



The Implications of NCLB Accountability for Comprehensive School Reform

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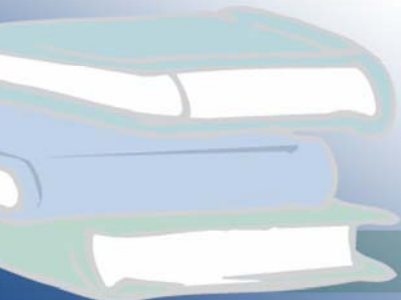
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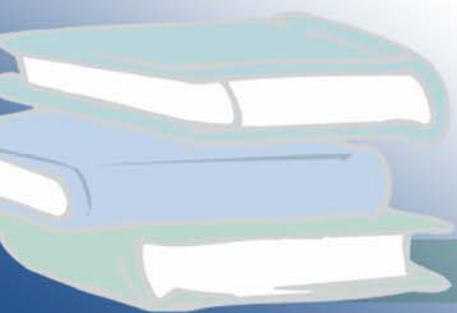
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Abstract

Each year, when states release assessment results, new schools join the ranks of those identified for improvement under No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Associated with this identification are mandated actions which have the potential to derail or redirect existing school reform efforts. The threat of being identified for improvement, or even missing targets for Adequate Yearly Progress could also be enough to motivate educators to redirect their instructional efforts. However, the implementation of consequences associated with NCLB accountability does not necessarily imply the demise of comprehensive school reform (CSR). Indeed, there is nothing in the NCLB theory of action—or indeed, in the statute or guidance—that would preclude the use of comprehensive school reform strategies. Yet as NCLB measures are interpreted and implemented at the local level, administrators may take actions that marginalize CSR efforts. For those pursuing CSR, then, the question remains of how to reconcile the implementation of NCLB accountability mandates with ongoing CSR efforts. Do these two major reform efforts conflict, or may they be woven into a coherent approach to school improvement? Drawing from longitudinal data from a national study of comprehensive school reform, this paper will explore this question.



The Implications of NCLB Accountability for Comprehensive School Reform

As each new wave of state assessment results are released, an increasing number of schools will join the ranks of those identified for improvement under Title I, Part A of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. Associated with this identification are mandated actions that have the potential to derail or redirect existing school reform efforts, depending on state and local interpretation of the statute. Schools that consistently fail to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) targets may be required to implement a new curricular program, restructure the school day, or dismiss staff, among other possible actions. Each of these could dismantle years of comprehensive school reform (CSR) efforts. However, the implementation of consequences associated with NCLB accountability does not necessarily imply the demise of CSR. Indeed, a broad conceptualization of accountability systems suggests that capacity-building mechanisms are as important for school improvement as rewards and sanctions. As such, districts may turn to CSR as a way to directly address the implementation of curricular or scheduling reforms required under NCLB. In spite of this, schools implementing CSR may find that pressure to meet AYP targets refocuses schools' actions in ways that are incongruent with their CSR models. Do components of NCLB accountability conflict with CSR, or may they be woven into a coherent approach to school improvement? This paper explores this question by drawing from longitudinal data from a national study of CSR.

Background

Although the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA) required states to develop systems for measuring Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act substantially strengthened the scope and impact of AYP. Under NCLB, AYP no longer focuses exclusively on Title I schools. Instead, all schools are required to meet AYP targets for proficiency, participation, and other academic indicators. Moreover, the requirements for passing AYP targets have become more stringent. Schools are required to demonstrate that every subgroup of students meets AYP targets for both participation and proficiency in both mathematics and literacy. NCLB also bolsters the consequences associated with consecutive years of AYP failure. Schools that miss AYP targets for two consecutive years are identified for improvement (IFI) and must offer Title I choice. Those that fail three consecutive years must offer supplemental educational services. Failure to meet AYP targets for four or more consecutive years results in designations of corrective action and restructuring, for which the sanctions stiffen each subsequent year.

States establish assessments and definitions of AYP. But NCLB also requires states to develop systems of support for schools identified for improvement. At a minimum, these systems should include school support teams and defined roles for distinguished teachers and principals. In addition, NCLB provides funding for programmatic mechanisms through which schools can implement improvement strategies, such as Reading First (Title I, Part B, Subpart I). Despite the predominance of attention focused on the punitive elements of Title I, Part A, other lower profile components of NCLB are intended to support and stimulate school improvement strategies. Title I, Part F is one such component. It provides funding for comprehensive school reform (CSR), which is the focus of this study.



Conceptual Approach

As standards-based reform and associated accountability strategies have become more integral components of American education, the research literature on accountability mechanisms has developed in scope and theoretical depth. The literature on school accountability has developed from straightforward descriptions of the building blocks of accountability, to recommendations for high-quality accountability systems, to theoretically grounded frameworks for understanding these complex systems.

