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## Political Action in Public Education

Brian Edmonds  
*University of Massachusetts Boston*

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**University of Massachusetts Boston**

**Political Action in Public Education**

Brian Edmonds

Department of Political Science

University Honors College

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### **Abstract**

Within the history of the United States, education policy has been an area of constant development and change. The unique structure of government in the U.S. means that any changes on a national level go through a detailed process with many different actors coming together and working toward the change. In the case of education policy change is often an intensive and laborious process. When looking at these changes the question really is this: does change in education policy represent government reacting to its own failures? Investigation into this question is divided into 6 sections: 1 – an introduction, 2 – history of U.S. education policy, 3 – analysis of scholarly views on education policy and the political nature of education, 4 – actions and the perspective of interest groups 5 – a case study using Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015. The final chapter is 6 – a conclusion designed to bring seemingly separate sections together. These pieces come together to demonstrate that when looking at education policy, political action and decision making is indeed reactionary, often looking to rectify past missteps to ensure of brighter future.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

In the spring of 2013, I was reading my local newspaper and saw that a longstanding member of the school committee had decided not to seek reelection. Upon further investigation, I was shocked and somewhat dismayed to learn that no one had pulled papers to run and fill the vacancy. It was then that the idea crossed my mind to run for the position myself. I can state as a matter of fact that in the beginning I was full of doubt. What did I know about the running of the schools and the duties entrusted to the school committee? I was a 19 year old college student with little experience outside the very school district I would be serving. That is when it hit me: my experience as a student within the school district is exactly what made me qualified for the seat.

During my years in the district, I had been an involved student who participated in a variety of clubs and activities particularly during my high school years. Choir, theatre, announcing/commentating during sporting events, student government and most importantly serving as the student representative to the school committee (just to name a few). Having thought long and hard about what I was going to do, I decided that I would in fact run. Unfortunately I had grappled with the decision for so long that I had missed the deadline to draw papers. Many would have stopped at that moment but a passion for education policy that I previously did not even know existed had been lit. It was at this point that I decided to organize a write in campaign.

I wrote to my local newspaper and announced my intention to run for the position and explained why I believed I was the best possible candidate; one who could make a difference. The newspaper heartily agreed to conduct an interview with me and publish it in the paper a few

weeks before the election. Then came the hard part of organizing a special write-in campaign for Election Day; posters, signs, pamphlets, business cards, and some assistance at the polls all had to be created while juggling a full college course load. With some help from my family, many friends who still attended my local high school, my laptop, and personal printer, I was ready for Election Day.

I stood at the polls from an hour prior to the opening until the closing of the polls in the evening. On the day of the election, I introduced myself, shook hands, discussed my policy ideas and gained the support of members within my community; people who called themselves Democrats and people who called themselves Republicans. Many hours and one bad sunburn later, I was notified just before midnight of my campaign's success and climbed into my bed knowing that I had been elected. I would be the newest and youngest member of the School Committee; at nineteen years old I now had a direct hand in the development and implementation of education policy at the local level.

For the next two and a half years I have been engrossed in a process of policy making and governing, the importance of which many do not recognize. Within my state of Massachusetts the role of the school committee is one of extreme importance. According to Massachusetts General Law, Chapter 71, Section 37, "the school committee establishes educational goals and policies for the schools in the district, consistent with the requirements of law and the statewide goals and standards established by the Board of Education". The recommendations from the state go on to compare the school committee to a company's board of directors and explains that the members are elected by the people and responsible to the students and communities they were elected to serve. Upon stepping into this role the often underestimated connection between education and the political processes in this country became abundantly clear.

As my term continued, the connections that exist between education and politics became more apparent as I sat in the chair and witnessed changes to policies, a committee that could be divided on issues and even public pressure that can only be compared to that of an interest group in Washington DC. My desire to step in and simply make a difference on local level had evolved into something greater. I now hoped to find a way to demonstrate the political elements of education in a new way that would not only excite but entice people to become educated about political action and work to make a substantial difference.

The opportunity came about through an internship with the Edward M. Kennedy Institute for the United States Senate beginning in the winter of 2015. This non-partisan educational institution, that opened to the public in March of 2015, “is dedicated to educating the public about the important role of the Senate in our government, encouraging participatory democracy, invigorating civil discourse, and inspiring the next generation of citizens and leaders to engage in the civic life of their communities” (EMK Institute). At the Institute, visitors use tablets to interact with museum exhibits and partake in programs that allow them to take on the role of a Senator to learn about our political processes. Through my role as a staffer in various programs for students and daily public programming, I have been able to investigate the legislative process and bring that knowledge to students and museum visitors in a way that is different from a classroom. The unique experience of engagement and hands on activity separates the Institute from many other museums and institutions.

One of the daily programs offered at the Institute is called ‘Today’s Vote’. Through the ‘Today’s Vote’ program, “visitors will get the chance to cast their vote on a bill inspired by real legislation related to the Issue of the Day” (EMK Institute). While working as a staffer, I began to develop a ‘Today’s Vote’ that focuses on Education Policy; specifically the Senate’s renewal



of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. This proposal was introduced to the Senate in April of 2015 (S.1177). While working to create a program centered on this bill, major interests and components of my life collided.

The information that had to be gathered for the development of the program involved detailed investigation into the legislative process with a focus on how education policy has changed and advanced. This thesis grew out of this process by questioning just exactly how education and politics intersect. It became apparent to me, that when it comes to the issue of education, legislators are often reacting to unintended consequences of previous decisions rather than being proactive in looking for unique solutions to future problems or possible complications.

To demonstrate the theory that I have developed, the following chapters have been prepared. Chapter 2 is a general history of American education policy in order to provide general baseline knowledge of how changes in legislation have occurred over time. Chapter 3 discusses the scholarly literature on modern education debates and legislation. Sources deliberated include the writing of experts online, in magazines and journals. Chapter 4 focuses on interest groups that have a vested interest in education reform and describe some of their efforts to impact changes in policy. Chapter 5 presents a case study and follows the introduction, amendment, debate and passage of an updated Elementary and Secondary Education Act throughout the year 2015. Chapter 6 brings all the pieces together and demonstrates that in a time of political uncertainty, decisions regarding education law are reactionary.

## Chapter 2: History of Education Policy in the United States

**Figure 2.1**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Event</b>
<b>1779</b>	<b>Jefferson proposes the Funding of Public Schools</b>
<b>1887</b>	<b>Massachusetts leads the way for public education</b>
<b>1867</b>	<b>U.S. Office of Education is established</b>
<b>1868</b>	<b>Worcester Polytechnic Institute opens – First U.S. Vocation School</b>
<b>1944</b>	<b>Servicemen’s Readjustment Act (G.I. Bill) Passes</b>
<b>1965</b>	<b>Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) becomes law</b>
<b>1983</b>	<b>‘A Nation at Risk’ is published</b>
<b>2002</b>	<b>No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) becomes law</b>
<b>2011</b>	<b>Obama Administration offers NCLB waivers to schools</b>
<b>2015</b>	<b>Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) becomes law</b>

To properly understand the links between politics and education in the modern context it is important to understand the development of public education within the United States. A full history of U.S. Education policy would fill numerous volumes. Throughout the nation’s nearly two hundred and fifty year history countless changes and developments have resulted in the convoluted system of education that is the cause of so much deliberation and debate today. Education has been at the core of the American Dream since the founding of this country. The belief in a well-educated populace leading to a more flourishing and successful country has been a driving force in the development of education policy. The purpose of this research is to look at

modern political actors; to determine the how and why of their decisions. To properly conduct this study a minimal historical background is necessary. Figure 2.1 provides a timeline of ten moments in American history that signaled a change in education policy. These ten events provide the framework for this chapter. However, as the focus of the paper is modern education politics the last five events are described in greater detail and historical context.

### **Event 1) 1779 – Thomas Jefferson proposes the Funding of Public Schools**

Discussions surrounding the importance of education began as early as colonial times. Thomas Jefferson, chief author of the Declaration of Independence and third President of the United States recognized the importance of education. Jefferson himself was a scholar of Lockean<sup>1</sup> liberalism and is cited as one of the first to push for greater access to education for citizens. In 1779, Jefferson put forth a plan that created free education for the children in his home state of Virginia. Jefferson argued that this system of education would be paid for and supported by the taxes paid in the state. Jefferson's concept was not made a reality at this time; however the ideas proposed are very relevant today. More specifically the proposal called for the funding of education be supported through taxes; in the modern world of public education taxes at the local level are instrumental in budgeting and funding public school systems (Education Policy).

### **Event 2) 1827 – Massachusetts leads the way for public education**

In the same way that many see the Commonwealth of Massachusetts as leading the early days of the American Revolution, the state led the nation in terms of public education. In 1827,

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<sup>1</sup> John Locke was the author of "Two Treatises of Government" which situated the government ruling by consent of the people and the basic natural rights of every individual. The duty of government is to protect those rights. These ideas influenced Jefferson in the drafting of the Declaration of Independence and are still considered basic principles of the American political system (John Locke).

Massachusetts was the first state in the nation to require free public schooling. Specifically the Commonwealth codified that cities or towns with 500 or more families were required to establish free public schools. Ten years later, an education enthusiast by the name of Horace Mann<sup>2</sup> became the supervisor on an initiative to create state-wide fixed curricula for all schools. These school systems were initially for all white children and by 1855 African American children were also included and integrated into the public schools (Education Policy).

#### **Event 03) 1867 – U.S. Office of Education is Established**

The U.S. Office of Education was established in 1867 and is currently called the U.S. Department of Education. This entity was created to help that states generate stronger public schools across the expanding nation. Over the years, the duties of this office have consistently increased. In its current form as the U.S. Department of Education, the agency safeguards equitable access to public education for all people in the United States. The Department of Education is also responsible for administering federal funding to schools across the nation and ensures that schools follow the federal education laws as determined by Congress (Education Policy).

#### **Event 4) 1868 – Worcester Polytechnic Institute Opens – First U.S. Vocational School**

In 1868, the state of Massachusetts made another step forward for the nation in terms of public education. This step forward was the opening of Worcester Polytechnic Institute. WPI was the first vocational school in the United States. The founders of Worcester Polytechnic

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<sup>2</sup> Horace Mann is often called the Father of the Common School. A lawyer and legislator he was the first Secretary of Education for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and used the position to push public education initiatives across the Commonwealth (Horace Mann).

hoped to combine academics and hands-on learning<sup>3</sup>. Their goal would be that the students with interests in specific sciences and engineering fields could learn the skills necessary to enter these growing industries upon graduation. This became a blueprint for other vocational schools that today have become a staple throughout the entire country. The movement has grown to the point that during the 20<sup>th</sup> century federal laws were passed to provide funds that would support the training and paying of teachers to work in these vocation schools (Education Policy).

