

Study rebuts negative reputation of 'No Child Left Behind'

July 14 2014

The public perception that No Child Left Behind has increased burnout and lowered job satisfaction among teachers is unfounded, according to a recent study co-authored by UT Dallas researcher Dr. James R. Harrington.

The study, which was published online in *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, a peer-reviewed journal of the American Educational Research Association, found that, overall, the [accountability](#) pressures of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) did not have much of an impact on teachers' [job satisfaction](#) or commitment to the profession.

NCLB is the latest version of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, a federal law authorizing spending on programs to support K-12 education. It includes requirements for testing, accountability and school improvements.

Harrington, an assistant professor of public affairs, said NCLB has been in effect for more than 10 years, and prior research on the program mostly has focused on student achievement.

"There is this anecdotal evidence and conventional wisdom about NCLB—people believe accountability makes teachers more miserable," he said. "We hear that it creates a negative environment for teachers—it forces them to stay on very strict curricula and reduces a lot of autonomy, as teachers worry less about their profession as a whole and worry more about meeting benchmarks on the exam."

The research team, which also included Dr. Jason A. Grissom of Vanderbilt University and Dr. Sean Nicholson-Crotty of Indiana University, used a nationally representative sample of 140,000 teachers from multiple waves of the National Center for Education Statistics' Schools and Staffing Survey from 1994 to 2008. Documenting overall trends in teacher attitudes, they considered the impact of NCLB on teachers' job demands, perceived autonomy and administrator support.

Harrington said the study helps shed light on NCLB and its impacts—both positive and negative.

"We do find that teachers after NCLB felt like they had more autonomy at work and more control, which is kind of backward to what we hear when we think about 'teach to the test,' " he said. "We also see that teachers feel more supported by administrators.

"On the other hand, we see that there are more demands. Teachers are working longer hours after NCLB. There is also some evidence that the accountability pressures reduced feelings of cooperation among teachers."

Harrington said the researchers were surprised to find that NCLB did not have a negative effect on satisfaction or commitment.

In fact, the percentage of teachers who said they intended to remain in the profession until retirement increased to 77 percent in 2008 from 65 percent in 1994.

"As we're going through the reauthorization of NCLB and having policy debates on how accountability should work, policymakers should take into account the full information on how accountability programs have affected job attitudes and work environments, and retool NCLB to be even more effective than it has been," he said.

Harrington also said that future research is needed to answer questions regarding accountability in other environments, such as in higher education and local and state government.

Harrington, who specializes in the intersection between education policy and management, is already investigating further. Two of his current projects explore how NCLB affects decision-making and data usage and how the program has influenced the distribution of [teachers](#) across their school districts.

"Everybody supports accountability at some level because we want to hold people accountable for their performances," Harrington said.

"However, we don't know much about accountability systems' effects on attitudes, [work environments](#) or outcomes. I think there's a lot more we need to learn to effectively implement accountability in the government."

Provided by University of Texas at Dallas

Citation: Study rebuts negative reputation of 'No Child Left Behind' (2014, July 14) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2014-07-rebuts-negative-reputation-child-left.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.