For example, in 1999, the Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE) surveyed assessment and accountability systems in the 50 states (Goertz, Duffy, & Le Floch, 2001) and unveiled substantial variation in the manner in which students are tested, in the types of achievement targets that states establish, in the data reported, in the technical assistance available to low-performing schools, and in the configuration of rewards and sanctions. Duffy (2001) outlined nine “layers” of accountability systems: statewide assessments, performance reporting, performance targets or goals, school improvement planning requirements, categories of success, technical assistance or support, rewards, sanctions, and school takeover or closure. Other organizations, such as the Council of Chief State School Officers and the Educational Commission of the States, have been conducting similar reviews of state policies since IASA was enacted.

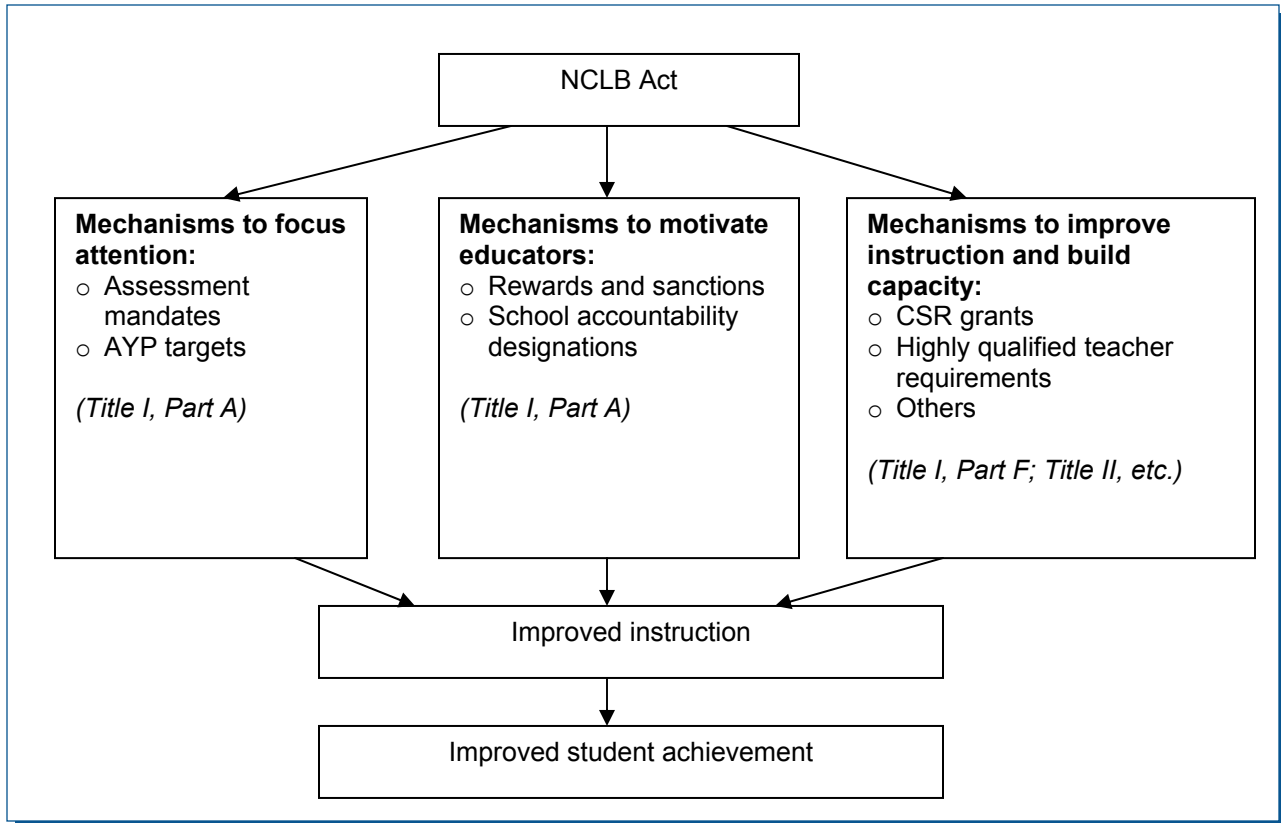
To better illuminate the theoretical underpinnings of accountability systems, several scholars have gone beyond straightforward descriptions and proposed analytical frameworks. Fuhrman (1999) and colleagues at CPRE (Kelley, Odden, Milanowski, & Heneman, 2000) developed a model of responses to accountability mechanisms based on expectancy theory and goal-setting theory. As Fuhrman explains, “this model suggests that a teacher will be motivated to try to reach the school’s student achievement goals to the extent that she (a) perceives a high probability that teacher effort will lead to students’ reaching achievement goals (expectancy perception); (b) perceives a high probability that the goal attainment will lead to certain consequences or outcomes, such as a bonus award (instrumentality perception); and (c) places value, either positive or negative, on these outcomes” (1999, p. 9).

O’Day (2002) suggests a framework that is based on complex adaptive systems and change. The complex systems framework is grounded in the dynamics of interaction and interdependence of individuals. O’Day asserted that the nature and strength of the patterns of interaction (among teachers, students, administrators, and parents) are crucial elements in understanding individual and organizational behavior in response to the policy system. She also draws attention to the linked elements of stability and change, information and learning, and learning and improvement. These dimensions highlight problematic features of accountability systems. For example, systems may provide educators with too much or too little information, both detracting from the capacity to change and improve. The manner in which information is interpreted by actors in the educational system may lead to errors of attribution, making it difficult, if not impossible, to address causes of failure. Finally, the incentive and resource allocation structures may be designed in ways that inhibit adaptation, learning, and improvement.