### **Event 5) 1944 – Servicemen’s Readjustment Act (G.I. Bill) Passes**

During World War II and the final term of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, laws were enacted to provide support for the veterans returning to the United States after fighting the war in foreign lands. One of the most substantial was the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act, popularly referred to as the G.I. Bill of Rights. The law provided the veterans of World War II with benefits upon their return home. The assistance that was substantial in the development of U.S. Education policy was education grants. These grants were designed to help servicemen continue their education after their service specifically at the collegiate level (Education Policy). The G.I. Bill represents a major change in how education is seen in the United States. Here access to education is included with other major assistances for servicemen such as unemployment benefits, access to low interest mortgages, vocational rehab and the establishment of Veterans Hospitals. We see this connection representing the need for education as instrumental in the continued development and success of citizens throughout the United States as a whole.

### **Event 6) 1965 – Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) becomes law**

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<sup>3</sup> This approach is often referred to by WPI as the Two Towers Approach. Physically present on the WPI campus, Two Towers on Tech Hill reflect the conflict between classroom learning and hands on practice which are seen to be reconciled by the school’s approach (The Two Towers Approach).

In 1965 as part of the President Johnson's 'Great Society'<sup>4</sup>, Congress passed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), designed to improve the quality of public education across the nation. At the time, this law was the most expansive education reform bill to pass both houses of Congress and become law. In fact the bill was introduced and enacted in less than three months. The main goal was to ensure equal access to education on a national level regardless of economic background or means. The main argument presented by the President in support of the bill was that stronger educational services would help move lower income students out of poverty in the long run (Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965). The signature component of the bill was the creation of Title I funding. In the simplest of terms, Title I provides federal funding to states and school districts with the financial assistance based on the financial status of the residents. The funds are meant to be distributed so schools with high numbers and/or high percentages of children from low-income families are serviced with the best possible educational opportunities (Improving Basic Programs Operated by Local Educational Agencies (Title I, Part A)).

The bill had a number of major consequences in terms of how public education is administered and overseen by the federal government in the United States. It demonstrated a shift in how federal aid is given to schools. Specifically this law initiated a switch from general aid towards categorical aid; connecting aid to a given political issue, in this case alleviating poverty. The law also set forth a precedent where state departments of education administer the federal funds to the various schools throughout each state; therefore increasing not only federal

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<sup>4</sup> The 'Great Society' refers to a series of programs proposed and passed under the Johnson Administration with the goal of alleviating poverty across the United States. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act is one of those programs that came together to form the 'Great Society' (Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965).

oversight on schools but state oversight as well (Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965).

### **Event 7) 1983 – ‘A Nation at Risk’ is Published**

The publication of ‘A Nation at Risk’ in 1983 signaled another major change in how U.S. Education policy was approached following the passage of President Johnson’s ESEA. This report was commissioned by the Reagan Administration and highly criticized education throughout the U.S.; specifically criticizing a decline in overall performance by students in U.S. schools<sup>5</sup>. The result was the consistent adoption of various testing initiatives at local and state levels to improve student scores and grades. There was a great deal of support from the federal government however the impact of this report cannot be overstated.

The major impact of ‘A Nation at Risk’ was a shift in perception of education. The education system became generally perceived as failing with need for drastic change and improvement. This renewed public attention and interest in school reform, led to new Federal school improvement grants and a general focus on the necessity of improving the quality of performance for U.S. students. One of the main components that the public and politicians began to focus on was student test scores. The major connective tissue between elements could be summarized as federal money equals accountability to the federal government; accountability is measured through test scores (Education Policy).

### **Event 8) 2002 – No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) becomes law**

In 2002, President George W. Bush signed a renewal and reauthorization of the ESEA known as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 (NCLB). This signaled the most expansive

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<sup>5</sup> The full “A Nation At Risk” report can be accessed at: <http://www2.ed.gov/pubs/NatAtRisk/index.html>

change to federal education policy since 1965. I would also argue that this law is in fact that most controversial milestone included in our timeline. I would even go as far as calling it the most controversial piece of education reform legislation in U.S. history.

One could conclude that No Child Left Behind is a reaction to the concerns presented in ‘A Nation at Risk’. The bill dramatically increased the federal government’s role in ensuring schools would be accountable for the success of their students. President Bush is often the main name associated with the law by critics, in the same way President Johnson is linked to the ESEA. This is simply not the case; the bill was the brainchild of a broad coalition that included Democrats, Republicans, civil rights advocates and business groups. In collaborating to draft and pass NCLB, these groups hoped to increase U.S. students competitive edge in the growing international community and close the achievement gap that had been a major topic of discussion since ‘A Nation at Risk’. At the same time, each group had their own individual goals that they hoped to have included in the final law.

NCLB immensely expanded the Federal government’s reach into public schools. The law instituted a mandate that required the states to administer statewide standardized tests in reading and math for students in grades 3 through 8 and once during high school. The results of these tests would be recorded and reported to the federal government. The data would be organized in a number of different ways, including groups based on ethnicity and economic status. The law set in motion a target for all students in U.S. schools to be performing at or above their grade level by the year 2014.

This target was tracked through a term called “adequate yearly progress” or AYP. AYP would track the progress of schools to ensure that they were on their way to meeting this target.



If a school was identified for missing their targets two years in a row, the school would be designated as not making AYP and subject to government intervention. That intervention could involve but is not limited to a state government taking over the schools or shutting them down. The law also tied teacher evaluation and retention to the success of their students; specifically the AYP.

Criticisms of the law come from a number of different avenues. For example though the goals of the law are incredibly lofty, some have questioned if such a result is even possible. Another major criticism has been the increasingly heavy reliance on standardized testing. Critics particularly those opposed to standardized tests have argued NCLB led to teachers focusing less on curriculum development and student achievement. Many say that teaching concepts has been replaced by teaching to the test; concerned more with test results than actual student growth. Essentially arguing that students are not being taught the skills needed to succeed in any environment but what is necessary to pass the test. Other opponents have also argued that standardized tests focus is too concerned with math and reading that other important subjects such as foreign language, history, and other liberal arts programs are not being given the focus needed for a well-rounded education.

Another major criticism of NCLB is in regard to the funding being provided by the Federal Government. When the legislation was originally proposed and passed, there was a call for increases in funding to support the lofty goals of the bill. By 2007, the funding for the main NCLB program was supposed to increase to \$25 billion. This has never come to pass and by 2015, that program receives approximately \$14.5 billion. This is far lower than projections for 2007 (Klein).

It is also important to note that according to the original bill, the provisions of NCLB expired in 2007 and have remained in effect because a renewal/reauthorization has not passed both chambers of Congress and been signed into law by the President (Congressional Record – April 2015).

### **Event 9) 2011 – Obama Administration offers NCLB waivers to schools**

As the provisions of NCLB became more and more unsustainable, the Obama administration offered waivers to the provisions of NCLB to states in 2011. As of April 2015, 42 states, Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia were operating under these waivers. These waivers allowed states to opt out of many NCLB mandates but instead they would adopt redesigned educational policies provided by the U.S. Department of Education. Under these waivers, the states would agree to setting standards targeted to career readiness in the workforce or continuing on to pursue higher education (Klein).

When announcing the waivers in 2011, President Obama stated “given that Congress can’t act, I’m acting” (McNeil and Klein). This is particularly relevant as it represents the first major executive foray into education policy not working in concert with Congress.. The plan specifically takes a step back from the time sensitive demands of NCLB. In order for a state to achieve a waiver they must be part of the Common Core States Initiative. When the waivers were announced 44 states and the District of Columbia were part of the coalition. States who were not involved could secure a waiver if their university systems would support their standards as college and career ready (McNeil and Klein).

President Obama's waivers were met with backlash from many different groups. A number of these groups can be grouped into an Anti-Common Core sector. These groups were not happy that the President's waivers essentially served as an opt-out from NCLB but an automatic opt-in to the Common Core coalition.

#### **Event 10) 2015 – Every Student Succeeds Act becomes law**

The final event in this timeline takes place over the course of 2015. It also serves as the subject of the case study to be discussed in Chapter 5. The main content of the bill and the process that led to it becoming law will be presented in detail during that discussion. For the purposes of an introduction, it is important to know that the “Every Student Succeeds Act” originated in the United States Senate in April of 2015. That bill was at the time known as the “Every Child Achieves Act”. The proposal itself was sponsored by Senator Lamar Alexander, a Republican from Tennessee, with assistance from Senator Patty Murray, a Democrat from Washington. Together they worked to create bill that would find support from both parties and eventually replace NCLB. The bill was introduced in April, passed the Senate in July and after conference with the House of Representatives signed into law in December of 2015. This entire process took less than a year and should be seen as a relatively speedy completion of the legislative process (S.1177 – Every Student Succeeds Act).

### **Chapter 3: Published Opinions and Scholarly Research**

With a brief historical overview completed, moving forward to the nuances of the issue can begin. To truly understand the impacts of any education reform from the legislative standpoint, it is also important to understand what is being said by those who have studied the topic and understand the details. A number of journalists and scholars have written not only about the various aspects of education policy that may be in need of reform but also the very political elements that are generally present in the realm of education. Discussion or debate surrounding the issues of politics and education is not something that should be considered new. As demonstrated in Chapter 02, throughout the history of the United States various reforms and legislative efforts have been made to increase the quality of education and educational opportunities for students across the country. But to understand many of the reform efforts taking place nationwide studying the views of scholars, writers and experts is of the utmost importance.

#### **Educators and Politics**

Scholarly perspectives from previous eras of reform can help one to understand the perspective of previous generations. That understanding helps to color and inform the reform efforts of current political actors. One major publication from the nineteen sixties comes from Michael W. Kirst of Stanford University and Edith K. Mosher of the University of Virginia. In 1969, these two scholars published a piece titled “Politics of Education” in the flagship journal *Review of Educational Research Journal*. Writing shortly after the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, this publication helps to reveal the mindsets of scholars as the United States entered the modern era of education reform.

