programs were either terminated or placed into a state block grant (which then made it easier to reduce their overall funding).[30] At the same time, the Reagan administration reduced the staff of the Department of Education as well as dismissed liberal employees to replace them with more conservative ones (especially in the National Institute of Education).[31]

[28]Jay P. Heubert and Robert H. Hauser, ed, *High Stakes Testing for Tracking, Promotion, and Graduation* (Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 1999; Jack Schneider, *Beyond Test Scores: A Better way to Measure School Quality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017); Vinovskis, "History of Testing."

[29]Daniel Koretz, *Measuring Up: What Educational Testing Really Tells Us* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 57–58; Kathryn A. McDermott, *High-Stakes Reform: The Politics of Educational Accountability* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2011); Joseph A. Soares, ed., *The Scandal of Standardized Tests: Why We Need to Drop the SAT & ACT* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2020).

[30]When the Reagan administration and Congress reauthorized ESEA in 1981, the name Title I was changed to Chapter 1, but the program continued in the roughly same manner. During the Clinton administration, however, Chapter 1 was renamed Title I.

[31]Gareth Davies, *See Government Grow: Education Politics from Johnson to Reagan* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2007), 246–75; Kevin R. Kosar, *Ronald Reagan and Education Policy* (Middletown, DE: Studies in Governance and Politics, 2011); Deborah A. Verstegen and David L. Clark, "The Diminution in Federal Expenditures for Education during the Reagan Administration," *Phi Delta Kappan* 70, no. 2 (October 1988), 124–38.

Reflecting state and national concerns about the adequacy of American schools, the new Department of Education secretary Terrel H. Bell appointed a special panel of experts to assess the state of education in America.[32] In 1983 the panel issued its widely publicized report, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative of Educational Reform*. In language that has now become classic, the report complained that "if an unfriendly power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war. As it stands, we have allowed this to happen to ourselves."[33] Education and history scholars such as Marshall S. Smith and Carl F. Kaestle stated in the early 1980s that "after almost two decades of interventions the Title I program stands primarily as a symbol of national concerns for the poor rather than a viable response to their needs."[34]

The publication of *A Nation at Risk* and other early 1980s education reports "helped launch the first wave of educational reforms that focused on expanding high school graduation requirements, establishing minimum-competency tests, and issuing merit pay for teachers. While many states and local school districts responded positively to the various recommendations by increasing graduation requirements and bolstering the academic course offerings in schools, many policymakers were disappointed by the lack of improvements in student achievement scores."[35]

Secretary Bell in 1984 began the widely publicized "wall charts," which used controversial indicators such as SAT scores to rank-order states according to student educational achievement.[36] Many governors and the National Governors Association (NGA) already had been using statewide tests as part of their education reforms. Some governors publicized their statewide student academic achievement scores during the 1970s and 1980s. States that did not want to be compared to other states opposed the use or release of statewide testing information. In 1986 NGA published its widely circulated report, *Time for Results: The Governors' 1991 Report on Education*, which called for state-level goals and better reporting of the results. Tennessee governor Alexander Lamar called for "some old-fashioned horse-trading. We'll regulate less, if schools and school districts will produce better results."[37]

In April 1988, the Reagan administration and Congress almost unanimously reauthorized ESEA. The new legislation brought sweeping changes to Chapter 1. It called for more attention to improving both the basic and "higher-order" academic training of eligible students. It also ended the Republican Party's retrenchment of federal support for education during the 1980s. States and local schools were allowed

[32]Originally, Bell proposed that President Reagan announce and appoint the panel. When Reagan was unwilling, Bell decided to do so himself as the secretary of education. Terrel H. Bell, *The Thirteenth Man: A Reagan Cabinet Memoir* (New York: Free Press, 1988).

[33]National Commission on Excellence in Education, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1983), 5; Maris A. Vinovskis, *From a Nation at Risk to No Child Left Behind* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2009), 10–20.

[34]Kaestle and Smith, "The Federal Role in Elementary and Secondary Education, 1940–1980," 400.

[35]Maris A. Vinovskis, *The Road to Charlottesville: The 1989 Education Summit* (Washington, DC: National Education Goals Panel, 1999), 11.

[36]Alan L. Ginsburg, Jay Noell, and Valena White Plisko, "Lessons from the Wall Chart," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 10, no. 1 (March 1988), 1–12.

[37]National Governors Association, *Time for Results: The Governors' 1991 Report on Education* (Washington, DC: National Governors Association, 1986), 3.

more flexibility in the use of Chapter 1 funds. At the same time, the new law required strict accountability and evidence that Chapter 1 recipients improve more than comparable students without such assistance.[38]

George H. W. Bush Administration

Vice President George H. W. Bush had not been active in education affairs before 1988. But during his presidential campaign of that year, he emphasized the importance of K-12 education, in part to differentiate himself somewhat from the previous Reagan administration.[39]

Historians have not paid much attention to how the Bush administration and the Democrats actually drafted the National Education Goals or how they set such ambitious and unrealistic objectives, which caused difficulties later. Rather than carefully considering the pros and cons of various options, the White House assigned it to the Department of Education. The task was then simultaneously given to two agencies: the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) and the Planning and Evaluation Service (PES). OERI and PES worked cooperatively but also competed with each other, developing option papers and background information for the White House. Similar to many other such government projects and documents, more attention was paid to the how the goals appeared to the public and other policymakers than what carrying out the stated promises might require.[40]

President Bush and the National Governors Association, led by Arkansas governor Bill Clinton, held an unprecedented education summit at Charlottesville, Virginia, in September 1989. The participants agreed that the president and the governors would work together to develop national goals by early 1990. Their joint statement said that the task was "to develop an ambitious, realistic set of performance goals. . . . By performance we mean goals that will, if achieved, guarantee that we are internationally competitive." They concluded by stating that "as elected chief executives, we expect to be held accountable for progress in meeting the new national goals, and we expect to hold others as accountable as well. . . . The time for rhetoric is past; the time for performance is now."[41]

In February 1990 President Bush and the nation's governors established the National Education Goals. They were even more ambitious than those discussed earlier at the Charlottesville Education Summit:

Goal 1: By the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn.
Goal 2: By the year 2000, the high school graduation rate will increase to at least 90 percent.