O’Day and Bitter (2003) articulate a framework for the understanding of accountability systems that highlights features noted elsewhere in the accountability literature. These features include mechanisms to focus attention, motivate educators, and improve instruction and develop capacity. This simplified theory of action, depicted in Figure 1, has been modified slightly to reflect NCLB and to provide a framework for this paper.



Figure 1. Simplified Theory of Action of NCLB Accountability



This paper explores the interactions among the three elements of this framework: the mechanisms to focus attention (most notably, AYP targets), to motivate educators (most notably, school accountability designations), and to improve instruction and build capacity. Frequently, NCLB accountability is perceived to focus only on AYP targets, diverting attention from comprehensive improvement strategies. However, AYP and comprehensive improvement strategies should not be mutually conflicting: if student achievement levels are not adequate to meet AYP targets, then this information should lead to the identification of sound, research-based strategies to attain higher academic performance.

However, this connection is often obscured, either by a “drill-and-kill” reaction to test pressure, a focus on more mechanistic components of AYP (e.g., attendance rate), or developing strategies to “game” the system—that is, targeting a few students who will enable the school to meet AYP targets through safe harbor. Such conditions could indeed persuade teachers that they can no longer take time to focus on all the components that are traditionally assumed to be a part of CSR, such as participation in shared governance structures, professional communication with peers, and parent involvement.



For AYP targets to take precedence over CSR strategies, teachers must first be aware of the core elements of NCLB accountability. Hence, our qualitative analyses will first address the degree to which teachers are aware of NCLB and focused on these policy mechanisms. Next, we will determine the degree to which they are motivated by these targets. Finally, we will determine the degree to which teachers perceive CSR to be either a tool that will enable them to meet AYP targets or an indulgent reform process that they no longer have time to implement.

Methodology

The analyses presented in this paper draw primarily from two waves of qualitative data collected for the National Longitudinal Evaluation of Comprehensive School Reform (NLECSR). Funded by the U.S. Department of Education, the NLECSR is a 5-year, mixed-method evaluation of the implementation and impact of CSR models. Qualitative data were collected through interviews with teachers, principals, reform facilitators, and district administrators from 32 schools in five districts during the winter and spring of 2003. Follow-up data were collected in the spring of 2004 from 10 schools in three districts. The sample included both CSR and comparison schools; however, the schools described in this paper are those that have implemented a CSR model. The sample included both high- and low-performing schools, with a wide range of CSR models and years of implementation. Also, most schools in the sample are situated in relatively challenging environments, with high levels of student poverty.

The analyses presented in the paper drew from both years of data collection, with a total of 72 interviews with teachers, principals, reform facilitators, and district administrators. However, the interview protocol for 2004 incorporated more specific questions and probes about NCLB and yielded stronger data for analysis than the protocol that was used in 2003. Prior to data collection, all interviewers were trained to ensure that they had a strong understanding of the accountability provisions of NCLB.

All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed for coding and analysis. The data were coded through NUD*IST, a qualitative data analysis software program, using an extensive coding key that linked constructs to the study's conceptual framework. As new themes emerged, codes were added to the construct key so as not to preclude a more grounded approach to data analysis. Prior to coding the data, staff double-coded and reviewed several documents to ensure consistency in coding. After the coding process, the distribution of codes was reviewed by the entire team, and when discrepancies or questions arose, documents were reviewed and recoded as necessary. Coded data most directly related to NCLB and model sustainability were then extracted and analyzed, and themes and trends were identified by respondent type, school, and district.

The quantitative component of this study analyzed AYP status, schools that were identified for improvement under NCLB, and CSR model sustainability. Data on each school's AYP and IFI statuses were collected from state education department Web sites and comprehensive state performance reports. In each case, care was taken to collect the final AYP and IFI determinations, realizing that preliminary statuses can change because of recalculation or appeal. We were unable to locate some of the data for the most recent school year (2003–2004). Of the 649 NLECSR schools, AYP data were missing for 6%, and IFI data were missing for approximately 20%. Of the schools that lacked IFI data, we expect that a somewhat higher percentage may be non-IFI schools, because states typically report only the schools that are identified for improvement, making it more difficult to establish that a school is not identified for improvement.



For the two sustainability analyses, we examined a subset of 250 schools that were using CSR in 2001-02 and for which we had data on implementation. The findings are summarized here, but the specific methods, models, and results are described in Taylor (2005). For the analysis of whether a school's IFI status was related to a school's likelihood to drop its CSR model, the measure of whether a school dropped its CSR model was a binary variable coded 1 if the school dropped or switched its affiliation with a CSR model developer organization. For the 2002-03 and 2003-04 school years, principals were asked if their schools were still implementing the same CSR models as in the previous year. If principals responded that they were no longer implementing the same models or that they had dropped last year's model and adopted a new model (in either year), their school was coded as having dropped their CSR model. The data were fit to a two-level logistic regression, and several covariates were entered to account for other factors related to a school's likelihood of dropping a CSR model.