Kirst and Mosher note in the opening of their research that this area of study is “a new and still largely uncharted area of research concentration” (Kirst and Mosher 623). It is said that because the field is a place where a variety of interests and ideas collide it is difficult to find a specific method for researching the politics of education. In many ways their research focuses on the political actions taking place within schools and through school bureaucracies (Kirst and Mosher 623). The two scholars present a variety of different possible methods for researching what appears to be an incredibly political phenomenon. In fact, their research would suggest that at this time the political connections were focused on the lower levels of government, i.e. schools, school officials, districts and states rather, than actors at the federal level. The two scholars question how decisions over budgets, curricula, and facilities changes are made, why certain choices are made and who can gain politically from such outcomes (Kirst and Mosher 623-624).

The scholars present a variety of potential lines for inquiry and explain that as some of the first writers in a new field their methods remain untested; however they believe the political actions taking place within schools cannot be ignored (Kirst and Mosher 637). They write that contrary to popular opinion schools can't be seen as non-political actors anymore. The authors go on to state that “there are 17,000 local districts and fifty states, and the government of education in each local district is to a degree unique... these complex and differentiated structures do not lend themselves to broad scale statistical surveys” (Kirst and Mosher 637). They conclude that further study is required by looking at the unique institutions of schools through case studies to find similarities between schools. This writing from the nineteen sixties serves as recognition that politics is necessary within schools due to their position as part of

government. Furthermore the very structure of school bureaucracies reflects this connective tissue between politics and education.

Following the research of Kirst and Mosher, and moving into the modern era, investigating the questions regarding political actors within schools is a truly important undertaking. It is definitively necessary to look at the important question about the role of teachers in this process and what has been written about their role in politics and education reform. One specific source of information regarding this question comes from the magazine *Education Week* and writer Ross Brenneman. Brenneman wrote during the debates surrounding Senate bill S.1177 and states that Education is by its very nature political. For Brenneman the important question is if education is political “can teachers afford not to be” (Brenneman)? It is important to note the Brenneman is writing to an audience that is composed primarily of educators. His writing looks at the current political process and states that “as political as education issues can be, teachers, charged with ultimate execution of new policies, often refrain from viewing themselves as political” (Brenneman).

Brenneman points to this as a potential problem because of the way that education reform works in the United States. Education reform is a political event and requires some political action to build momentum. In a way his piece serves as a call to action for those in the classroom to become more involved in the development of these new policies for reform; specifically getting involved on a more individual and personal level. Brenneman’s article quotes the President of the American Federation of Teachers, Randi Weingarten as saying “[Teachers] want to tell legislators what’s going on, they want legislators to visit their classrooms, they want people to help them have the tools and conditions they need to do their job... they don’t see that as political, they just see that as part of, ‘Help me do my job’” (Brenneman). In the end

Brenneman's argument comes down to a cooperative partnership style relationship between policy makers and educators.

### **Education and Partisan Politics**

In addition to the types of arguments made by Brenneman about the role of teachers in politics, other authors have focused on the intense politicizing of education and a seeming partisan divide that has developed. One such author is Kevin Chavous, Executive Council to the American Federation for Children. Chavous tackled the issue of education policy in relation to the Presidential election in 2012 through a series of articles reflecting on the debates and campaigns of the race. He indicates the tactics used in speeches, debates and advertisements are without a doubt in poor taste despite the fact that we as a population have become accustomed to them.

The first of two Chavous articles to be discussed is titled "Education Reform is Much More Than Partisan Politics". When opening this reaction to education in the context of the presidential race, an analogy is made to a predictable movie, with "a predictable plot, bad script, bad director and bad actors" all of whom are "ready to perform their roles" (Chavous). Chavous goes on to note that here we had Mitt Romney's proposal for more parental choice in education and yet he is applauded by Republicans and attacked by Democrats because this is the partisan political world that has developed. For Chavous the most ironic part to all of this is that "the emerging cry for parental choice is warranted, and it's not coming from the Republican Party playbook" (Chavous). Chavous sees this push coming from families lower on the income ladder who typically votes with the Democratic Party. The article notes that this movement is being

driven “by low-income parents who are disgusted with the fact that they are forced to send their kids to bad schools with no other options” (Chavous).

Chavous argues that as political partisan divide continues to grow the more educational excellence is diminished. He maintains that “while the politicians and pundits continue to play their parts, more and more of our kids are falling behind” (Chavous). He adds that in this immensely polarized political world “adult interests and politics take precedence over the education of our children” (Chavous). The article goes on to note that in many instances both political parties (specifically the 2012 campaign proposals of Barack Obama and Mitt Romney) are not as far apart as some would think. Chavous notes that both parties support issues of performance pay, charter schools, and teacher quality initiatives but these areas of agreement are dwarfed by the metaphorical battle lines drawn when there is disagreement. One example would be the role of the federal government (Chavous). His writing points to the fact that the political rhetoric during debates and discussions polarizes movements for education reform while in reality both parties have theories and proposals that are more alike than they care to admit (Chavous).

Like Brennenman, Chavous brings this article to a close with a call to action. He makes it clear that discussions regarding education need to be taken to a level where partisan divide is removed from the equation. He cites education reform as “the one issue we should rally around as Americans, without the political shenanigans” (Chavous). He ends by presenting a hypothetical scenario in which presidential candidates see the issue of education as one where they can be unified. He calls for “proposals calling for the immediate and radical change needed in this country to make schools work for kids today... proposals that when offered, to the



American people, give no deference to the politics of education, but are thoughtful and forward-thinking with children yet unborn in mind” (Chavous).

Another article of interest was published in the aftermath of what Chavous called “the most expensive, hype-driven presidential campaign in U.S. History” (Chavous). This wrap up piece is the culmination of Chavous’ editorials throughout the campaign that advocated a more unified stance between Governor Romney and President Obama when discussing education policy. The article serves as Chavous’ blueprint to not only to de-politicize education reform efforts but also to help unify the nation in making these changes.

Chavous begins his wrap up, by explaining just exactly what he is looking for by proposing to remove politics from education and why current divisions continue to exist. He explains that “as a starting point, we need to look at education quite differently than we do now” (Chavous). Evidence shows that many stereotypes exist regarding the various groups who care about education policy. For example, teachers’ unions are often painted an extension of Democratic Party politics, while charter school groups and parental choice leaders are smeared as mere extensions of right wing politics. For Chavous, a major part of the problem comes from the fact that “any and all discussions relating to how we fix our schools are viewed in stark political terms and the various stakeholders feel compelled to pick sides before all the relevant issues are fully understood” (Chavous).

Writing in early 2013, Chavous believes that solutions to achieve unification must come from the top down. He states that our leaders need to push for positive dialogue and goals that represent the dreams and goals of both the parents and students. Chavous’ proposal “means that Republicans and Democrats nationally and in every state legislative chamber should reach across

the aisle and build on their common points of agreement and create measurable goals and objectives both short and long term, that will advance the academic achievement of our kids” (Chavous). The author writes that he knows this will not be easy. However, he does not stop there.

Chavous’ blueprint for change continues in a call to action that once the political sphere becomes more unified “make it a priority to educate and each and every American child” this will in turn “accelerate the urgency associated with closing achievement gaps and in eliminating the education disparities... so that all children can benefit” (Chavous). The final piece of this outline calls on the well-recognized national leaders, particularly the president, to promote education reform as a national cause that everyone needs to think about. Whether someone has a child in the school system or is nearing retirement, an “environment in which all citizens can participate” must be cultivated and encouraged (Chavous). The author believes this can all be achieved simply by changing the ways partisan politics tackles the issue of education and by replacing animosity over the issue with a desire for creating a common goal as “a nation that motivates its students to value education, love learning, and realize their duty to their families, our nation, and themselves to maximize their educational potential without giving any thought to the politics of the day” (Chavous).

### **Too much Politics, not enough Education**

Unlike Brenneman and Chavous there are some proponents of education policy who take great issue with the political connections that have become a staple to these important conversations. One example is P.L. Thomas. Thomas is an Associate Professor of education at Furman University located in Greenville South Carolina. In a piece published by the *Atlantic*,

Thomas takes a position of removing political bureaucracy from education. The article titled “Politics and Education Don’t Mix” begins with a simple statement that is explained later in the article: “governors and presidents are no better suited to run schools than they are to run construction sites, and it’s time our education system reflected that” (Thomas).

This particular statement could seem like a gross exaggeration, but for Thomas it serves as a lead to bring forward the issue of bureaucratic idiosyncrasies preventing lasting reform in terms of developing stronger educational opportunities within the United States. Thomas begins by citing an argument made by legal reformer Philip K. Howard that in order for teachers and principals to act in the best interests of students school bureaucracy must be bulldozed (Thomas). Thomas indicates that he is in agreement with that particular concept but to understand those notions, a more in-depth discussion of bureaucracy and the obstacles it creates is required (Thomas).

Thomas’ analysis begins by presenting the fact that without proper dissection of the obstacles in bureaucratic debates this argument would serve as little more than a convenient target for challenging current education reform efforts. In the words of this education professor “bureaucracy fails in part because it honors *leadership* as a primary qualifier over *expertise*, commits to ideological solutions without identifying and clarifying problems first, and repeats the same reforms over and over while expecting different results” (Thomas). In this case repetitive reform represents the current model of developing standards and utilizing a standardized test as the primary indicator.

Though a proponent of education being removed from politics, Thomas is quick to note that in our current system education is in many ways a subsidiary of government. This has

unfortunately resulted in schools and the public education system/curriculum becoming a vehicle for political mandates and ideological changes consistent with changes in party majorities and administrations (Thomas). Direct examples cited include President Bush's "No Child Left Behind" and President Obama's "Race to the Top". (Thomas). In fact Thomas states that government "bureaucracy is unavoidable" however "the central flaw is that need for structure and hierarchy is that politics prefers leadership characteristics over expertise" something that can't happen when talking about the future of millions of young people (Thomas).

Professor Thomas states definitively that no politician has all the expertise and experience needed to single handedly craft policy. For example when looking at education policies over the last three decades "the direct role of governors and presidents as it relates to education has increased dramatically –often with education as a central plank in their campaigns" (Thomas). Thomas continues by noting that many of the most prominent advocates for education reform, such as billionaire Bill Gates, do not have relevant experience making decisions in and around the classroom.