[38]Congressional Quarterly, *Congressional Quarterly, Almanac*, 88th Cong., 2nd Sess., vol. 44 (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1989), 330–37; Sam Stringfield, "Introduction to the Special Issue on Chapter 1 Policy and Evaluation," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 13, no. 4 (Winter 1991), 325–27; Deborah A. Verstegen and Pat Anthony, "Is There a Federal Role in Education Reform?," *Journal of Education Finance* 14, no. 1 (1988), 30–56.

[39]Charles Kolb, *White House Daze: The Unmaking of Domestic Policy in the Bush Years* (New York: Free Press, 1994).

[40]Vinovskis, *From a Nation at Risk to No Child Left Behind*, 10–20.

[41]Vinovskis, *The Road to Charlottesville,* 40.

Goal 3: By the year 2000, American students will leave grades four, eight, and twelve having demonstrated competency in challenging subject matter including English, mathematics, science, history, and geography.

Goal 4: By the year 2000, U.S. students will be the first in the world in science and mathematics achievement.

Goal 5: By the year 2000, every adult American will be literate and possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

Goal 6: By the year 2000, every school in America will be free of drugs and violence and will offer a disciplined environment conductive to learning.[42]

The six National Education Goals were very ambitious and unlikely to be reached in a decade. Yet they continued to be used in subsequent reforms, including America 2000, the long-range educational strategy the Bush administration publicized in 1991; Goals 2000, the Educate America Act that Bill Clinton signed into law in 1994 (including two additional national goals put forward by Congress); and No Child Left Behind (NCLB), which George W. Bush signed into law in 2002. And policymakers pledged themselves to be held accountable for reaching the goals.[43]

While policymakers agreed on the need for improving American education, they disagreed on how to reach these objectives. Most Democrats, and even some Republicans, were satisfied with existing federal programs and did not see the need for additional programs. Instead, they favored increased funding for the recently reauthorized Chapter 1.[44]

President Bush, however, was not satisfied with the existing programs. He appointed former Tennessee governor Lamar Alexander as the Secretary of Education and introduced a new package of education initiatives, "America 2000," in April 1991. America 2000 was based upon the six National Education Goals and mandated states to develop curriculum standards in five core subjects: mathematics, science, English, history, and geography. It called for voluntary examinations for the fourth, eighth, and twelfth grades in those subjects. It also proposed new American model schools and called for establishing America 2000 states and communities. America 2000 also called for the funding of parent-choice programs for both private and public schools, which was the most controversial part of the GOP package for Democrats.[45]

[42]These goals were publicly released by the White House Office of the Press Secretary on February 26, 1990. The Republicans tried to commit to no additional details beyond the goals, but at the insistence of the Democrats, between two and five objectives also were listed for each goal. These objectives have been ignored or forgotten by most people.

[43]President Bush and the nation's governors jointly created the bipartisan National Education Goals Panel (NEGP) on July 31, 1990. It was terminated in April 2002. NEGP was created to oversee the National Education Goals and to help develop ways of researching them. For more details about those goals and the operation of NEGP, see Vinovskis, *From a Nation at Risk to No Child Left Behind*, 10–51.

[44]Patrick J. McGuinn, *No Child Left Behind and the Transformation of Federal Educational Policy, 1965–2005* (Lawrence: University of Kansas, 2006); Vinovskis, *From a Nation at Risk to No Child Left Behind*, 10–51.

[45]John F. Jennings, *Why National Standards and Tests? Politics and the Quest for Better Schools* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1998); Vinovskis, *From a Nation at Risk to No Child Left Behind*, 10–51.

Anticipating the 1992 presidential election, Democrats developed their own education reform package that resembled parts of GOP's America 2000. It stressed high academic standards, aligned with the curriculum, and used appropriate assessments. But neither party was willing to help pass its opponent's proposal. Therefore Bush used his executive powers to implement parts of America 2000 and encouraged voluntary state and local participation. Under difficult circumstances, the Bush administration succeeded in persuading forty-four states and 2,300 communities to adopt the six national goals. The Republicans also supported the creation of the New American Schools Development Corporation project, which raised private money to fund a small number of practice-oriented replicable models.[46]

Clinton Administration

Following the election of William J. Clinton and a Democratic Congress, policymakers and educators expected a quick reauthorization of Chapter 1. But the Clinton administration also insisted on a new approach to education reforms, including some parts of America 2000. Disappointing results from a recent Chapter 1 assessment suggested more funding might not be sufficient to enable the students eligible under the newly renamed Title 1 to catch up with their more fortunate counterparts.[47] President Clinton called for standards-based, systemic education reforms and named the new initiative Goals 2000. The Clinton administration acknowledged the current program's shortcomings. This was a profound change—just four years earlier there had been a consensus among many Democratic and some Republican legislators on the seemingly proven effectiveness of the previously named Chapter 1.[48]

In 1990, 1992, and 1993, Senator William V. Roth (R-DE) introduced legislation in the Senate requiring federal agencies to develop performance standards and use them to measure and account for progress on specific programs. The Senate Committee Report stated, "Public confidence in the institutions of American government is suffering from a perception that those institutions are not working well. . . . A recent public opinion poll . . . shows that Americans, on average, believe that as much as forty-eight cents out of every Federal tax dollar is wasted. . . . The Committee shares the public's frustrations with waste, inefficiency, and ineffectiveness in Federal programs."[49]

With strong bipartisan support in August 1993, the Government Performance and Results Act (Public L. 103-62) was signed into law as part of the Clinton administration's plan "to reinvent government." Government agencies were to develop five-year

[46]Jeffrey E. Mirel, *The Evolution of the New American Schools: From Revolution to Mainstream* (Washington, DC: Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, 2001); Vinovskis, *From a Nation at Risk to No Child Left Behind*, 10–51.