For the analysis of implementation, the dependent variable was the measure of a school's overall implementation fidelity; that is, the mean across the implementation of seven component indices reported by teachers. (This is described in more detail in Kurki and Aladjem, 2005.) Implementation data were fit to a three-level hierarchical regression (teachers by year, within schools, within districts), with several variables entered to account for alternate explanations for a school's change in implementation fidelity.

Quantitative Results: Do Schools Identified for Improvement Retain Their CSR Models?

Quantitative data on the AYP and IFI status of schools in the NLECSR sample enable us to address several important questions with regard to the plight of CSR schools in the context of NCLB accountability. That is, are CSR schools more or less likely to miss AYP targets than schools without models? Are CSR schools more or less likely to be identified for improvement than non-CSR schools? And, most importantly for our purposes, do CSR schools drop their models if they have been identified for improvement?

First, we must note that in general, the entire NLECSR sample is more likely than non-CSR schools across the United States to have missed AYP (51% in 2003-04) and to have been identified for improvement (55% in 2004-05). The NLECSR sample consisted of low-performing, diverse elementary and middle schools with many subgroups that are counted in AYP calculations. Within this sample of disadvantaged schools, our data suggest that there are no significant differences between the AYP statuses of CSR schools and non-CSR schools, and the results fluctuate from year to year (Table 1). In 2002-03, comparison schools missed AYP at a higher rate (47%) than CSR schools (41%), but in 2003-04, CSR schools missed at a higher rate (57%) than comparison schools (46%). Interestingly, schools that were using CSR models were identified for improvement at a rate similar to that of comparison schools in the same districts with similar demographic characteristics (23% for CSR versus 24% for non-CSR in 2002-2003; 24% versus 26% in 2003-04; and 56% versus 54% in 2004-05). Therefore, CSR schools in this sample were no more likely to be identified for improvement than their non-CSR counterparts, and AYP rates fluctuate between the two types of schools. Overall, it should be kept in mind that CSR model developers typically work with schools with very low-performing populations.



Table 1. Percentage of CSR and Comparison Schools That Missed Adequate Yearly Progress Targets and Were Identified for Improvement, by School Year

	Missed AYP 2002-- 03 (N = 635)	Missed AYP 2003-- 04 (N = 604)	IFI for 2002-03 (N = 635)	IFI for 2003-04 (N = 643)	IFI for 2004-05 (N = 515)
CSR	41%	57%	23%	26%	56%
Comparison	47%	46%	24%	24%	54%

To examine the hypothesis that NCLB accountability mechanisms—such as being identified for improvement and implementing consequences associated with this status—are forcing schools to attend to strategies other than CSR, we sought to determine the extent to which schools drop their CSR models after being identified for improvement. To do so, we analyzed the relationship between model sustainability and IFI status, controlling for demographic characteristics and a set of 11 risk factors. We found that schools that were identified for improvement during 2002-03 or 2003-04 were not significantly more likely to drop their CSR model nor were they more likely to sustain the model. That is, being a CSR school identified for improvement does not, by itself, appear to prompt the school to drop its CSR model.

Indeed, when analyzing data from our survey-based implementation index and data on IFI status, we determined that CSR schools that were identified for improvement during 2002-03 or 2003-04 experienced more positive changes in implementing CSR models relative to those CSR schools that were not identified for improvement. This was true after controlling for a variety of district, school, and teacher covariates, including prevalence of CSR in the district and school level, size, disadvantage, faculty characteristics, and risk factors for unsustained implementation (e.g., leadership turnover, lack of achievement gains). The results indicate that IFI schools gain more implementation fidelity relative to their unidentified counterparts. However, from the coefficient estimates on the intercept (the school mean implementation level in 2001-02) one can see that IFI schools began the period of study with lower levels of implementation than other schools. Therefore, these IFI schools may have had more room to improve than non-IFI schools that started with higher levels of implementation.

Despite this caveat, it appears that being identified for improvement acts as a stimulus for CSR schools. Rather than compelling schools to drop their improvement efforts to adopt new strategies, schools that already have adopted a CSR model return to the implementation process with greater vigor after being identified for improvement. Hence, at least with regard to the schools in the NLECSR sample, it appears that the policy mechanisms associated with Title I, Part A are working in conjunction to support school improvement. (Although, of course, greater implementation of school improvement efforts may not always produce the desired improvement in student academic outcomes.)



Qualitative Profiles: Perceptions of NCLB

Having noted the important relationships within the quantitative data, we next turn to the site visit data to determine how stakeholders in CSR schools perceive the demands of NCLB accountability. Are they attuned to AYP targets? Are they motivated by the threat of being identified for improvement? Are they focused on improvement strategies in which the school is already invested? Our analyses of interview data suggest that there is a high degree of district variation in how educators and local administrators perceive NCLB. Respondents in one district exhibited a high degree of awareness of NCLB and even described ways in which CSR efforts were being compromised. However, teachers in another district exhibited surprisingly low levels of understanding of NCLB. In the latter context, NCLB targets and sanctions have only a marginal impact on the sustainability of CSR efforts.

