

Teachers Give No Child Left Behind Act Mixed Reviews

January 26 2010

(PhysOrg.com) -- Highly accomplished teachers assessing the merits of the No Child Left Behind Act give the federal legislation a mixed report card, according to a study by University of California, Riverside researchers that appears today in *Policy Matters*, a quarterly journal published by UCR.

Researchers Patrick Guggino, who earned his Ph.D. in education from UCR in 2008, and Steven Brint, professor of sociology, surveyed more than 740 of California's most accomplished [teachers](#) to assess the effectiveness and unintended consequences of the No Child Left Behind Act. Congress approved the legislation in 2001, increasing federal funding for education while at the same time tying continued support to improvements in individual student outcomes.

The legislation fundamentally changed teaching and education in U.S. schools by requiring annual testing of school children and "adequate yearly progress" for every subgroup of students. The act also requires schools to provide after-school tutoring and other services for poor-performing students and mandates that schools hire only "highly qualified" teachers.

The researchers conducted an [online survey](#) in 2007 of educators who are National Board Certified Teachers, a rigorous certification process that requires candidates to demonstrate high levels of subject matter knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and [classroom](#) effectiveness through performance-based assessment. Guggino and Brint asked these teachers

to assess the impact of No Child Left Behind in three areas of professionalism - technical areas of practice, the service ethic of teaching and professional commitment.

Although few teachers surveyed were enthusiastic supporters, large minorities credited the act with increasing focus on core skills, encouraging planning and organization of lessons, and creating higher expectations for student performance. However, 84 percent of these highly accomplished teachers reported overall unfavorable attitudes toward the act, which is consistent with previous studies, the researchers said.

“Their criticisms focused on concerns about individualized student learning, declining creativity in the classroom, weakened relationships between teachers and students, and the lack of understanding and respect for the skills and experience of teachers,” Guggino and Brint said in the report, “Does the No Child Left Behind Act Help or Hinder K-12 Education?” “These highly accomplished teachers were skeptical, and in some cases angry, about the consequences of No Child Left Behind for the nation’s school children. This is a problematic outcome of the legislation, if only because these are precisely the teachers the public schools can least afford to lose.”

Teachers have been virtually ignored in the ongoing public policy debate over the effectiveness of the legislation, Guggino and Brint observed. As policy makers attempt to improve No Child Left Behind by studying national test results and debating ways to increase test results, the UCR researchers suggest that future changes pay attention to building on and rewarding the professional practices of teachers.

“The teachers we surveyed are among the most qualified teachers in the public system, and they are experienced hands in the classroom. Their views of the legislation should be taken seriously,” said Brint, a leading

researcher of U.S. education policy and practice, and Guggino, an English teacher at Charter Oak High School in Covina, Calif.

Highlights of the report include:

- Between one-third and two-fifths of teachers surveyed said the act provided incentives to organize subject matter effectively, plan better, focus on core subjects, increase expectations for student learning and to see all students as capable of learning. Most said the act did not make their job more difficult.
- Sixty-one percent said the act created an overly narrow conception of the meaning of education; 46 percent felt it diminished creativity; and 59 percent said it had unintended consequences, primarily less creativity in the classroom and increased influence of textbook companies to determine the content and pace of instruction.
- Nearly 60 percent said it would significantly affect the teaching profession. Teachers will focus on test performance to the detriment of other important aspects of education and will come to teach to scripts designed by publishers.
- About one-fourth said No Child Left Behind has made it tougher to get through to difficult or unmotivated students or prevent students from dropping out of school. Three in 10 teachers said it has become more difficult to make learning fun for students.
- One in four teachers surveyed said the act helped them improve as instructors. Another one in four said the act had lowered their commitment and loyalty to the profession, and two in five said it had a negative influence on their own enthusiasm for teaching, “a telling statistic about the impact of NCLB on teacher satisfaction, given the higher-than-average levels of commitment among these highly qualified

teachers.”

More information: www.policymatters.ucr.edu/

Provided by University of California, Riverside

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