[47]National Assessment of Chapter 1 Independent Review Panel, *Reinventing Chapter 1: Executive Summary* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1993).

[48]As mentioned earlier, Clinton renamed Chapter 1, reverting back to its earlier name, Title I. John F. Jennings, ed. *National Issues in Education: Goals 2000 and School to Work* (Bloomington: Phi Delta Kappa International, 1995); Vinovskis, *From a Nation at Risk to No Child Left Behind*, 56–75.

[49]US Congress, Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs, "Government Performance and Results Act of 1993," Report No. 103–58, 103rd Cong., 1st Sess., June 15, 1993 (Washington, DC: US Government Printing, 1993), 2.

strategic plans, annual performance plans, and evaluate annually the success or failure of the agency to meet its goals. The government's initial step was to select ten agencies in fiscal year 1994–1996 to deliver reports to the Office of Management and the Budget (OMB). OMB was then required to submit a government-wide performance plan with the annual budget. While most education historians and other scholars did not pay much attention to this legislation initially, it has become more useful as it has been developed.[50]

Most Democrats and Republicans agreed with much of the proposed Goals 2000 package, but they disagreed on the federal government's role in K-12 education. Liberal House Democrats also wanted federally funded opportunity-to-learn standards to help low-income students reach the goals. Yet Republicans opposed opportunity-to-learn standards as too expensive and threatened to oppose Goals 2000 as well as the reauthorization of Chapter 1. Republicans called for more state and local education control and less federal involvement.[51]

A bipartisan compromise was reached and Goals 2000 was passed in April 1994; it included provisions for rigorous state accountability systems as well as a commitment to reach the goals.[52] Also, Chapter 1, which now included major components from the Goals 2000 bill, was reauthorized six months later as the Improving America's Schools Act with the revived name of Title I. Key provisions of the new legislation, such as the development by states of a rigorous accountability system, however, were not scheduled to be completed until 2001—just after Clinton would finish his second term in office.[53]

Unexpected GOP victories in the 1994 midterm congressional elections derailed the Clinton education reforms. House Republicans now tried to repeal Goals 2000, dismantle the Department of Education, and reduce federal education funding. At first, it appeared that House Speaker Newt Gingrich and his allies might succeed in reversing federal involvement in education. But President Clinton and congressional Democrats, with some support from moderate Senate Republicans, rallied to save the Department of Education, protect Goals 2000, and reduce education cuts. The strong GOP opposition and disappointing student test scores, however, persuaded the Clinton administration to quietly minimize Goals 2000. As part of Clinton's successful 1996 reelection strategy, he proposed small-scale initiatives such as hiring one hundred thousand new teachers, creating after-school programs, and reducing class sizes.[54]

[50]Clinton T. Brass, *Changes to the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA): Overview of the New Framework of Products and Processes*, Congressional Research Service, Report No. R42379 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2012).

[51]Jesse H. Rhodes, *An Education in Politics: The Origin and Evolution of No Child Left Behind* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012).

[52]On systemic reforms in the Clinton administration, see Jennifer A. O'Day and Marshall S. Smith, "Systematic Reform and Educational Opportunity," in *Designing Coherent Education Policy: Improving the System*, ed. Susan H. Fuhrman (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1993), 250–312; Maris A. Vinovskis, "An Analysis of the Concept and Uses of Systemic Educational Reform," *American Educational Research Journal* 33, no. 1 (Spring 1996), 53–85.

[53]Diane Ravitch, *National Standards in American Education: A Citizen's Guide* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1995); Vinovskis, *From a Nation at Risk to No Child Left Behind*, 56–75.

[54]Elizabeth H. DeBray, *Politics, Ideology, and Education: Federal Policy during the Clinton and Bush Administrations* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2006); Manna, *School's In*; Vinovskis, *From a Nation at Risk to No Child Left Behind*, 56–75.

Goals 2000 and the Title I program were scheduled to expire in 1999. Democrats supported renewing the existing education reforms.[55] Republicans, on the other hand, pointed to the discouraging NAEP scores during the 1990s. The GOP claimed that standard-based reforms by themselves were not helping disadvantaged youth sufficiently, and instead called for more flexibility in how federal funds could be distributed at state and local levels.[56]

The Office of the Under Secretary of Planning and Evaluation Service issued its final report on the Title I program in 1999, finding mixed results. It stated that evaluation of "the implementation and impact of Title I . . . finds promising results as well as continuing challenges in carrying out reform. . . . An examination of trends in the performance of students in the nation's highest-poverty public schools, as well as progress of the lowest achieving students shows positive gains in reading and math performance since the reauthorization of Title I." Despite these gains, the report stated, "while the performance of students in high-poverty schools is improving, they remain much further behind than their peers in meeting basic standards of performance in both reading and math."[57]

The congressionally mandated Independent Review Panel report, which advised the Department of Education on evaluations of Goals 2000 and other ESEA programs, had produced similar findings. It stated that the "overall picture of student achievement today is a somewhat encouraging one: on average today's schoolchildren have made gains in mathematics and are holding steady or may be improving in reading. . . . Despite some closing of the achievement gap in some subjects and grades, the achievement of students in high-poverty schools remains too low, and still falls well short of national and state goals."[58]

Finally, the Clinton administration sought to reauthorize Title I, but dropped its support of Goals 2000. Republican victories in the 1994 midterm elections and partisan hostility to Goals 2000 made it more difficult to defend the program as President Clinton faced the 1996 reelection. Critics also continued challenging the idea of more stringent federal regulations for state and local schools as well as more national tests. The 106th Congress allowed Goals 2000 to lapse quietly. Several small components of ESEA were changed, but the larger ESEA legislation (including Title I) was extended routinely for another year.[59]

Earlier, the first President Bush and the nation's governors had agreed to reach specific national education goals by the year 2000 and promised to hold policymakers accountable for reaching them. So what happened when the year 2000 arrived? None

[55]Lynn Olson, "An Unusual Alliance Presents United Front on Title I Revisions," *Education Week*, Feb. 10, 1999.