In returning to the issue of bureaucracy focusing on leadership and hierarchy, Thomas sees this problem as having two major consequences that will feature the continued failure of potential reform. These consequences are "(1) Inexpert leadership is ideologically committed to solutions and thus implements solutions without identifying and clarifying the problems first, and (2) inexpert leadership is in constant flux, with the perpetual changes in administrations, is apt to implement the same solutions over and over with different outcomes expected" (Thomas).

Now what possible solution could be proposed to such a grave problem as the one described by Professor Thomas? The answer he proposes is that "universal public education

needs a new wall, paralleling the wall of separation between church and state” (Thomas). The concept put forward by Professor Thomas is one where “power over funding and broad performance benchmarks can remain vested in political leaders... but granular operational details should be left to local administrators, the people best suited to achieve these goals in their schools and classrooms” (Thomas). A specific comparison is then made to civil engineering projects; the government provides funds and goals but the daily minutia is left to those constructing the project because it is their area of expertise.

Thomas’ conclusion is that if this metaphorical wall can be constructed, reform must then be left in the hand of the experts. When referring to experts, Thomas means the educators in the classrooms, the administrators and local officials who run the schools. If this is the case, Thomas is of the mindset that the end result will be “education reform that allows teachers to do that which they know how to do” to continue to foster the growth, education and development of the nation’s youth (Thomas).

Thomas is not the only writer to be critical of how political action has impacted public education in the United States. Another critique comes in the form of an Opinion Editorial authored by Peter Greene. Greene himself is a teacher who has used internet blogging to express his views and had his opinion editorial titled “Mixing Education With Politics” published online by the *Huffington Post*. The main argument that Greene presents is that by mixing education and politics, the politics is metaphorically drowning education.

Greene begins his argument with a quote from a Reverend who states “when you mix religion and politics, you get politics” (Greene). Greene’s analysis of that particular quote is that “while you may think that political power gives you leverage you need to engineer social

changes... politics always ends up in the driver's seat" (Greene). Greene hopes to take that same concept and explain how it applies to education and in many ways sees education reform being used as a means to a political end.

Greene then leads with his definition of politics and the roles of political power; specifically that "the first job, the primary imperative, of all political power is to collect and preserve political power" (Greene). For Greene in all instances where politics and other interests intersect the considerations of politics and power will reign supreme. As is apparent, Greene's tone and view of politics is one that seems to be resoundingly negative. In fact what Greene is stating falls under the category of Political Realism. Political Realism can essentially be defined as a "political philosophy that attempts to explain, model, and prescribe political relations... it takes as its assumption that power is (or ought to be) the primary end of political action, whether in the domestic or international arena" (Moseley).

In working to demonstrate his views, Greene looks to the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) which was passed under the George W. Bush Administration. Many scholars including some referenced above have panned this piece of legislation as failed education reform. Greene does not necessarily disagree with those writers. Greene writes that for all the problems and difficulties caused by this piece of legislation, "it boils down to politics – No Child Left Behind is such genius political rhetoric that it is impervious to all educational sense" (Greene). Greene takes this time to state his thesis that with No Child Left Behind, "we have mixed education and politics, and we are getting politics" (Greene).

From Greene's point of view, No Child Left Behind was a genius political move because the rhetoric used to promote the bill was that the systems of public education in this country are

allowing some children to be forgotten or left behind. This oratory continued and painted that outcome as unacceptable. As a result, certain new accountability mandates needed to be put in place. With these new measurements no child would be given the best education and according to the bill's requirements "100 percent of our students would be above average in 2014" (Greene). As Greene points out this requirement is impossible and most states are operating under waivers to prevent penalties from crippling the various state education departments.

Coming from the perspective of a teacher, Greene writes that "NCLB is terrible education policy, but brilliant politics" (Greene). Writing in 2014, prior to recent reform efforts, Greene cites the fact that despite opposition and waivers for noncompliance, the fact that the NCLB has remained law is a testament to its political credibility. It is here that Greene in many ways begins to tackle the uber-partisanship that has been discussed by previous authors. He writes that "the basic formula for applying bad political solutions is to mix one part good idea and one part fantasy... you make yourself the champion of the good part and when the ship of fantasy runs aground on the hard rocks of reality, you make the disaster the fault of your enemies" (Greene).

Greene makes excellent points about the present partisan divide, and puts the hat of teacher back on when noting that from his point of view teachers have been seen as the scapegoats for failings in education. More recently those in the political realm have begun to fall under increased scrutiny and criticism. Unlike some of the previously mentioned writers, Greene does not necessarily have a solution to the problems that he sees in public education. He notes that in many ways seeking solutions that include cooperation between educators and politicians is "a better alternative than letting them run loose" (Greene). Greene makes it clear that despite the admirable goal of working together, finding a way to put the education of youngsters (a common good) above political interests such as partisan divide, retaining office, playing to

constituent beliefs and fundraising will be a difficult or more likely impossible task. He does suggest in the conclusion that a first step in the right direction would be for the U.S. Department of Education to value those who are good at education rather than good at politics.

In many ways Greene represents a certain sector of the United States population that have become so disillusioned with our current difficulties that a robustly negative outlook is the only solution they see left. Some might argue that a perspective which offers no solutions can't possibly be useful but I believe it can possibly serve as motivation particularly as we turn to another area of study and deliberation.

### **Impacts of Political Decisions on Students**

Debate surrounding education policy has not necessarily been limited to political realities such as the partisan divide that is currently entrenching government. Numerous writers and scholars have also investigated the requirements that are being implemented in public schools and proposed through new policy. Topics of discussion have included standards such as those proposed by Common Core and the intense focus on testing. The research and views presented by these authors vary but it cannot be denied that these scholars are appealing to those who draft the education policy in hopes that their expertise can be put to use for the betterment of student achievement and growth.

Donna L. Clovis, a former elementary school teacher and editor for the educator resource *Scholastic* published an article in which she proposed solutions to stresses that standardizes tests allegedly put on students. The article is titled "Taking Out Your No.2 Pencils: Taking the Stress Out of Standardized Tests". To give credence to her perspective, Clovis begins with an analysis



of every day examples that can demonstrate the elements of the modern standardized testing system that can serve as stressors.

Her opening states that “American students may be the most tested kids in the world, taking more than 100 million standardized tests every year, according to Teachers College at Columbia University in New York City” (Clovis). She then points to the fact that the results of the tests are seen as a serious matter, something that is often known by the children. Clovis lists some of the various groups that care so deeply about the scores such as the classroom educators, the administrators, the parents and sometimes even local elected officials. The more important element is that in some cases the results of standardized tests can determine the future placement of students within school systems. This can include the classes they are allowed to take or the teacher they are assigned to. Being a former classroom teacher, Clovis also writes that in some instances the test scores “are viewed as a measure of teacher and school competence” (Clovis). Clovis then provides a quote from a kindergarten and first grade teacher in Texas stating that “Scores are analyzed to the nth degree and published in newspapers, with banners given to exemplary schools... parents buy and sell houses just to be in the neighborhood with the best test score” (Clovis).

As someone who has spent time with students in the classroom, Ms. Clovis points to the fact that these pressures are observed and felt by the teens and adolescents taking the tests. Clovis then tactfully quotes a seventh grade student describing their reaction to test taking. The student said that “when my homeroom teacher told us to take out our No. 2 pencils...I immediately started sweating... I got cramps in my stomach... I thought I was really going to get sick” (Clovis). This description of a student’s reaction is then supported by analysis from a school nurse that “it’s natural to feel anxiety before you take a test” however the fact of the

matter is that “some children experience a level of nervousness that interferes with their performance” (Clovis).

Ms. Clovis then explains her views on what makes standardized tests stressful for the students and what can be done to alleviate some of that stress. Her specific answer to the former is that the method by which tests are administered to students causes much of the stress. For example, generally speaking the tests are taken in timed sections, with complicated instructions that must be read to all students exactly as they are written by the test writers. In essence the entire environment in and of itself is rigid and inflexible just like the test being taken by the students. Focusing on the environment of the classroom, Clovis explains that a classroom where students usually sit in a circle or in small groups immediately find themselves lined in straight rows which they may not be accustomed to. The next example comes from the teachers who are most likely acting different than usual. The author demonstrates this point with an example from New York City. She quotes a third grade teacher as saying that “With my own tests, I can give them extra time to finish if they need it... but during a standardized test, I just say, ‘do the best you can.’ They look up at me helplessly and fidget” (Clovis).

The writer seems to recognize that based on current legislation, political and educational trends standardized tests are not going to be abolished in the near future. To that end, Clovis proposes some solutions for teachers to take some of the stress off the students when it comes to preparing for and participating in these federally mandated tests. Her first helpful tip is to create a positive atmosphere when it comes to testing. In many cases these types of tests are seen in a negative light. However Clovis suggests finding a balance between “‘relax it’s only a test’ and ‘let’s take this seriously’” (Clovis). She suggests letting students talk about their concerns and

encouraging elective reading between tests and sections because reading subjects that interest each individual student can help them to relax and unwind rather than stress out (Clovis).

Her second proposal is to replace the feelings of dread with anticipation. Using examples of students at a younger level such as third grade, she suggests using a reward system to help encourage some of the more nervous students. Maybe stickers with encouraging messages or magic pencils to help them change their attitude and do their best. For higher level students present it to them as a chance to show off their smarts. Essentially in many ways she suggests following the advice of H.D. Hoover. Hoover is a senior author of the Iowa Test of Basic Skills who says that it is important for all involved to not “make a big deal about it” (Clovis).

Another suggestion proposed by Clovis is one that some might not find popular support but it is to simply work with students on their time management skills. The argument here is that even at a young age if students develop ways to manage their time more effectively, they will be less likely to face major anxiety when time restraints are placed on them. More specifically, the suggestion here is “throughout the year, give a few tests with time limits, so when faced with a timed test, children don’t panic” (Clovis). The idea is not to make timed tests the new normal but simply to ensure they are not the scary thing that only happens during standardized testing.

Clovis’ final recommendation is that parents should be involved in preventing the test from stressing out the child. The fact is that “parents are often anxious about their child’s test scores” and that anxiety can possibly rub off on the student. Clovis writes that it is important for parents not only to understand that but also to know when the test will be given and why so that they can help ease the child’s anxiety.

**Closing**

In closing, the issues addressed by authors in this literature review all add something to current debates when looking to change education laws. The issues presented have been addressed in one way or another by interest groups, legislators or both as debates commenced throughout 2015. The outcome of those debates and the resulting changes to federal education policy will be further analyzed and dissected in the following chapters.