The following sections provide descriptive profiles of districts that focus on the core elements of the proposed theory of action.¹ First, we explore the extent to which NCLB mechanisms succeed in focusing educators' attention on student achievement. To do so, teachers must first be aware of the provisions of NCLB. Therefore, much of our analysis explores the extent to which interview data provide evidence of both awareness and attention. Next, we discuss the extent to which interviewees appeared to be motivated by NCLB accountability. That is, motivation is stimulated not only by awareness but also by the expectation that teachers' actions could affect whether goals are being met and that consequences could be forthcoming. Finally, we discuss the extent to which the attention-focusing and motivational components of NCLB interact with the capacity-building efforts at the school level and the resulting implications for CSR.

Riverton School District

Focusing attention: Are educators aware of NCLB provisions?

Riverton distinguished itself as a district in which the teachers have a relatively high degree of awareness and knowledge of core NCLB components. Teachers in Riverton were knowledgeable about NCLB and articulated ways in which they thought it would affect their school district. Teachers exhibited knowledge about AYP, sanctions, NCLB requirements for supplemental educational services, and the term “highly qualified teachers.” Nearly all of the teachers (16 of 19) and all four of the principals interviewed were aware of whether their school was meeting its targets for AYP. No teachers were unaware of AYP; it did not come up in the other three interviews.

Other interview data suggest that teachers in Riverton have a relatively high degree of fluency with NCLB terminology and concepts. Teachers in Riverton appeared more comfortable discussing NCLB and using terms specific to it than some teachers in other districts. When discussing sanctions, several teachers were comfortable using terminology such as “corrective action 2” and “safe harbor” and were able to explain those terms to the interviewer. Six teachers and principals brought up highly qualified teachers during their interviews; whereas in another district, discussions of highly qualified teachers emerged very rarely in interviews.

¹ All school districts described in this paper are identified only by pseudonyms.



Another interesting indicator of the level of awareness of NCLB was the way in which educators articulated school goals. In Riverton, unlike in other districts in the NLECSR study, teachers expressed their school's goals in terms of NCLB. More than one third of Riverton's teachers said that their school goal specifically was to meet AYP. Even more strikingly, one teacher said the goal was to make "safe harbor." A teacher also mentioned bringing students up to the proficient level. A principal phrased his goal as "[making] sure that our children are proficient for the state exams." Another principal summed up the feelings of almost half of the interviewees when he stated that "the major goals are pretty much spelled out for us because of all the legislation."

Motivating educators

For accountability mechanisms to motivate teachers to change their behaviors, teachers must be aware of sanctions and perceive them to be salient. In Riverton, we found generally high levels of both awareness and perceived salience. For example, most teachers knew that the state could take over their school if they did not meet AYP for consecutive years. Thirteen educators (more than 56%) told interviewers that they were concerned about such sanctions. Three people knew the consequences for not meeting AYP, but it was not clear if they were concerned. One stated that, "the administrators are more concerned than the teachers. We're union; we have a job anyway." Another teacher echoed that sentiment, saying "I haven't heard any threats toward teachers," and "My principal . . . might, you know, [be] really concerned, because I don't know if her job might be on the line." Only two teachers reported that they were not concerned about the consequences of not meeting AYP.

Teachers in Riverton also described being greatly distressed by the district's IFI status, and principals reported that teachers were motivated to try new approaches to school improvement. As one principal described, "I have teachers who come in and say, 'I heard what you said. I know what's happening. I know what needs to be done. Let's try something different.'"

However, the motivational effects of these sanctions are mediated by concerns about NCLB and perceptions of substantial barriers to meeting AYP targets. Educators in Riverton voiced a number of concerns about NCLB. The problem most often cited was that NCLB fails to address outside factors that influence performance in school. Approximately one third of the interviewees said that NCLB does not help them deal with factors such as home environment, discipline problems, and poor attitudes. Teachers frequently commented about constraints imposed by the poor home environments of their students. One explained that "if my kids come in here and there's something that's happened at home, they're not going to do well on the test."

Some teachers expressed concern about student misbehavior and how AYP requirements constrain their capacity to discipline students. For example, one commented that

Our hands are really tied because you have to be careful with the discipline because if you suspend [students] too many times, that brings down the attendance. So if you leave [them] in the building, then they get to think that because they punched someone in the face, then they can get away with it; there's no punishment.

These teachers are concerned that if students are not suspended for their severe transgressions, the school will send the message that such behavior is acceptable, but if the school does not reach 95% attendance, it will miss an important AYP target.



Three quarters of the principals and a few of the teachers felt that NCLB regulations for “highly qualified teachers” pose problems for schools. Two principals explained that teachers’ jobs are terminated if they do not find the time or money or do not want to expend the effort to renew certifications after two years. One principal has lost 13 teachers this way. Another principal told the following story:

A wonderful teacher in the seventh grade just can’t pass the test. . . . She is marvelous and that’s hard because children of that age are so hard to teach; they’re adolescents, but she’s remarkable with them. So I don’t know. The only thing left for me now is prayer for her.