[56]Chester E. Finn, "Getting Serious about Schools," *Weekly Standard*, Jan. 25, 1999, 27–30; Marvin H. Kosters and Brent D. Mast, *Closing the Education Gap: Is Title I Working?* (Washington, DC: AEI Press, 2003).

[57]US Department of Education, Office of the Under Secretary of Planning and Evaluation Service, *Promising Results, Continuing Challenges, The Final Report of the National Assessment of Title I* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1999), 181, 183.

[58]Independent Review Panel, *Measured Progress: Report of the Independent Review Panel on the Evaluation of Federal Education Legislation* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office), 6, 8.

[59]Vinovskis, *From a Nation at Risk to No Child Left Behind,* 56–109.

of the national education goals had been reached—a very disappointing result. And it was largely unacknowledged. Most Democrats and Republicans were now silent about the failure to reach the goals, lest they themselves or their parties be held responsible for not reaching them.[60]

George W. Bush Administration

President Clinton had soundly defeated Senator Bob Dole (R-KS) in 1996; and with the domestic economy now showing strength, Democrats believed that Vice President Al Gore would easily replace Clinton as president. However, the Republicans thwarted these plans by turning to a candidate who attracted both conservatives and moderates—Texas governor George W. Bush. Stressing improving early reading instruction, Bush called for a revised Title I program. Lest the Democrats once again outflank the GOP on the education issue, candidate Bush and the congressional Republicans supported large increases in federal K-12 spending. And Republicans neutralized much of the Democrats' normal electoral advantage on education by abandoning, at least temporarily, some of the previous conservative GOP policies.[61]

President Bush made education one of his top domestic priorities. His proposals built upon America 2000, Goals 2000, and his experiences as Texas governor. Less than two weeks after his inauguration, Bush announced his No Child Left Behind (NCLB) proposal, which was similar in some ways to Goals 2000. Previously, Democrats were unwilling to penalize states or local school districts that failed to comply with the mandated federal requirements. Now many Republicans and even some Democrats wanted stronger standards and holding states and teachers accountable for improving student test scores.

During the protracted negotiations over the No Child Left Behind legislation, Bush abandoned traditional GOP issues such as public funding of private school vouchers. And he continued accepting Democratic proposals for higher federal education budgets. Both Democrats and Republicans made several concessions, and the revised NCLB won nearly 90 percent support in both the House and Senate in January 2002.[62]

While NCLB was similar in some ways to the Goals 2000 framework, it differed in other ways. States receiving Title I money needed to develop rigorous academic standards, and all students had to be at least proficient in reading and math within twelve years. Students were to be tested in reading and math annually from grades three through eight, and again once in high school. Test results were to be reported in the aggregate, but also divided into categories such as race and economic status to identify schools where high overall grade averages hide pockets of failing students. Schools had to make adequate yearly progress toward the twelve-year deadline of

[60]Vinovskis, *From a Nation at Risk to No Child Left Behind*, 56–109.

[61]James W. Ceaser and Andrew E. Busch, *The Perfect Tie: The True Story of the 2000 Presidential Election* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001).

[62]DeBray, *Politics, Ideology, and Education*; Paul E. Peterson and Martin R. West, eds., *No Child Left Behind? The Politics and Practice of School Accountability* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2003); Jesse H. Rhodes, *An Education in Politics*; Vinovskis, *From a Nation at Risk to No Child Left Behind*., 85–135.

universal proficiency. And the legislation imposed a series of corrective actions on schools and districts failing to make adequate yearly progress for two or more consecutive years. Moreover, NCLB set new higher minimum professional standards for teachers and paraprofessionals and required all teachers to be certified as "highly qualified" by the 2002–2003 school year. The legislation also called for better, scientifically based education research.[63]

At first there was optimism that NCLB would succeed. The actual implementation and operation of NCLB, however, failed to live up to the new requirements. Evaluations showed only limited student educational improvements. The National Research Council, which examined fifteen "test-based incentive programs, including the large-scale policies of NCLB, its predecessors and state high school exit exams . . . [concluded that] test-based incentive programs . . . have not increased student achievement enough to bring the United States close to levels of the highest achieving countries elsewhere."[64] Other analysts also doubted that achieving the goal of all children being proficient in math and reading by the school year 2013–2014 was possible.[65]

The Department of Education's 2007 final report on the *National Assessment of Title I* stated that although the number of Title I participants had tripled and overall funding increased by 35 percent over the previous seven years, achievement results fell short of the program's stated goals. For both state assessments and NAEP results, achievement trends through 2004 and 2005 were positive overall for key subgroups. Yet on the basis of trend data for thirty-six states, the report concluded that most states still would not meet the goal of 100 percent proficiency in reading or mathematics by 2013–2014.[66]

Obama Administration

During the 2008 election cycle, the public did not view school reform as a major issue, neither in the primaries or the general election.[67] Senator Barack H. Obama (D-IL) had always considered education as one of the most important ways to help

[63]Scott Franklin Abernathy, *No Child Left Behind and the Public Schools* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007); Frederick M. Hess and M. J. Petrilli, *No Child Left Behind Primer* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006); Lorraine M. McDonnell, "No Child Left Behind and the Federal Role in Education: Evolution or Revolution?," *Peabody Journal of Education* 80, no. 2 (2005), 19–38; Vinovskis, *From a Nation at Risk to No Child Left Behind*, 85–135.

[64]National Research Council, *Incentives and Test-Based Accountability in Education* (Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 2011), 4.

[65]For example, see Adam Gamoran, ed., *Standards-Based Reform and the Poverty Gap: Lessons for No Child Left Behind* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2007); Michael A. Rebell and Jessica R. Wolff, eds., *NCLB at the Crossroads: Reexamining the Federal Effort to Close the Achievement Gap* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2009); Diane Ravitch, *The Death and Life of the Great School System: How Testing and Choice Are Undermining Education* (New York: Basic Books, 2016).

[66]US Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, *Final Report on the National Assessment of Title I: Summary of Key Findings* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 2007), https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pdf/20084014_rev.pdf.