## **Chapter 4: the Role and Perspectives of Interest Groups in Education Reform**

At face value, when thinking about any political action locating the players and stakeholders seems to be a relatively simple task. Simply identify those who make the decisions and those who would be impacted. In the case of education reform efforts the answer would seem to be a quick and to the point. You have the legislators, government agencies, students, teachers, administrators, parents and community members.

Legislators make the laws that impact public education. On the executive level, government agencies work to execute those laws. This occurs on both a state and federal level. Moving down to the lower levels, students are impacted by these decisions, same goes for teachers, parents, administrators and community members. It is true here we have the different groups impacted on a very general level. Within each group, subgroup on top of subgroup exists and when it comes to governance the interests of all these sets play a role.

Existing within a Democratic Republic, the people who are affected by government action seeks ways to make sure that their voices are heard. One of the ways, these groups do just that is through organizing into more clearly defined interest groups. These groups work to use a collective voice so they may have a say in the political process by influencing the people who make decisions.

For the purposes of this discussion, the interest groups that will be analyzed have taken some type of action to influence the Every Student Succeeds Act. Some of these groups pushed for the bill's passage and may have presented some suggestions, while some advocated for the bill's defeat. This chapter will be divided into two subsections, one for each of the aforementioned groups.

### Advocated for S.1177

When thinking about the challenges for school districts and educators that was caused by President Bush's No Child Left Behind program, as described in Chapter 2, it should come as no surprise that many of the organizations who support amendment and reauthorization are those who have a direct connection to public education. As is often the case with lobbying and working to influence legislators, these groups have adopted a tactic of strength in numbers particularly when it comes to strategy. In late September 2015, the National Educators Association and National School Board Association banded together with a number of other education organizations to draft a joint letter to the leadership of the Senate's Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions along with the leadership of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce. These committees serve as the primary location for building omnibus education bills in Congress. This letter urges these leaders to come together and combine the best part of each ESEA/NCLB reauthorization bill and pass a bipartisan bill in both Houses of Congress and on the President's desk for signature or veto in the fall of 2015 (NSBA ESEA Joint Conference Letter). Organizations that signed on to the letter are listed below:

American Federation of Teachers	National School Boards Association
National Education Association	National PTA
The School Superintendents Association	National Association of Elementary School Principals
National Association of Secondary School Principals	Association of School Business Officials International
Council of Chief State School Officers	National Association of State Boards of Education

The tactics that were used in this letter tell us a great deal about the mindset of the organizations and the goal they hope to achieve. In terms of content the letter is not lengthy. The language is brief and to the point. The listed organizations essentially state that for another

school year, schools are burdened by NCLB. The letter states that progress needs to be made and that a new law “should maintain the historic purpose of ESEA by preserving the focus on low-income students and equity, and ultimately focus on delivering the high-quality education that all our children deserve” (NSBA ESEA Joint Conference Letter).

The letter goes on to note that at the time of the letter’s drafting both chambers had passed different versions of the bill with the goal of updating and amending the law. The organizations then deliver a call to action which essentially comes down to both chambers coming together in conference committee and take the best parts of each proposal. The groups ask the legislators to come together and use the bills to create a bipartisan proposal and “deliver it to the President’s desk this fall” (NSBA ESEA Joint Conference Letter).

The strategies that were used in the creation of this letter can simply be defined with the phrase less is more. These organizations all have strong reputations in their own right but by joining forces they indicate a collective shared goal for educational reform by moving past NCLB. Strength in numbers is an effective way to promote change at any level and this has been demonstrated many times throughout the history of the United States and the world. If we were to focus on the brief length and content of the letter we can make some assumptions about the benefits and difficulties of so many groups banding together.

At one hundred and fifty nine words the body of the letter holds very little direction for the members of Congress in terms of what content should be included in this proposed education reform bill. Instead the groups rely on the number of organizations as their primary source of strength. With this understood, it can be surmised that there is an extremely strategic reason this letter does not offer detailed suggestions for the developing bill. These different organizations

represent different groups who each have a vested interest in education. Some represent teachers, some represent administrators, some represent school boards, and others represent parents. Each subgroup likely has its own beliefs and priorities when it comes to education reform and finding enough common ground to draft a detailed letter could prove very difficult. One could venture a guess that that difficulty could potentially break the coalition and in the end the strength of this lobbying technique is strength in numbers.

Creating groups with similar goals is an effective way to gain traction for not only public support but also to create a sense of unity among elected officials during times of partisan divide. However, just as individual senators and members of the house can make individual comments to the press many organizations that are part of such coalitions will also lobby as a single organization. One such example can be found in the National Education Association (NEA).

This group signed onto the joint letter in the fall of 2015, however during the summer of 2015 as debates raged in the Senate and the House of Representatives, the NEA took wrote a letter as an individual organization. This approach allowed the organization to take a specific approach focusing on their goals that allowed them to focus on pros and cons of an individual bill, in a single house of Congress: the Senate (Letter to the Senate on “the Every Child Achieves Act of 2015” (S.1177)).

Unlike the letter sent by the coalition, the NEA’s individual letter is one thousand one hundred seventy nine words long and includes many different sections that they hope will serve to guide the Senators as the bill is debated and brought forward for a final vote. The organization takes an approach that included praise of certain aspects of the bill, suggestions for improvement in other areas and concepts that the NEA would not be able to support.



By working as an individual organization the NEA was able to focus on the individual goals of the organization. This allows more detail and the ability to include proposals for not only strengthening the bill but also areas that should be cut entirely. For instance the organization suggests that Senators consider further changes to standardized tests through amendments. Specifically the letter states that “less high-stakes testing would allow teachers to spend more one-on-one time with students, especially those most in need of extra help, and undo narrowing of the curriculum” (Letter to the Senate on “the Every Child Achieves Act of 2015” (S.1177)). In many ways the National Education Association can be seen as reflecting two very effective ways interest groups can promote change in education policy through strength in numbers but also through more specific proposals supported directly by the organization.

### **Opposed to S.1177**

Organizations that are in stark opposition to the proposed education reform bills often times use similar methods to those who are in support of the bill. However when it comes to opposition, many times the organizations come together as groups to draft more detailed letters to their elected officials. The argument can be made that as a group, the interest groups can compile their grievances to create a much more scathing letter that would hopefully allow them to gain traction with not only elected officials but with members of the public and the media.

When looking at the recent debates surrounding ESEA/NCLB reauthorization in Congress, two major sects arose with the goal of defeating the bills created in 2015. The sects include groups who focus on advocating advancement of Civil Rights and those who are opposed to Common Core standards. Each of these sects have worked similarly in that they have created

coalitions and signed onto letters. However unlike the aforementioned joint letter in support of reform, these groups have created long letters that include lists of objections.

Looking to the groups who have focused their lobbying efforts on Civil Rights, the group leading the charge is the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights. This group organized with other groups including but not limited to the Association of University Centers on Disabilities, Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund, NAACP, National Down Syndrome Congress, and the Southern Poverty Law Center to draft and a letter to Senators on July 16, 2015 opposing S.1177. Their letter applauds the efforts of legislators to build a bipartisan bill but find fault in certain civil rights components of the bill. Their main criticism is as follows: “Although this bill includes some important priorities of the civil rights community, it fails to meaningfully protect and advance civil rights and achievement for the most vulnerable students the Elementary and Secondary Education Act intended to protect and we urge you to oppose it” (Keep the Promise of ESEA: Oppose the Every Child Achieves Act, S.1177).

Groups opposed on the issue of Civil Rights seem to focus on the fact that they see education reform is not focusing on the initial goals of LBJ’s ESEA. In the view of many of these organizations without that focus, legislation is abandoning the main goal of the original legislation. Other groups that are opposed to Common Core initiatives have grown in popularity following the implementation of President Obama’s waivers from NCLB.

In a letter drafted on October 13, 2015 by a coalition of Anti-Common Core parents groups the group states that their belief is contrary to claims of the legislators the bill is not strong enough to prevent what they see as further federal overreach by the current President. The letter states that “although both reauthorization bills mention the federal overreach and

supposedly prohibit such future action, the claimed prohibitions are inadequate for several reasons: first, the language is not substantially different from that in the three federal statutes (ESEA, the Department of Education Organization Act, and the General Education Provisions Act) that have already been violated". This letter suggests that Congress tables the issue of education reform until after the upcoming presidential and congressional elections so that new leadership can be seen in both the White House and the Senate's H.E.L.P. Committee (Stop Common Core Coalition).

Looking at these two examples of interest groups working in opposition, the tactics in general are quite different from those of groups who work to support legislative efforts. Their tactics seem to focus on strength in numbers but also on presenting detail on their perspective. What I mean is that these letters are lengthy and include detailed examples of shortcomings. There is a different strategy here particularly in how information is being presented to the legislators. The information here is stated in a far more definitive manner than the suggestive language of the supportive organizations.

## **Conclusions**

When comparing and contrasting the actions that have been taken by interest groups the similarities and differences in strategy are quite striking. If I were to summarize the tactics in a single sentence, it would be the supporters offer encouragement and suggest change while the opposition debunks positives and expects more drastic change. This may seem to be rather simplistic but the process of crafting legislation is a process that involves human deliberation and interaction.

Each tactic has pros and cons however based on the outcome of the case study to be reviewed in the next chapter, the more suggestive language of the supporters seems to win more points with legislators than the more critical and negative tone taken by the opponents. It would seem that the elected officials found constructive criticism to be more helpful in their deliberations over content within a bill. One could even argue that constructive criticism, a tactic often used by educators in a classroom setting, proved to be a more effective lobbying method. This is not to discredit the opposition as it is their right within the United States political system to express their perspective and using the power of writing to petition the government as protected by the Constitution.

## **Chapter 5: Case Study – S.1177 Every Student Succeeds Act**

In April of 2015, Senator Lamar Alexander of Tennessee introduced a bill in the Senate that was designed to revamp and reauthorize NCLB. Like all Senate bills Alexander's proposal was given a number and title: S.1177 the Every Child Achieves Act of 2015. The bill then went through the rigorous process to eventually bring the bill before the full Senate for a vote on the Senate floor. After passing the Senate, the bill continued on to eventually become the new major piece of education legislation governing our nation. To truly understand this entire process and what specifically was addressed in the proposal it is important to understand the players involved, the content of the bill and finally the steps taken to pass the bill including arguments in favor and arguments in opposition.