A teacher agreed with the discrepancy between good teachers and teachers who pass the test. She said,

I don’t think those tests determine who’s qualified and who’s not, you know, because some of the dumbest people I know pass those tests without an issue and quit teaching three weeks later . . . but then we’ve also lost some really good teachers because they weren’t certified. . . . Ninety percent of our teachers this year are new. A lot of it is because of the certification.

Overall, the problems perceived to be inherent in NCLB may serve to diminish motivation to meet the statutory requirements. However, Riverton’s teachers and administrators still expressed the highest levels of apparent salience of NCLB.

Implications for CSR

Although educators in Riverton perceived NCLB to be having an effect on their schools, relatively little interview data indicated that NCLB is having a direct effect on their CSR model. One teacher said that the reform model has suffered because “I haven’t had one grade group meeting. . . . We’re not really, at least as far as I can see, able to function beyond the strictness of our curriculum demands that are much more in line with No Child Left Behind.” Another teacher found that the CSR model “had to take a backseat to . . . the professional development” required after the district was taken over. A third teacher said that NCLB brought in a new set of standards and “affected our delivery system across the board.” One teacher felt that the new curriculum (it was unclear whether this curriculum is related to CSR or not) did not allow time for students to master skills that would affect their AYP scores under NCLB.

In addition, other teachers described ways in which AYP requirements have manipulated their instruction, often in ways that do not bode well for CSR. For example, one teacher described how the safe harbor provisions can cause teachers to target moderately achieving students and neglect lower achieving students:

[To meet AYP,] I need to move 12 more kids to proficient advanced than I had last year, and I’ve got a pool of 90 kids to pull from. Well, the 50 who are lowest are going to sit uncared for while we put all the effort into the 30 or 40 who are miserable, but who can jump forward.

Another teacher said that a similar problem came up between grade levels:

[They are] putting all the emphasis on getting the eighth-grade scores to improve to meet No Child Left Behind, because what we’re doing is basically leaving the seventh and sixth graders behind. . . . So it’s kind of a one-year Band-Aid, and it could come back and bite us next year and certainly by the following year. Because if you keep pushing the top grade . . . [then] the gap’s going to get wider and wider, and at some point you’re not going to be able to close it.



Hence, teachers find that a focus on passing AYP can lead to efforts being concentrated on certain students or grades. Such efforts are generally incompatible with CSR models because of CSR's emphasis on schoolwide improvement. In sum, it appears that the heightened awareness of AYP and relative concern about NCLB sanctions could constrain the capacity of Riverton's schools to continue to implement CSR models.

Eastwicker School District

Focusing attention: Are educators aware of NCLB provisions?

Teachers in the Eastwicker School District exhibited some confusion about NCLB and its effect on their school district. All of the district's personnel had a basic knowledge about the district's AYP status, but three of them deferred to the fourth as being the most knowledgeable about the actual numbers of schools that passed AYP. The majority of teachers knew whether their school had met AYP; of the nine teachers interviewed individually, only two did not know whether their school had met AYP. There is some indication, however, that AYP is not a frequent topic of discussion in the schools, or that teachers are expected to attend to AYP targets. One teacher, who appeared relatively knowledgeable about her school's AYP status, also reported that, "[AYP] is really not dealt with here. It's dealt [with] at the board level, and I did go to a little session . . . [with] someone from our grants and proposal office [who] discussed some of the issues about it and how it's supposed to be implemented."

Interview data suggest that teachers in Eastwicker were less informed and more confused about aspects of NCLB than their counterparts in other districts. Unlike those in Riverton, none of the teachers in Eastwicker exhibited familiarity with terms such as "corrective action" and "safe harbor." More than one third of the teachers displayed a complete lack of knowledge of NCLB. Five of them stated that NCLB was not a frequent topic for discussion. One stated that

No one has actually sat down and talked to us yet about the No Child Left Behind program. I've just been hearing about it through, you know, the newspaper and on the news, but it hasn't been introduced to us here yet like . . . the [CSR model] was.

Two teachers indicated that their knowledge of NCLB came almost entirely from reading about it on their own. When asked what aspects of NCLB have been challenging to the school, a teacher replied,

I'm not even clear on that. I have no idea what they're doing [with] No Child Left Behind. . . . The only part of it that I do see is the classroom. . . . I mean, they do try to keep the numbers down per . . . teacher per student. . . . That's the only aspect of it that I really . . . see or . . . hear about or anything.

Some teachers showed a lack of information about NCLB. "I haven't even heard [about] No Child Left Behind since maybe a meeting that we might have had like in January or something. . . . You know, don't forget the No Child Left Behind rule." Other teachers appeared to interpret the phrase "no child left behind" quite literally. One explained that she tried to implement NCLB in her "daily teaching, to make sure that all students are on task, to accomplish that no child is left behind. . . . If you don't pay attention, you will be left behind." Another said, "I think it is in 3rd grade that students are supposed to be left behind if they don't pass."