[67]Some analysts initially believed that education would be a major factor in the 2008 election, but that did not happen. Jeffrey E. Mirel and Maris A. Vinovskis, "Perennial Problems with Federal Education Reform in the United States," *Politique Américaine* 15, no. 3 (Winter, 2009), 11–34.

children from low-income families.[68] His rival for the Democratic nomination, Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-NY), now denounced NCLB and promised to end the program if elected.[69] Obama agreed that NCLB was underfunded, needed a better accountability system, less excessive testing, and fewer penalties for failure to reach the goals. But Obama praised some of NCLB's goals, such as recruiting high-quality teachers, and he called for additional pay based upon their performance.[70] In the final November election Obama easily defeated his more conservative Republican opponent, Senator John McCain (R-AZ).[71]

The United States experienced a severe domestic economic crisis, which worsened in the second half of 2008. As a result, President Obama focused mainly on restoring the economy.[72] Yet in his first joint address to Congress on February 24, 2009, Obama designated education as one of his top three priorities.[73] Obama nominated Arne Duncan, CEO of Chicago Public Schools, as US secretary of education. Duncan earlier praised NCLB's goal of improving the academic performance of all children, but criticized its inadequate funding and excessive testing.[74]

In February 2009 Congress passed the $787 billion American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (ARRA). Almost $100 billion of that money was allocated for education. This provided the Department of Education with more resources than had been available during its past four decades. Most of that K-12 education money, $53.6 billion, went to states to supplement the shortfall in state and local tax revenue resulting from the crisis.[75]

Five billion dollars was set aside from the ARRA fund for the Department of Education as a discretionary fund for "state incentive grants." Operating with $4.35 billion of that fund, the Obama administration announced on July 24, 2009, the Race to the Top (RTT) grant competition for the next two years. This was an unprecedented attempt to encourage states and the District of Columbia to compete for federal grants through innovative statewide K-12 education reforms. In order to win one of the few available large grants, states had to address the administration's priorities.[76] In mid-November the Department of Education issued the final rules

[68]William Hayes, *What's Ahead in Education? An Analysis of the Policies of the Obama Administration* (Plymouth, UK: Rowman and Littlefield, 2010).

[69]Earlier she had supported NCLB, but now sided with the teacher unions, which opposed the program as ineffective and troublesome for teachers. Vinovskis, *From a Nation at Risk to No Child Left Behind*, 171–204.

[70]Hayes, *What's Ahead in Education?*; Robert Maranto and Michael Q. McShane, *President Obama and Education Reform: The Personal and the Political* (New York: Palgrave, 2012).

[71]Dan Balz and Haynes Johnson, *The Battle for America 2008: The Story of an Extraordinary Election* (New York: Penguin Group, 2009); William J. Crotty, ed., *Winning the Presidency: 2008* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2009).

[72]On the economic challenges, see President Obama's interesting memoir, Barack Obama, *A Promised Land* (New York: Crown, 2020). Unfortunately, he does not discuss much about his involvement with reforming K-12 education.

[73]Alyson Klein, "Stimulus Scale Seen as Issue: K-12 Funding Boost Could Shift Federal-State Balance of Power," *Education Week*, Feb. 11, 2009, 18–19.

[74]Arne Duncan, *How Schools Work: An Inside Account of Failure and Success from One of the Nation's Longest-Serving Secretaries of Education* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2018), 51–52, 74–81.

[75]Cross, *Political Education: Setting the Course for State and Federal Policy*, 2nd ed., 155–59.

[76]Maranto and McShane, *President Obama and Education Reform*; Patrick McGuinn, "Incentives and Inducements: The Feds Fight Federalism," in *Bush-Obama School Reform: Lessons Learned*, ed.

for the RTT competition, listing more than thirty criteria on which the applications would be assessed. Among the three top criteria were the state's education reform agenda, the local school district's willingness to participate, and teachers and principal evaluations based in large part on student performance. The first round of RTT applications were due in mid-January 2010; another round would be accepted by June 1 for states that did not apply initially or did not win in the first round.[77]

There were strong disagreements about RTT. For example, Joanne Weiss, former chief of staff to Secretary Duncan, was supportive, while Frederick M. Hess, director of education policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute, was more critical.[78] Looking back five years later, Weiss concluded that "on balance and despite its imperfections, Race to the Top spurred important work that had a significant impact, both in states that won RTT grants and in states that did not. All 46 state applicants and D.C. developed comprehensive education agendas."[79] Hess, on the other hand, cautioned that "public imagination is often captured by the *fact* of a federal program, but what matters in a realm as complex as schooling is how programs *actually work*. . . . Yet, five years on, even a well-wisher can conclude that the Race to the Top may have done as much to retard as to advance its laudable goals."[80]

In a later study of the effects of RTT on education policymaking, political scientist William G. Howell was impressed, concluding that "the surge of post-2009 policy activity constitutes a major achievement for the Obama administration. With a relatively small amount of money, little formal constitutional authority in education, and without the power to unilaterally impose his will upon state governments, President Obama managed to jump-start policy processes that had languished for years in state governments around the country. When it comes to domestic policymaking, past presidents often accomplished a lot less with a lot more."[81]

Much of the Obama administration's education reform efforts focused on the new RTT programs. Yet it was still necessary to oversee NCLB, an inherited policy program that the administration inherited and supported.[82] Many people, including President Obama and Secretary Duncan, acknowledged that some changes were needed, but they also wanted to maintain NCLB's state student achievement standards as well as rigorous requirements for being called a highly qualified teacher—someone who holds at least a bachelor's degree, has full state certification, and demonstrates competence in every core academic subject they teach. Other

Frederick M. Hess and Michael Q. McShane (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2018), 51–68; William G. Howell, "Results of President Obama's Race to the Top," *Education Next* 15, no. 4 (Fall 2015), 58–66.

[77]Michelle McNeil, "Starting Gun Sounds for 'Race to the Top,'" *Education Week*, Nov. 18, 2009), 1, 18–19.