### **Key Players:**

This bill was sponsored by Republican Senator Lamar Alexander of Tennessee (S.1177 – Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015). Alexander has been a longtime proponent of education on the national level. Coming from a family of educators, Alexander took a deep interest in education in the United States. Throughout his long career he has served as President of the University of Tennessee and United States Secretary of Education under President George H.W. Bush. He was first elected to the U.S. Senate in 2002 and currently serves as Chairman for the Senate's Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP Committee). Alexander was also the only sponsor S.1177 (Lamar Alexander: United States Senator for Tennessee).

Though not listed as a sponsor of the bill, throughout development, debate and amendment Senator Alexander was always quick to recognize Democratic Senator Patty Murray of Washington. During his remarks introducing the proposal to the Senate in April of 2015,

Alexander stated “in January, Senator Murray suggested that the two of us work together to try to bridge the partisan divide” (Congressional Record – April 14, 2015). This is but one example in which Alexander recognizes Senator Murray as a co-author and adamant supporter of the bill. For the purposes of this study it is important to understand her background as well.

According to her official website that is sponsored by the Senate, Senator Murray did not intend to get involved in politics. She began her political career after being told by a state elected official in Washington she couldn't make a difference while advocating against budget cuts to a local pre-school program. From there she organized a parent led movement to save the program and ran for her local school board. She was elected before joining the Washington State Senate in 1988 and running for the U.S. Senate in 1992. She is currently the ranking Democrat on the Senate's HELP Committee (United States Senator Patty Murray: Working for Washington). Her partnership with Senator Alexander on this bill represents a bridging of the partisan divide. This partnership can be summarized as the highest ranking education advocates in both parties coming together to support making a difference and fixing the problems created by NCLB.

### **Content of the Bill**

When a bill goes through any legislative body, it undergoes changes and amendment based on input from members within committees and the body as a whole. In the case of S.1177, the bill was initially amended by the HELP Committee before finally coming to the Senate floor for debate, amendment and a final vote. It is important to understand the contents of the bill in its final form. In its final form the bill is nearly four hundred pages long. It contains many different provisions, the basic building blocks of law. However for the purposes of this paper, an

executive summary of the major points will provide enough information to understand the major impacts of such a piece of legislation.

S.1177 maintains the federally mandated statewide standardized tests initially required by NCLB however it leaves the question of what to do with the test results to the states, not the federal government. New state accountability systems will be designed by states based on a federal framework. The proposal prohibits the U.S. Department of Education from deciding or approving these standards and prevents federal government from creating mandates or incentives to adopt certain standards including Common Core. It provides grants to poorly performing schools and requires that various sorts of student data particularly the aforementioned test results are reported to the federal government. One provision present in the bill and often referred to as an accountability amendment requires that federal funding be used by states to support schools where less than two thirds of the student body graduates. The proposal works to support educators through potential funding for educator training programs and allowing state development of teacher evaluation systems. The bill would also require that districts consult with community stakeholders and school leaders in the development of programs for students. This includes programs for safety, health, well-being and academic achievement. It asserts state responsibility to support development and execution of said programs. The bill updates charter school programs by combining two existing programs to simplify the process for application and development of new charter schools (S.1177 Every Student Succeeds Act)<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> The full text of the bill and arguments made on the floor in both chambers of Congress can be accessed at: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/senate-bill/1177>

## Process

The process in which a bill becomes a law is often long and convoluted. S.1177 represents a bill that became a law in a relatively quick time frame. For this case study a chart has been prepared that includes a date and title for specific events of importance. Beneath the chart, is an outline that expands upon the information presented with brief multi sentence summaries of each event will be grouped together by dates.

<b>S.1177 – Every Student Succeeds Act History</b>	
April 30, 2015	Introduced in the Senate
April 30, 2015	Sent to the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
July 16, 2015	Passed in the U.S. Senate
November 17, 2015	Passed in U.S. House of Representatives with amendment
November 18, 2015	S.1177 is sent to conference committee
November 30, 2015	Conference Report is filed
December 2, 2015	Conference Report agreed to in U.S. House of Representatives
December 9, 2015	Conference Report agreed to in U.S. Senate
December 10, 2015	Signed into law by President Barack Obama

(S.1177 – Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015)

1. April 30, 2015
  - a. Here Senator Alexander first introduced the bill to the U.S. Senate. It was then sent to the Committee on Health, Education Labor and Pensions. Within that committee various Senators from both major parties all worked to build a bill that could be accepted on the Senate Floor by a majority of the Senators. Appealing to both sides of the aisle would be necessary to reach a filibuster proof majority (S.1177 – Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015).
2. July 16, 2015



- a. After being amended and debated on the Senate floor for just over a week, the final bill was voted on by the Senators. The bill passed the chamber with a final vote of 81 Senators in favor and 17 in opposition. The bill was then sent for consideration in the House of Representatives (S.1177 – Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015).
3. November 17 – 18, 2015
    - a. In November the bill was taken up in the U.S. House of Representatives. The bill was passed with amendment. This was done to add certain provisions from a different education reform bill that had previously been passed by the House earlier in 2015. A request for a Conference Committee with the Senate was then requested (S.1177 – Every Student Succeeds Act).
4. November 30, 2015
    - a. After debating within the Conference committee, the changes that were agreed upon between the members is filed in a Conference Report to be taken up and voted on in both chambers of Congress (S.1177 – Every Student Succeeds Act).
5. December 2 – 9, 2015
    - a. Between December 2, 2015 and December 9, 2015, both chambers of Congress consider the results and changes crafted by the Conference Committee. Both chambers must then take final votes and agree on the report for the final bill to be sent to President Obama for a signature or veto. On December 2, 2015 the House of Representatives agreed with a vote of 359 in support and 64 in opposition. After deliberation in the Senate, the report was agreed upon with a final vote of 85 in support and 12 in opposition (S.1177 – Every Student Succeeds Act).

6. December 12, 2015

- a. On December 12, 2015, President Barack Obama signed S.1177 into law at a signing ceremony. Guests included students and members of both major parties who worked on this new law (S.1177 – Every Student Succeeds Act).

### **Final Remarks on S.1177**

The passage of S.1177 represents decisive legislative action that overhauled public education across the United States. In terms of process and the implications of the bill, it is important to look at the fact that this bill was introduced and signed into law in less than a year. The legislative process is one that can only be summarized as complicated. There are many moving parts and groups that need to come together in order for legislation to be passed.

S.1177 is unique in that during a time of partisan divide, leading senators in both political parties came together to draft the initial proposal so that the positions of both parties could be thoroughly considered. The leaders reached across the aisle due to the fact that leaders were able to find areas of agreement. When introducing the bill, Senator Alexander summarized the goals of the bill and the need for bipartisanship as follows: “the consensus is this: continue the law’s important measurements of academic progress of students but restore to the states, school districts and classroom teachers and parents the responsibility for deciding what to do about improving student achievement” (S.1177 – Every Student Succeeds Act). He went on to state clearly for his colleagues that “we have drafted a bill based upon this consensus which we will offer as a starting point for our deliberations” (S.1177 – Every Student Succeeds Act). I would even argue that his use of the ‘we’ effectively demonstrates the collaborative process that was used in initial development of this bill.

During the debate on the bill, a number of important perspectives were presented and there were areas where disagreements ensued. There is a major issue that has been discussed nationwide and in earlier chapters is the issue of testing. This was an important part of the deliberations that occurred during the work that went into this bill. Alexander stated during debate on the proposal that “no issue stirred as much controversy as testing” (S.1177 – Every Student Succeeds Act). He went on to explain that maybe testing is not necessarily the problem but the fact that government accountability systems relied so heavily on testing that it became the focus of states and local school districts. Arguments made during debate highlighted the fact that in response to federal testing requirements, local and state standardized test requirements also increased. For that reason the bill that became law ended federal test based accountability systems. This returned power to the states and local school districts in essence taking away some of the pressure that had been weighing on them since the passage of NCLB.

Some legislators who disagreed with the bill had similar concerns to those discussed by some of the interest groups who also opposed the bill. One such Senator is Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts. Senator Warren voted against S.1177 when it initially came before the Senate in July of 2015. In a statement published on her official website she mirrored many concerns listed in Chapter 4 and stated that while the proposal was an improvement but the bill lacks “basic, fundamental safeguards to ensure that federal dollars are used to improve both schools and educational outcomes for those students who are often ignored” (Elizabeth Warren U.S. Senator for Massachusetts).

In keeping with the bipartisan nature of developing this bill, the Conference committee process kept the more conservative pro-state provisions in place but added an accountability amendment designed to address concerns like those presented by Senator Warren. The

amendment that was added ensured states utilize federal funds to assist schools with graduation rates less than two-thirds of their student population. In the end this was enough to gain support in the Senate from many of the bill's previous opponents. During final debate on the bill in December, Senator Warren stood to voice her support despite voting against the proposal earlier in July (S.1177 – Every Student Succeeds Act).

During the ceremony in which the bill was signed into law, President Obama referred to the bill before him as “an early Christmas present, after more than ten years members of congress from both parties have come together to revise our national education law” (Obama). Continuing to cite the fact that the proposal before him represented a change to the partisan divide Obama joked that the ceremony before them was “A Christmas miracle, a bipartisan bill signing” (Obama).

## Chapter 6: Conclusions

After five chapters of data and analysis, the links between the sections and my proposal can be addressed and explained. In Chapter 1, I made the claim that on the federal level education policy seems to be reactionary. The following four chapters included discussions related to the history of education policy, the opinions of scholars, perspectives of interest groups all leading up to the content of Congress's new national education law. This new law is a culmination of all that prior information being brought together and each section has some type of impact on the final result.

Beginning with the history of education policy in the United States, S.1177 represents a continuation of the history that is presented in Chapter 1. Chapter 1 demonstrated that throughout the history of the United States, a well-educated citizen was seen as necessary for the public good of the nation and thus there became a need for developed public education. The chapter also demonstrated patterns in how these policies were conceived and developed. Beginning halfway through the timeline, President Johnson's Elementary and Secondary Education Act was crafted in an attempt to specifically alleviate poverty through the funding and expansion of public education across the nation.