Motivating educators

Educators in Eastwicker seemed to be far less concerned than educators in Riverton about sanctions that could be imposed on their schools for not passing AYP for consecutive years. Only one district-level person discussed sanctions in his interview, but he was knowledgeable about consequences and steps being taken to increase student achievement. The teachers had varying degrees of understanding and concern about sanctions. Nearly all of the teachers were aware that consequences existed for not meeting AYP, but only five could describe the sanctions with any level of detail. Of the five, only two exhibited any concern about potential sanctions, and one was primarily concerned with school labels, noting “they do publicize the test scores in the [local newspaper].” One teacher stated that she knew their school could be restructured, but did not “see that really happening, per se.” Another teacher explained that there is pressure to score well on the mandated assessment, but did not appear worried overall, stating that “it’s not a lot of pressure.” Overall, the sanctions associated with failure to meet AYP targets seemed to hold relatively little salience for teachers in the Eastwicker School District.

Regardless of their depth of understanding of sanctions, Eastwicker’s teachers and district administrators described a number of concerns about NCLB and barriers to making AYP. One of the most common complaints was voiced only by the district’s personnel. The four district staff worried that the test was unfair to special populations, such as special education students and English Language Learners. The other most common concern with NCLB was voiced by one quarter of the teachers: NCLB does not take into account outside factors that interfere with school performance, most notably the challenging home environments and lack of parental support. Teachers felt that a number of community issues, including unemployment, the rate of sickness, poor health care, and segregation contributed to the achievement gap. One stated that

The notion that No Child Left Behind is going to address the sociological issues without a revolutionary approach in terms of funding and the breakdown of the psychological and sociological barriers that communities impose upon the kids and the schools that operate to me is heresy.

One teacher found it unfair that her school was held accountable for AYP, when, despite contextual challenges:

As a teacher, [you] have no control over what’s happened before you, what happens on the life of that child outside of that classroom. But at the end of it, if a child comes to you and he’s two years behind, you have to catch him up, and we don’t look at, well how much progress did you make with this child.

Implications for CSR

Most of Eastwicker’s educators did not mention a connection between NCLB and their CSR model; however, some commented on a disconnect between the CSR model and the mandated state assessment. They found that “the practices for the model were not necessarily aligned to the content standards of the district,” which were aligned to the mandated state test. One teacher said that he finds that to teach in a way that raises his students’ scores on the state test, he must deviate from the CSR model because “the testing and [our CSR model], to me, it just doesn’t go.” Another teacher agreed that “some strategies weren’t effective to address students’ needs.” She said that some teachers didn’t like the CSR model because “it didn’t have the strategies we were looking for to gear to the test.”



However, the bulk of our interview data suggest that the accountability mechanisms most associated with NCLB (i.e., AYP targets and accountability designations) have a minimal impact on teachers' behavior and an even smaller effect on the CSR models that schools have adopted. Many teachers were confused about key components of NCLB; few discussed AYP targets in their schools; and teachers expressed only mild concern, if any, about NCLB sanctions. They did perceive barriers that would hinder their capacity to meet performance targets—primarily a lack of support to overcome the challenging environments in which their schools were situated. In this context, NCLB accountability mechanisms have only minimal interaction with the sustainability of CSR models.

Dodgeland School District

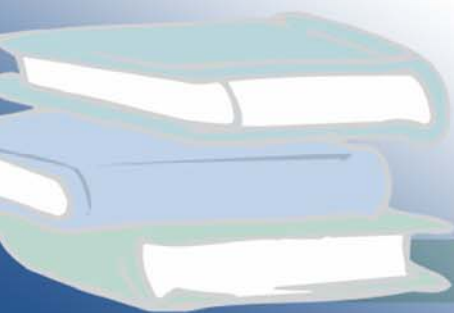
Focusing attention: Are educators aware of NCLB provisions?

Riverton's teachers were very aware of AYP, and Eastwicker's teachers were confused. Teachers in Dodgeland School District, however, were situated somewhere in the middle. Nearly all of Dodgeland's educators were aware of AYP, but there was evidence of some confusion in teachers' understanding of the requirements. Of the 15 educators interviewed, 10 exhibited an understanding of whether their schools had met AYP goals. Two teachers had a limited understanding of AYP, and two exhibited some confusion. One principal reported that his school had met AYP, and when probed whether the school had met AYP goals the previous year, he replied, "in most areas, yeah, and we still have a ways to go." A teacher from another school seemed to confuse issues related to AYP with issues related to NCLB's requirements for "highly qualified teachers." When asked about whether the school met its AYP goals, she replied, "Yeah, there were some. I know that we got notice with that, you know, any parent can check your credentials." Two teachers at the same school were unaware that attendance plays a factor in passing AYP. One teacher was entirely unfamiliar with the term "Adequate Yearly Progress" and did not know whether her school had met AYP goals. In general, teachers in Dodgeland were not familiar with NCLB terminology, such as "safe harbor."

Motivating educators

Sanctions can be imposed on schools that continually fail to meet AYP targets. The majority of Dodgeland's educators were knowledgeable about sanctions that would be imposed for not passing AYP, but this knowledge did not appear to figure as prominently as it did in Riverton. Teachers in two schools in the Dodgeland sample had met AYP goals and were confident that they would continue to do so. Thus, they expressed less concern about potential sanctions: "I don't believe that we're not going meet our goal," and "You just do the best you can for the kids you have. . . . We do everything we can to make sure kids get the best education that they can." Only one teacher was completely unaware of sanctions, and another reported that the consequence for not meeting AYP would most likely be a walk-through by an official to provide feedback on improvement. Overall, less than half of the interviewed educators reported being concerned about their schools being taken over.