[78]"What Did Race to the Top Accomplish? Education Next Talks with Joanne Weiss and Frederick M. Hess," *Education Nex*t 15, no. 4 (Fall 2015), 51–56.

[79]"What Did Race to the Top Accomplish?," 56.

[80]"What Did Race to the Top Accomplish?," 56.

[81]Howell, "Results of President Obama's Race to the Top," 66.

[82]Cross, *Political Education: Setting the Course for State and Federal Policy*, 2nd ed., 158; Jonathan Zimmerman, "Education in the Age of Obama: The Paradox of Consensus," in *The Presidency of Barak Obama: The First Historical Assessment*, ed., Julian Zelizer (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), 111–26.

Democrats and some Republicans, however, were angry that basically the same Bush program might be reauthorized. There was also growing opposition to excessive testing and the resultant penalties for the increasing number of schools projected to be unable to reach the ambitious NCLB goals by 2014. Much of the public as well as many policymakers were also disappointed with the limited progress achieved under NCLB.[83]

The Obama administration was unable to persuade Congress to provide funding for additional RTT projects.[84] Without more RTT financial aid, President Obama and Secretary Duncan looked for other ways to persuade states to adopt the administration's education reforms. As only a few states had any hopes for reaching the mandated 2014 goals, many states sought waivers from the Department of Education. Under the 2001 NCLB law the Secretary of Education had authority to grant waivers, but Duncan "opted for something much grander, granting waivers only on the condition that states promise to enact a list of Obama's priorities. Duncan's conditions—including federally preferred teacher-evaluation systems and the adoption of the Common Core or a federally approved alternative—has no statutory basis."[85] As a result, many Republicans and Democrats were frustrated and supported the unexpected passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) on December 10, 2015.[86] President Obama called it a "Christmas miracle."[87] While some key Republicans had initially praised the appointment of Duncan, now Senator Lamar Alexander (R-TN) and others called for his replacement.[88]

At last, after more than thirteen years, Congress reauthorized ESEA as ESSA, replacing NCLB for K-12 students. Some aspects of NCLB were maintained, but others were changed or abandoned. Annual standardized tests continued between the third and eighth grades, and once during high school. States now were to set challenging high academic standards (at three levels of achievement) in at least mathematics, English language arts, and science for all public schools and their students. Unlike NCLB, ESSA reduced many of the previous prescriptive accountability goals, including school evaluation metrics, timelines, school interventions, and the federal definitions for a "qualified" or "effective" teacher. And ESSA did not specify the type of interventions necessary for dealing with low performing schools. Data requirements about student academic performance and school quality were expanded and shared with the public. ESSA also prohibited the federal government from

[83]Frederick M. Hess and Max Eden, eds., *The Every Student Succeeds Act: What it Means for Schools, Systems, and States* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2010); Robert Maranto, Michael Q. McShane, and Evan Rhinesmith, *Education Reform in the Obama Era: The Second Term and the 2016 Election* (New York: Palgrave, 2016).

[84]Frederick M. Hess, "The Real Obama Education Legacy," *National Affairs* 25, no. 49 (Fall 2015), 3–19.

[85]Hess, "The Real Obama Education Record," 7.

[86]Jeffrey R. Henig, David M. Houston, and Melissa Arnold Lyon, "From NCLB to ESSA: Lessons Learned or Politics Reaffirmed?," in Hess and Eden, *The Every Student Succeeds Act,* 29–42; Alyson Klein, "How ESSA Passed: The Inside Scoop," in Hess and Eden, *The Every Student Succeeds Act,* 43–58; Maranto, McShane, and Rhinesmith, *Education Reform in the Obama Era*; Zimmerman, "Education in the Age of Obama."

[87]Andrew Ujifusa, Evie Blad, and Daarel Burnette II, "ESSA Voices: The Every Student Succeeds Act, Four Years Later," *Education Week*, December 9, 2019.

[88]Klein, "How ESSA Passed," 57.

attempting to influence, incentivize, or coerce state adoption of any academic standards or assessments. While RTT and the Obama administration significantly increased the federal role in K-12 education, ESSA reduced it and allowed more state leeway.[89]

The initial responses to ESSA were mixed. Martin West, then an associate professor at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and a former senior education adviser to the GOP in the US Senate, saw ESSA as a political success that achieved a more balanced role for states and the federal government.[90]

Chad Aldeman, who served at high levels in the Obama administration's Department of Education, complained about the new law's shortcomings. ESSA gave more power to states to develop their own standards and accountability systems, which could confuse the public about schools and student achievements. ESSA also allowed states the option of only identifying the bottom 5 percent of schools receiving federal funds, thereby leaving the rest without any mandatory pressure to improve.[91] Adelman believed teacher quality could also suffer as "it allows, but does not require, states and districts to spend federal funds on improving teacher and principal evaluation systems. It requires states and districts to enact plans to ensure students have equitable access to 'highly qualified' or effective teachers, but it has no accountability mechanisms to make sure those things happen."[92]

Both the Bush and Obama administrations faced growing doubts about test-based K-12 accountability. Some education experts continued supporting these tests. Others questioned their ability to help all children catch up with their classmates. They also pointed to the damages that could result from using high-stakes assessments for schools, teachers, and students. Education professor Daniel Koretz, for example, supported using appropriate, limited education testing throughout both administrations; but he rejected the misuse of narrow, high-stakes tests. In his sobering summary of the costs and benefits of the recent reforms from 1992 to 2015 he stated:

> It's no exaggeration to say that the costs of test-based accountability have been huge. Instruction has been corrupted on a broad scale. Large amounts of instructional time now are siphoned off into test-prep activities that at best waste time and at worst defraud students and their parents. Cheating has become widespread. The public has been deceived into thinking that achievement has dramatically improved and that achievement gaps have narrowed. Many students are subjected to severe stress, not only during testing but also for long periods leading up to it. Educators have been evaluated in misleading and in some cases utterly absurd ways. Careers have been disrupted and in some ended. Educators have been indicted and even imprisoned.
>
> The primary benefit we received for all of this was substantial gains in elementary-school math that don't persist until graduation. This is true despite

[89]Charles Barone, "What ESSA Says: Continuities and Departures," in Hess and Eden, *The Every Student Succeeds Act*, 59–74.

