

Chubb, John E. (2009). *Learning from No Child Left Behind: How and Why the Nation's Most Important but Controversial Education Law Should Be Renewed*. Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press.

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John E. Chubb, a co-founder of Edison Learning, has written extensively on student achievement and school choice. Chubb has served as an advisor to both the White House and the U.S. Department of Education and currently serves as a member of the Hoover Institution's Task Force on K-12 Education. His latest volume on student achievement, *Learning from No Child Left Behind*, supports the ideals of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) while identifying some of the law's shortcomings and offers suggestions to improve the law's effectiveness. The book is the result of conclusions drawn by the Hoover Institution's Task Force after reviewing six years of data gathered on the effectiveness of NCLB. With one exception, all members of the Task Force support the recommendations Chubb makes in this book. Readers who are familiar with the tenets of NCLB and who already possess strong opinions will find little here to cause them to change their minds about the law. Other readers who

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have less familiarity with NCLB will likely gain insight to some of the controversy the law has created.

Chubb spends the first fifteen pages of the book comparing the scores on the 2007 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) exam to results from the NAEP exams in the 1990s. After examination of the various sets of scores, Chubb concludes it is too early to attribute all gains to NCLB, but it appears that NCLB is a good continuation of reform efforts begun in the 1990s; and therefore, NCLB is worthy of reauthorization. Chubb makes ten recommendations to improve and strengthen NCLB so it can become a more effective tool for school reform while countering some aspects of the law that critics claim are unfair.

Chubb's first recommendation calls for a voluntary system of national standards. Currently, each state is free to set its own curriculum standards and proficiency rates. Therefore, the states can vary greatly in what is expected of students. In order to create greater continuity of standards across the nation, Chubb proposes that states join one of three consortium groups. These groups of like-minded states and would create academic standards based upon a common educational philosophy. States would have the option to refuse joining any of the consortiums and of writing their own standards. However, NCLB would impose strict guidelines for this process in order to discourage states from going it alone.

While some may argue against national standards, some states have already begun this process by setting standards at the state level. In Texas, for example, individual school districts follow the TEA developed curriculum guidelines: the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) which comprise the foundation of each content area taught in Texas public schools. A classroom teacher in Texas would likely notice little difference between a national set of guidelines versus one imposed from the state level.

Chubb's second and third recommendations are related because they address how Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) is measured

and how the sanctions that accompany a school's failure to meet AYP criteria are applied. The measurement of AYP and the way sanctions are applied to schools who are not achieving these goals are two of the most common criticisms of the NCLB law. Chubb recommends that we change the way Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) is measured and reported and to allow for a differentiated system of sanctions for schools that fail to meet AYP standards.

In its current form, schools that serve a more diverse clientele are more likely to be unable to meet AYP criteria than are schools with a more homogeneous population (Karp, 2004). Additionally, no recognition has been given to schools as they help students make progress towards grade level proficiency. As Chubb reports in the book, the U.S. Department of Education has recognized this flaw in the legislation and has approved the use of growth models as a measure of AYP. The growth model gives schools credit for students who are moving towards basic skill proficiency. Additionally, NCLB currently does not recognize or reward the advanced performance of high achieving students. Chubb's second recommendation supports altering the current system for determining Adequate Yearly Performance (AYP) so that schools receive credit for a student's academic growth wherever they fall in relation to the proficiency standard. Implementation of this recommendation would likely result in fewer schools failing to meet AYP criteria and thus being placed at risk of receiving sanctions.

Chubb's second recommendation of an altered AYP measurement system may benefit both low and high achievers. A major frustration with NCLB for special education advocates is that the lowest performing students are likely to be overlooked in classroom instruction because they are considered to contribute the least to meeting the passing standards on high stakes exams. As it is currently written, NCLB does not give schools credit for any progress that students make in their effort to improve their proficiency or approach grade level performance. Chubb advocates giving schools credit for progress that low performing students make as they strive for grade level mastery. Implementation of this idea could serve to

motivate both low achieving students and their teachers in their efforts towards improvement.

Proponents of gifted education have worried that NCLB hurts the performance of our highest achieving students. Despite Chubb's support of the law, a major concession made in his book is the admission that NCLB has not helped advanced students. Gifted education advocates (Gallagher, 2004) have lamented the impact that the NCLB legislation has had upon services for advanced students. Some consequences for gifted students include less money for enrichment experiences and the use of instructional strategies aimed at the entire class rather than more expensive individualized methods. Chubb also advocates giving schools financial rewards for students who score at the advanced level on high stakes exams. However, there is no mention of whether the financial reward of approximately \$150 per student would be required to be spent on programming for advanced students or would be funneled into the school's general budget where it may or may not benefit this population

In his second recommendation, Chubb admits that NCLB currently forces schools to focus instructional attention on students who fall in the midrange of ability levels. A model that gives credit for student gains would allow the progress made by all students to count for schools rather than forcing schools to focus solely on the students that are most likely to pass and those who have already passed. Following Chubb's recommendation may increase the odds that both gifted and special education students will become a true part of the accountability picture in a manner appropriate to their educational progress.

Chubb's third recommendation suggests implementing a differentiated system of sanctions for schools that do not meet AYP criteria. The sanctions range from extra requirements that schools must meet to increase student achievement to possible school restructuring or closing. NCLB currently takes a one-size-fits-all approach to sanctioning schools that do not meet AYP without regard for the severity of their individual

problems. Chubb admits that schools missing the AYP mark by only a few students in one sub-group require different interventions than schools with more severe failures. A differentiated system of sanctions would save the most severe sanctions for the schools suffering the most severe problems. It would also allow parents and the public to be more informed regarding the specific problems at their local school rather than simply labeling all schools in a district as needing improvement without providing further explanation.

Of all of Chubb's recommendations, the most troublesome is recommendation five in which Chubb advocates linking student performance with individual teachers and principals. On its surface, this recommendation is proposed as a means of implementing total transparency and ensuring that teacher quality is measured and accounted for. Chubb suggests that this is a logical step in allowing parents and communities insight into true teacher effectiveness. However, in this recommendation, Chubb is operating from the assumption that teacher quality alone is the sole determinant of student achievement. While research does support the importance of teacher quality, a myriad of other factors also impact student achievement which educators have little or no control over. For example, economic status (Karp, 2004) has been shown to impact student performance in addition to other factors such as access to health care, parental support and educational level of the mother. Implementation of Chubb's recommendation has potential for misuse and abuse and gives rise to many questions. For example, how will performance data be used in personnel decisions? Will teachers in lower socioeconomic schools choose to remain there if their career options hinge on the performance of low achieving students? Will this policy serve as the final demoralizing factor for educators who already feel they are held responsible for solving societal problems beyond their control? These and other questions need to be carefully considered before a policy of this nature is implemented.

Despite some misgivings with a few of Chubb's recommendations, this is a thought-provoking book with much to consider. Especially for readers who do not support NCLB,

this book provides a glimpse into the thought process of those who are advocates for the law's reauthorization. This fact alone makes this book a worthwhile read.

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About the Reviewer

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