Moving forward to President Bush's No Child Left Behind, there is a definitive correlation between the law and the 'Nation at Risk Report' of 1983. This report is when the belief that the United States was falling behind other nations first became widespread and thus something had to be done about it. Congress and the Bush Administration passed NCLB with the intention that no student would be forgotten or left behind. This was to be achieved through progress measured by standardized tests. If schools and states failed to meet those standards the

federal government would be ready to step in. The provisions of this law became so rigid and unworkable that President Obama offered waivers to states who adopted their federally recommended policies.

The current law, Every Student Succeeds is a direct reaction to the failings of No Child Left Behind. This law reacted to the rigid federal controls that were placed upon schools by NCLB. The law maintained certain aspects of the bill but returned major controls over the public education system to the state governments. This represents not only a major change from NCLB but also a change from the waivers offered by the Obama Administration. It is also important to think about the bipartisan nature in which the bill passed through Congress and to the President's desk for signature. In many ways we see members of both parties working together to recognize the mistakes of the past and react to them.

Chapter 2 dealt with the writings of scholars which were divided into a number of sub-categories. The categories discussed were Educators and Politics, Education and Partisan Elections, Too Much Politics, Not Enough Education and Impacts of Political Decisions on Students. In each category a number of writers discussed difficulties faced in the world of education policy and presented their views for possible solutions. In many ways the results presented by the Every Student Succeeds Act can be compared to the writing of these scholars. The results demonstrate that in some ways political actors are not only reacting to mistakes of the past but looking to the experts to solve these complications.

Section 1, dealt with Educators and Politics and essentially questioned the role of educators in the world of politics. Early writings from the nineteen sixties presented the possibility that the very executive design of school systems set schools up to be a political

environment. Schools deal with many of the same questions and complications that politicians do such as crafting a budget. In many ways due to federal oversight that became more overt since the nineteen sixties, schools are now more than ever and extension of government. The real question that developed in this section is: what role do teachers play in the development of education policy. Teachers are seen as non-political actors and yet they have an invested interest in the development of education policy. This section argued that as experts in what goes on in a classroom they should have a say in the improvement of regulations. This section ended with one author's call to action for classroom educators to get more involved in the development of new protocols to replace NCLB.

Based on the interest groups that became involved according to Chapter 4 and the results of the law in Chapter 5, that call to action was met. Chapter 4 demonstrated that many of the interest groups who supported the development of the bill were directly connected to those who work in schools. Organizations like the American Federation of Teachers and National Education Association became involved with supporting the development of new legislation. The new legislation seemed to think about the important role of teachers, as provisions in the bill specifically take control away from the federal government and return power to the states, local municipalities, and local administrators and teachers.

Sections 2 and 3 all dealt with partisanship and who should be making decisions when it comes to the educational requirements and opportunities for children. In section 2, authors discussed the 2012 presidential election as an example of how despite being on near common ground in regards to education reform proposals the candidates found a way to found to focus on the differences rather than common ground. The argument is made that when it comes to something as important as education partisan politics should be set aside and the focus should be

on doing what is best for kids. Section 3 cast doubt as to whether that proposal is possible. Essentially the authors argued that politics has developed to a point where focusing on the greater good is no longer a possibility. Instead of focusing on creating policies designed to enrich educational standards focuses are now on creating clever soundbites to promote either reelection or the platform of a particular party.

These sections present a rather negative view of our political system in devising education reform. However, I would argue that the very valid positions of these authors were challenged by the passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act. The process presented was one in which party lines were crossed and political actors in both Congress and the White House worked together to craft a piece of bipartisan legislation. This does not mean the authors in sections 2 and 3 presented invalid information, in fact one could argue that these sentiments reflect the feelings of many in the American public. If that is the case, the passage of ESSA represents government once again reacting to criticisms in how they operate in working to enhance and fix public education.

In Chapter 3 Section 4, we see a focus on the issues of standardized testing. This concept which became a staple in American public education since the passage of NCLB is seen by many to be a major flaw. The author discussed the impacts that these tests have on students and how to possibly alleviate that tension within the classroom. What is particularly interesting is that the author seems to accept standardized testing as the new norm, something that will never go away. Based on the passage of ESSA, I would say that she is correct.

When looking at the passage of the new law, the law retains the mandated state-wide standardized tests that were implemented by NCLB. The law does however make some changes



to the overall implications of the test results. The new law simply has the testing results reported to the federal government and leaves the question of how to react to that data to state governments. I would argue that this is another example of reactionary thinking at the national level. With NCLB, the test results were seen as having the upmost importance with the potential to impact funding and allow for federal intervention within schools. ESSA changes that by taking some of the pressure off and putting more power back in the state's hands. My argument would be that this takes pressure off individuals on all levels, the states, the local districts and the teachers. Based on the writing in Section 4, I believe this could then trickle down to remove some of the elements that cause students stress. The fact of the matter is that the changes to standardized testing elements within the law are a reaction to the past.

In Chapter 4, the perspectives of Interest Groups demonstrated which tactics seem to work when lobbying Congress but also show that many of the issues discussed in the scholarly reading is also important to those who have a vested interest in changing education policy at the national level. For example the groups taking action represent ground level educators taking a stance in the political area and areas of the proposal that were discussed focused on presenting the President with a bipartisan bill that would appeal to all and in the end allow for a national education update.

The interest groups who presented Congress with opposition to the bill may not have been able to defeat the bill but I would argue that their voices were still heard. The two major areas of opposition came from Civil Rights activists and Common Core opponents. The final bill that was passed and signed into law included an amendment that was supported by many civil rights advocates in Congress such as Senator Elizabeth Warren. This may not be enough to eliminate the concerns of some such groups but it still represents a change from the initial

proposal that passed the Senate chamber. In terms of the Common Core opponents, the new law specifically prohibits the Federal Government from maintaining any nationwide standards including Common Core. In some ways this leaves the battle to be fought on the state level and in many ways working for change within an individual state should be an easier task than lobbying at the national level.

In closing, the labyrinth that is national education reform is one that involves so many different elements the task of understanding it in a general sense can fill volumes. However, if this essay has accomplished anything it has raised important questions about the process of developing educational excellence for the youth of our nation. Time will tell if the actions taken to fix past mistakes will succeed with the Every Student Succeeds Act. With the pattern that has developed throughout the history of the United States, it is the duty of the active and informed citizen to be engaged with the process and respond to what happens. This can be done by students, by parents, by teachers, administrators, community members and politicians. The Every Student Succeeds Act includes provisions to empower each of those groups to become involved in the educational development of their community. But more than that it is the job of these groups to evaluate and analyze the results so that the next time a change is needed it happens faster than the examples presented here. Or better yet, changes and solutions are created before there is widespread anger over problems that could potentially arise from the passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act.

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Article suggests ways to become more involved – conferences, writing to legislators, organizing, even running for office is mentioned.

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Kevin Chavous writes about partisan politics in election season. Notes that partisan divide has presented reform in an us versus them fashion that is entirely inaccurate. He states that as partisan divide grows and elections continue to dominate American politics, children and the quality of education in the U.S. continues to decline.

Chavous, Kevin P. "Moving Beyond the Politics of Education." *Huffingtonpost.com*. Huffington Post. 6 Nov. 2012. Web. 28 Sept. 2015.

Writing during the end of the 2012 Presidential election, Executive Counsel for the American Federation of Children writes that education is in chaos due to the way it has been politicized. Chavous cited the Obama and Romney campaign tactics of tearing apart each other's education plans as an example of this polarized political climate. He pushed for education as a national cause where there is a national dialogue with all stakeholders for betterment of education without partisan politics.

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*Elizabeth Warren U.S. Senator for Massachusetts*. United States Senate. n.d. Web. 12 Oct. 2015.



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Greene, Peter. “Mixing Education With Politics” *Huffingtonpost.com*. Huffington Post, 12 May 2014. Web. 28 Sept. 2015.

In this piece, Greene argues that in the current world of federal education mandates we see legislation that designed to further political goals. He presents an idea that we have a formula of a good idea combined with a fantasy; specifically citing No Child Left

Behind. He argues that with NCLB we have a concept of all children consistently improving as a good idea but the fantasy present in a requirement that 100 percent of students will be above average by the year 2014.

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This research article published in 1969 advocates for the continued development and study of education and politics. The authors note that this is a developing field that should be studied and cultivated. Specifically touching on the fact that both political systems and educational systems are consistently changing, they both go hand in hand with questions of who manages to get what, when, and how. These questions connect the systems of education and politics from the top down. The researchers note that despite attempts to keep public schools nonpolitical, changing situations and the structures regarding educational policy have removed this barrier and question whether it ever truly existed.

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Daniel Koretz's book looks to the issues of standardized testing and looks to explain the complexities. He takes his readers through the issues and seeks to demonstrate their connection to the controversies of public education. Specific questions tackled by Koretz include the limits of tests, what testing does well, what can be learned, and improved

Kralovec, Etta, and John Buell. *The End of Homework: How Homework Disrupts Families, Overburdens Children, and Limits Learning*. Boston, MA: Beacon, 2000. Print.

This book focuses on a concern of many families and school groups; the effect of homework on children as they move through school. Issues focused on include the

amount of homework being given to students, the effect it has on them socially, emotionally, and physically. Points of view presented include students of different ages, socio-economic backgrounds, and races. The writers note negative effects caused by the amount of homework students receive such as anxiety, general irritability, lack of sleep, etc. The authors encourage change and a new focus on schooling to be more effective for all students while still encouraging development and a love of learning.

Krolovec, Etta. *Schools That Do Too Much*. Boston: Beacon, n.d. Print.

This book looks generally to the American Public School System and argues that we see schools doing too much as suggested by the title. Specifically noting examples of poor scheduling and budgets that are spread too thin in an attempt to provide every activity under the sun for students. While presented as a noble ambition, Kralovec believes that in an attempt to provide students with limitless opportunities the end result is that the quality of teaching and education is slipping.

*Lamar Alexander: United States Senator for Tennessee*. United States Senate. n.d. Web. 12 Oct. 2015.

This is the official website for United States Senator Lamar Alexander. He is the only sponsor of bill S.1177. His website contains information about his prior jobs, areas of interest in the Senate and legislation that he is sponsoring.

“Letter to the Senate on “the Every Child Achieves Act of 2015” (S.1177).” *National Education Association: Great Public Schools for Every Student*. National Education Association. 7 Jul. 2015. Web. 12 Oct. 2015.