[90]Martin R. West, "The Case for ESSA: A Proper Balance," in Hess and Eden, *The Every Student Succeeds Act*, 75–76.

[91]Chad Aldeman, "The Case Against ESSA: A Very Limited Law," in Hess and Eden, *The Every Student Succeeds Act*, 91–105.

[92]Adelman, "The Case Against ESSA," 99.

the many variants of test-based accountability the reformers have tried, and there is nothing on the horizon now that suggests that the net effects will be better in the future.[93]

Concluding Observations

This brief overview of federal compensatory education policies from President Johnson to President Obama has focused mainly on the development of the Title I program as well as its later transformations such as America 2000, Goals 2000, No Child Left Behind, and the Every Student Succeeds Act. This article also has looked at issues such as increased high-stakes testing and higher achievement standards as well as other subjects. Both the federal and state governments now play larger roles in providing funding to improve the educational outcomes of students exposed to poverty, homelessness, poor nutrition, insufficient access to health care, or who need to learn English. At the same time, however, throughout the administrations of nine American presidents, the academic achievement of students did not improve as much as education policymakers had hoped.

When Title I was first created, the emphasis was on providing more federal funds to public schools to help children living in poverty. The assumption was that additional money was the way to help them keep up academically with their more advantaged classmates. Little attention was paid to how this additional support might be used most effectively to help the Title I-eligible children, their schools, and the variety of different current education programs available. In order to enact the legislation, the modest federal supplements were distributed so widely that almost all local school districts received at least some Title I money. This meant that the additional amount for the neediest students was small. Though the extra money was helpful and appreciated, it was not enough by itself to prepare many of them to succeed in school.[94]

Before the advent of federal compensatory programs, some states did not acknowledge that *all* children are able to learn, and that the academic performance gap between the wealthiest and the poorest students in the country could be shrunk. The 1965 federal Title I program and its revisions stressed that all children should have access to a high-quality K-12 education. By focusing national attention and providing some resources for better compensatory education programs for eligible children, the federal government encouraged states and local schools to provide high-quality education for every one of their students.

David Cohen and Susan Moffitt agreed that some progress had been made, but pointed out that the fragmented and unequal school system remained, which hindered improvements: "Title I had helped to build the capability to solve problems of poverty in public education. If we compare the situation in 1965 with that when NCLB became law by 2002, many more educators had experience trying to improve

[93]Daniel Koretz, *The Testing Charade: Pretending to Make Schools Better* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 191.

[94]Philip Meranto, *The Politics of Federal Aid to Education in 1965: A Study in Political Innovation* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1967); James J. Vanecko and Nancy L. Ames, with Francis X. Archambault, *Who Benefits from Federal Education Dollars? The Development of ESEA Title I Allocation Policy* (Cambridge, MA: Abt Books, 1980).

teaching in high-poverty schools, and many more school managers had experience managing such efforts. There were many problems, but there had been gains in capability."[95] But they also noted that "it is one of the great curiosities of the age that Title I, a modest supplement to a very unequal system of schooling, was used as the lever to remedy the educational effects of an extraordinarily fragmented system of education, which lacked the educational infrastructure that could connect policy and practice. That is a chief source of the difficulty and controversy that bedevil Title I and a chief cause of its very mixed effects."[96]

American spending on K-12 public education has increased dramatically. In constant dollars (2015), the total federal, state, and local revenues to public elementary or secondary education grew nearly 250 percent from $191 billion in 1965–1966 to $664 billion in 2014–2015.[97] The gains in revenue share to K-12 public education were similarly dramatic: the federal share of revenues to K-12 public elementary and secondary in 1965 was 7.9 percent, the state contribution 39.1 percent, and the local assistance was 53.0 percent; a half century later federal share of funding slightly increased to 8.5 percent, state monies grew more rapidly to 46.6 percent, and local outlays dropped to 45.0 percent.[98]

While we spent more on elementary and secondary public school programs specially designed to help students most in need of assistance, Title I provided a small but important part of the funding. Much of the overall revenue for education (federal, state, and local) went to the growing number of other agencies and responsibilities.[99] Mark Dynarski and Kristen Kainz stated in 2015 that Title I

> funding per student is quite low, averaging about $500 to $600 a year. And there is little evidence that the overall program is effective or that its funds are used for effective services and activities. Large proportions of school principals report using Title I funds for teacher professional development, which many studies have shown to be ineffective and which teachers do not find valuable. Other services on which principals spent Title I funds include after-school and summer programs, technology purchases, and supplementary services, which also have been shown to be ineffective, and class-size reductions, which are unlikely to be of the size needed to generate effects found in previous research.[100]

[95]David K. Cohen and Susan L. Moffitt, *The Ordeal of Equality: Did Federal Regulation Fix the Schools?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 190.

[96]Cohen and Moffitt, *The Ordeal of Equality*, 192.

[97]Calculated from Susan B. Carter et al., *Historical Statistics of the United States: Earliest Times to the Present*, Millennial Edition, vol. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), Table Bc 909–925; Thomas D. Snyder, Cristobal de Brey, and Sallow A. Dillow, *Digest of Education Statistics 2017* (Washington, DC: NCES, 2019), Table 236.10. The current dollars were converted to 2015 constant dollars using the Consumer Price Index from the CPI Inflation Calculator, https://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm.

[98]Rebecca R. Skinner and Wayne Riddle, *State and Local Financing of Public Schools*, Congressional Research Service, Report R45827 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2019), 2.

[99]Rebecca R. Skinner and Leah Rosenstiel, *History of the ESEA Title I-A Formulas*, Congressional Research Service, Report R44898, July 17, 2017, 49–52, https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R44898/4.

[100]Mark Dynarski and Kristen Kainz, "Why Spending on Disadvantaged Students (Title I) Doesn't Work," *Brookings Reports* 1, no. 7 (Nov. 2015), 1.