Dodgeland's educators also articulated a number of barriers that could prevent them from meeting AYP targets. The two most common concerns about NCLB were that school transfers put stress on the receiving schools and that NCLB did not address outside factors that affect students. One third of interviewed educators found the transfers to be problematic. One principal summed up several problems:



[I'm] not able to have a [reduced] class size because I have to keep accepting children and keep filling up. So you always want to keep your mobility rate down, and the fact that these children come on buses sometimes prohibits them from afterschool programs [and] Saturday school classes, so they really don't have the equal opportunity.

Teachers felt that NCLB does not take into account outside factors that may influence student performance. One principal said, "We have such high mobility . . . high poverty [and] high minority . . . and it's really a big challenge for us, because . . . especially with No Child Left Behind, the kind of pressure that's upon us to make progress in the students." Two teachers saw a disadvantage for students who are having problems at home. One explained that "they're not getting any help or support from their parents." The other thought that "not everyone is going to . . . succeed at the pace they think they're going to. Children have family issues, children have problems, and not everyone is going to [succeed]. I think it's very unrealistic."

Implications for CSR

Interview data suggest that teachers in Dodgeland do not make an explicit connection between NCLB accountability requirements and CSR. None of the educators in Dodgeland linked NCLB with their CSR model. Only 2 of 15 interviewees expressed their school goal in terms of NCLB. One teacher stated the goal of making AYP, and another teacher stated the goal of staying off of probation.

Overall, teachers in Dodgeland's schools are moderately aware of AYP targets and NCLB sanctions, but most interviewed teachers were not particularly motivated by the threat of sanctions. Dodgeland was similar to other districts in that its teachers noted contextual challenges that could hinder their capacity to meet performance targets.

Conclusions

In both the popular and academic press, NCLB accountability receives a great deal of attention—to the extent that a casual observer might conclude that such issues are equally emphasized in American schools. The reality in the classroom, however, appears more nuanced.

Together, our quantitative and qualitative data offer complementary insights into the interaction between NCLB accountability mechanisms and CSR. First, the quantitative data suggest that there are no significant differences between the rates at which CSR schools are identified for improvement or meet AYP targets, at least within the NLECSR sample. This sample, however, consists of disadvantaged, generally low-performing schools, so such a trend may differ in a sample with a different composition. The most intriguing finding concerns the improvement in model implementation within CSR schools that are identified for improvement. Rather than functioning as competing forces, it appears that NCLB accountability designations and CSR models interact to stimulate school change.

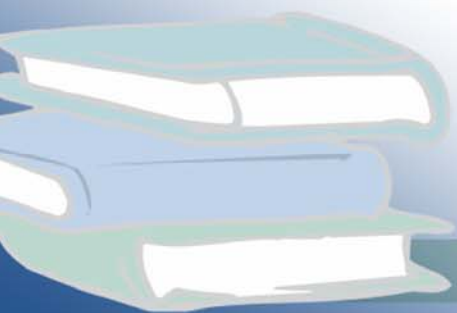
The site visit data allowed us to probe deeper into the ways in which teachers perceive NCLB. Some findings conflict with the trends depicted in the quantitative data. In one of the districts in our study (Riverton), teachers had a fine-tuned understanding of NCLB accountability mechanisms but some attention was being diverted from schoolwide strategies endorsed by CSR models. In the two other districts (Eastwicker and Dodgeland), however, awareness is either moderate or low, and the threat of sanctions seems to have a marginal motivational effect, at best. It appears, then, that the failure of CSR



models in such schools cannot be attributed directly to inordinate pressure from NCLB accountability requirements.

To reconcile the quantitative and qualitative data, we must note that many of the schools in the site visit sample were not yet identified for improvement at the time of the interviews, although many had missed AYP targets. It is possible that the most salient accountability stimulus is being identified for improvement, rather than just missing AYP, and teachers' awareness of accountability consequences will increase if their schools are identified for improvement. Following identification, teachers may follow the trend of other IFI schools and focus increased efforts on CSR model implementation.

Finally, the interview data suggests another interesting pattern: Teachers and administrators in all three districts expressed concern that the impoverished, urban environments of their schools present challenges that would prevent them from meeting AYP targets. Although NCLB is intended to provide support for schools that face the most severe challenges, clearly these teachers do not perceive this support to be adequate, and it appears that the CSR models in place in these schools were insufficient in helping the teachers overcome such challenges. The intent of CSR is to integrate instructional strategies with other schoolwide components, including parental support, community involvement, and governance. Doing so would help address some of the concerns expressed by so many of the interviewees. Although interviewees did not specifically articulate it, NCLB accountability requirements indirectly highlight the extent to which CSR models have failed to address what teachers perceive to be the most severe challenges. Whether other support strategies will more effectively address these needs is unclear.



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