In this letter, the National Education Association writes to the Senate discussing their thoughts and views on the bill. They outline areas of support and also suggest

improvements to the bill. The letter notes that this group wants to see support for this bill and a new law regarding education at the federal level.

*Making Schools Work with Hedrick Smith*. PBS.org, copyright 2005. Web. 14 Sept. 2015.

<<http://www.pbs.org/makingschoolswork/index.html>>.

Official website for the PBS program *Making Schools Work with Hedrick Smith*. The website features a variety of subdirectories with a variety of information on public education within the United States. Subdirectories of interest include but are not limited to a Timeline on Education Legislation in the United States, Report Card on America's Schools, Components of District-Wide Reform, and Obstacles to Reform.

Marcos, Christina. "House narrowly votes to renew No Child Left Behind after drama."

*Thehill.com*. The Hill, 8 July 2015. Web. 17 July 2015.

News article reporting that in July of 2015, the U.S. House of Representatives renewed the No Child Left Behind Act. The article notes that debate within the chamber was rigorous with disagreements ensuing. Despite the disagreement the vote narrowly passed along party lines with a vote of 218 in favor of passage with a healthy minority of 213 in opposition. The article also notes amendments were added to the bill that allowed opt outs of certain requirements for both schools and parents.

McNeil, Michele and Alyson Klein. "Obama Offers Waivers From Key Provisions of NCLB."

*Edweek.org*. Education Week, 27 Sept. 2011. Web. 15 Dec. 2015

This article published by Education Week outlines President Barack Obama's initiative to create waivers for the requirement of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002. The goal of said waivers is to prevent the schools from failing to meet the law's requirements and 2014 deadline for 100 percent proficiency in academic subjects. The

article speaks to questions of executive overreach and congressional failure to amend/reauthorize NCLB.

Moseley, Alexander. *Political Realism*. Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, n.d. Web. 1 Feb. 2016.

This webpage contains an explanation of political realism with a number of examples explaining the scholarly theory. The basic principles of political realism can be seen as looking to main goal of politics as obtaining and retaining power.

National Education Association. "Every Child Achieves Act: A Step in the Right Direction." *Educationvotes.org*. Education Votes – National Education Association, June 2015. Web. 10 Oct. 2015.

This is a position document produced by the National Education Association discussing the Every Child Achieves Act. In this release, the organization lists what they feel the bill does right, where the bill could be improved, and areas that cause concern for the organization. This document is essentially a list of pros and cons about s.1177.

"NSBA ESEA Joint Conference Letter." *National School Boards Association*. NSBA, 29 Sept. 2015. Web. 12 Oct. 2015.

This letter was signed drafted and signed by a coalition of education groups to urge leaders in the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions and the House Committee on Education and the Workforce to come together and draft a bipartisan education reform bill to be signed into law by the President during the fall of 2015.

Obama, Barack. "President Obama Signs the Every Student Succeeds Act." *White House*. White House, 10 Dec. 2015. Web. 15 Dec. 2015.

Video of the signing ceremony where President Barack Obama gave a speech and signed the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 into law.

Petrilli, Michael J. "The case against federal accountability mandates in education."

*Edexcellence.net*. Thomas B. Fordham Institute. 26 Jan. 2015. Web. 6 Oct. 2015

Article published by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute. This argument is that we need to lower the emphasis the current top down accountability formula that is being presented by the federal government. The author of this piece Michael J. Petrilli says that focusing on accountability should transfer to transparency without fear or repercussion so that we may learn how to replicate the best schools and systems of education. He argues that accountability does not need to be abandoned but simply no longer the core focus of federal education reform.

Ratner, Gary M. "Senate's ESEA Challenge: Strengthen Accountability to Help Schools

Improve, Not Perpetuate Test Driven Accountability." *Huffingtonpost.com/*

Huffington Post. 7 Jul. 2015. Web. 12 Oct. 2015.

In this article, Gary M. Ratner (Founder and Executive Director, Citizens for Effective Schools) writes about the Every Child Achieves Act proposed by the Senate's HELP committee and led by Sen. Alexander and Sen. Murray. He reports on changes that the committee made in this bill when comparing it to the previous version passed by the Senate in 2001.

Ravitch, Diane. *Reign of Terror: The Hoax of the Privatization Movement and the Danger to America's Public Schools*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013. Print.



Diane Ravitch is the former U.S. Assistant Secretary of Education who uses this book to argue current concerns within the public education sector stem from an effort to hurt rather than help public schools. Her argument notes that federal initiatives including both No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top set irrational goals and standards for both students and teachers. She argues that the end result is punishment in an attempt to privatize the education industry.

Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions. *The Every Child Achieves Act of 2015*. Senate HELP Committee, n.d. Web. 10 Oct. 2015.

This document is a summary of the main provisions of the bill as written by the Senate's Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions. This committee worked on the initial development and drafting of the bill and prepared a document outlining the main goals of Title's I-X in the bill and the impact on Early Childhood.

Simon, Stephanie. "No Profit Left behind." *Politico.com*. Politico Pro, 10 Feb. 2015. Web. 07 June 2015.

An article that focuses on Pearson a company that works to develop testing and educational materials for many standardized tests within the United States. They are currently working with the developing PARCC test and control the SAT. This article looks at the amount of money Pearson is earning through their work in development and administration of standardized test. This article argues that despite near dominance in their field they are not producing results and are contributing to falling quality of education in the United States.

Stop Common Core Coalition. "ESEA Congressional Letter". *Flstopccoalition.org*. 13 Oct. 2015. Web. 19 Oct. 2015.

A letter sent to Congressional leaders that serve as the chairs and ranking members of the Senate's Committee on Health, Education Labor and Pensions and the House of Representatives Education and the Workforce Committee. The letter is supported by various groups and individuals opposed to Common Core standards. The letter outlines reasons why current ESEA reauthorization bills are not the answer and any proposal should be stalled until a new president is in office.

"The Two Towers Approach." *Gordon Library*. Worcester Polytechnic Institute, n.d. Web. 28 Mar. 2016.

Information detailing the two pronged educational approach of WPI along with a physical representation of the approach on their campus.

Thomas, P.L. "Politics and Education Don't Mix" *Theatlantic.com*. The Atlantic, 26 Apr. 2012. Web. 28 Sept. 2015.

P.L. Thomas writes how the nature of our political system has led to a connection with education in the United States. The argument is made that government needs to step back and allow individuality to return to the classroom; this individuality has been stripped away by government bureaucracy according to Thomas. He specifically cites No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top as specific examples of this. Thomas makes the analogy that government executives have as much business making educational decisions as they do managing construction sites.

U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions. *U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions*. U.S. Senate, n.d. Web. 21 Sept. 2015.

The official website for the Senate's Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions. This committee deals with a variety of bills with one of their focuses being

education across the United States. This committee was responsible for discussion, debate and amendment of Senate bill S.1177 – Every Child Achieves Act of 2015, prior to the bill being heard on the floor and passed in July of 2015.

United States. United State Congress. House of Representatives. “H.R. 5 – Student Success Act.”

*Congress.gov*. Library of Congress. 13 July 2015. Web. 21 Sept. 2015.

Up to date information on House of Representatives Bill H.R.5 – Student Success Act.

This bill serves to amend and reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. That very act was already reaffirmed and amended as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. This presentation of the bill sponsored by the Library of Congress includes a summary of the bill, full text of the bill, actions taken, previous titles, amendments, cosponsors, committees, and related bills. This page also include a link to a Committee Report from the House’s Education and the Workforce Committee which worked on the bill before bringing it to the House for a formal vote. The report includes both majority and minority views. It is worth noting that within Committee the bill passed along party lines.

United States. United States Congress. Senate. “Congressional Record – April 14, 2015”.

*Congress.gov*. Library of Congress, 14 Apr. 2015. Web. 12 Oct. 2015.

In the Congressional Record for April 14, 2015, we see statements made on the floor by Sen. Lamar Alexander as he introduced bill S.1177. His statements include recognition of his colleague Sen. Patty Murray but also flaws in previous versions of the bill and the need to an update as proposed.

United States. United States Congress. Senate. “S.1177 – Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015.”

*Congress.gov*. Library of Congress, 9 Dec. 2015. Web. 9 Jan. 2016.

Up to date information on Senate Bill S.1177 – Every Child Succeeds Act of 2015 formerly known as the Every Child Achieves Act. This bill serves to amend and reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. That very act was already reaffirmed and amended as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. This presentation of the bill sponsored by the Library of Congress includes a summary of the bill, full text of the bill, actions taken, previous titles, amendments, cosponsors, committees, and related bills. This piece of legislation was sent to conference committee with the House of Representatives; accepted by both chambers of Congress and signed into law by the President of the United States.

*United States Senator Patty Murray: Working for Washington State.* United States Senate. n.d. Web. 12 Oct. 2015.

This is the official website for United States Senator Patty Murray. she helped draft the initial proposal of bill S.1177. Her website contains information about his prior jobs, areas of interest in the Senate and legislation that she is sponsoring.

*U.S. Senate Roll Call Votes 114<sup>th</sup> Congress – 1<sup>st</sup> Session – S.1177 As Amended.* United States Senate, U.S. Congress, 16 Jul. 2015. Web. 10 Oct. 2015.

<[http://www.senate.gov/legislative/LIS/roll\\_call\\_lists/roll\\_call\\_vote\\_cfm.cfm?congress=114&session=1&vote=00249](http://www.senate.gov/legislative/LIS/roll_call_lists/roll_call_vote_cfm.cfm?congress=114&session=1&vote=00249)>.

Roll call vote by the U.S. Senate during the 114<sup>th</sup> session of Congress on Bill S.1177 – Every Child Achieves Act of 2015. Site includes details of the vote organized by generic summary, Senator names, Senator's votes and by home state. The vote included a final tally of 81 Yeas, 17 Nays, and 2 Senators not voting.

“We Just Decided To.” *The Newsroom*. By. Aaron Sorkin. Dir. Greg Mottola. Perf. Jeff Daniels.

The Newsroom: the Complete First Season. HBO Home Video, 2013. DVD.

The first episode of Aaron Sorkin’s TV Drama, *the Newsroom*, contains a sequence in which Will McAvoy, a new anchor played by Jeff Daniels, speaks about reasons he sees America no longer being the greatest country in the world. The sequence was critically acclaimed and featured statistics regarding America’s standing in various fields including math, literacy and science.