Most scholars agree on the modest improvements that Title I has provided since 1965. But some also believe that more fundamental changes are needed. For example, Eric A. Hanushek, professor of economics at Rochester and a former deputy director of the Congressional Budget Office, in 1996 concluded, "nothing indicates that more of the same—more spending and more equalized spending—will lead to improvements in the very real problems of our schools without a series of more fundamental changes in perspective and organization. . . . When we pursue the funding equalization strategy, we observe little in the way of equalization of student outcomes. . . . What we typically find is that more money is spent without commensurate improvement in student performance."[101]

Growing reliance on high-stakes testing as well as higher academic standards for all public school children encouraged some educators and policymakers to call for more federal involvement in education. At the same time, however, it threatened others who felt that parents, local schools, and states were responsible for overseeing K-12 education rather than bureaucrats in the US Department of Education. This was further complicated by the assumption that Title I students could easily catch up with their more privileged classmates. Yet there was no single or simple strategy that could suddenly overcome years of disadvantage created by living with poverty, racial and social inequity, and inadequate instruction.[102]

All students now were required to do much better on the new high-stakes examinations or their teachers and schools might be penalized. These unrealistic goals resulted in some educators cutting corners, or sometimes encouraging teachers to cheat in order to reach those requisite objectives. Consequently, the public became even more cynical about promises by our elected officials and educators. And some of us hesitated to increase public school funding or undertake new expensive education reforms if we suspected that previous promises and increased costs were neither sufficient nor effective.

Since 1990 large federal education initiatives such as America 2000, Goals 2000, No Child Left Behind, and the Every Student Succeeds Act have been enacted with great hopes of promising results. These programs often mandated that public schools and students achieve unrealistically high academic goals within a decade. Moreover, policymakers promised to be held accountable if we failed to achieve these goals. Yet policymakers and scholars paid almost no attention to considering what problems overly ambitious goals and promises might cause.[103]

The large-scale programs often lacked careful prior planning, timely implementation, and adequate funding. The federal government, which drafted and enforced these regulations, provided only about 10 percent of K-12 revenues. Meantime, states increased their share of elementary and secondary education funding from 39 percent in 1965 to 47 percent in 2015. Yet states still often did not adequately fund, carry out

[101]Eric A. Hanushek, "The Quest for Equalized Mediocrity: School Finance Reform without Consideration of School Performance," in Lawrence O. Picus and James L. Wattenbarger, eds., *Where Does the Money Go? Resource Allocation in Elementary and Secondary Schools* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 1996), 39.

[102]Mirel and Vinovskis, "Perennial Problems," 32.

[103]Vinovskis, *From a Nation at Risk to No Child Left Behind.*

the pertinent federal laws, or coordinate their programs with the ambitious federal directives.[104]

While education is essential for helping disadvantaged students, we also need to deal with the larger issues of poverty and discrimination in America. Economic class and racial inequalities still play a significant role in determining student achievement differences. This was recognized by earlier presidents from both parties, including Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon.[105] During the Johnson administration, the president declared a War on Poverty with the promise that it would be won in ten years. Unfortunately, that did not happen because it needed better planning, proper implementation and coordination, and much more funding.[106] The Nixon administration proposed the Family Assistance Program, which would help low-income people. While it was not as generous as was needed, it might have set a precedent for a "guaranteed income" that could have been expanded later. The House passed the legislation several times, but conservative Republicans and liberal Democrats in the Senate opposed it.[107]

Since then, all of our presidents have supported programs to help low-income and minority families and children. Yet these efforts were not as successful as hoped. Lawrence J. McAndrews's timely and useful book on presidents and the poor concluded:

> With each change of administration from 1963 to 2009 came a renewed hope that the new president would be able to unlock the secret to erase poverty. Now all of these presidents have come and gone, and the poor are still here.
>
> Although each president from Lyndon Johnson to Barack Obama waged his campaign differently, they generally confronted the same adversaries. They primarily deployed the same weapons. And despite some notable successes, they ultimately experienced the same outcomes. In the end, every one of them lost his battle against poverty.[108]

Today we need to find and support better ways to improve the structural and social problems in our economy and society that now limit the well-being of our citizens. We need to pay more attention to the strengths and weaknesses of the previous attempts as well as explore new solutions based on reliable, scientifically based education research. If there is a shortage of monies for universal assistance, we at least

[104]Carter et al., *Historical Statistics of the United States*, Millennial Edition, vol. 2, Table Bc 902–908; Snyder, de Bray, and Dillow, *Digest of Education Statistics 2017*, Table 235.10.

[105]For Nixon's encouragement of affirmative action resolutions and some civil rights issues, see Hugh Davis Graham, "Richard Nixon and Civil Rights: Explaining an Enigma," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (Winter 1996), 93–106; Kotlowski, *Nixon's Civil Rights*.

[106]Martha J. Bailey and Sheldon Danziger, eds., *Legacies of the War on Poverty* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2013); Irwin Unger, *The Best of Intentions: The Triumph and Failure of the Great Society under Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon* (New York: Doubleday, 1996).

[107]Vincent J. and Vee Burke, *Nixon's Good Deed: Welfare Reform* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974); Daniel P. Moynihan, *The Politics of a Guaranteed Income: The Nixon Administration and the Family Assistance Plan* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973).

[108]McAndrews, *The Presidents and the Poor*, 248.

need to go ahead with providing such programs for the families and children who need them most.

In the past, it usually has required members of both parties to agree upon useful major changes to education policy at both the national and state levels.[109] This is particularly the case when we are already facing challenges such as wars, serious economic crises, and pandemics. Unfortunately, our country still remains deeply divided today on questions such as who is responsible for pre-kindergarten-12 education, what are the best ways to improve our schools, how much that will cost, and who will pay for it. To develop and maintain such ambitious reforms will probably require bipartisan cooperation between Democrats and Republicans on national and state education policies.

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[109]Vinovskis, *From a Nation at Risk to No Child Left Behind*.

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