
Foreword

Mend Not End

Who would have guessed 4 years ago—when the bloom was on the NCLB rose—that it would today need spirited defenders, people who see beyond the partisan rhetoric? As it turns out, because NCLB set its sights so high it now needs all the friends it can get—and not policy wonks but practitioners who know whereof they speak.

Yet the opposition NCLB has garnered is strange. Spell it out: NCLB, no child left behind. As an idea, it is beyond reproach: Who, indeed, should policy and practice leave behind? Your child? My child? Uncle Sam has overreached, opponents argue, forcing unfunded mandates on the states. If, as they aver, education is the state's business and not the federal government's, does that mean that they are prepared to defend the indefensible? Is it all right for states to leave the poor and dispossessed behind?

Is it all right, in the name of states rights, to leave racial minorities behind? Who should our schools be educating if not the least among us? True, there is no federal constitutional mandate for education. Indeed, the reserve powers clause of the Tenth Amendment actually reserves to the states any powers not specifically enumerated for the federal government. The constitutional mantle for education is state by state, not federal. Do these state constitutional mandates legitimize leaving the less fortunate behind?

Paul Kimmelman is just the person to offer a spirited defense of NCLB. A former school superintendent currently at Learning Point Associates in Illinois, he has been deeply involved in school improvement throughout his career. Indeed, Paul has served not just the districts in which he worked but also the nation as a whole, first as president of the First in the World Consortium, then as a member of the TIMSS-R Technical Review Panel, and recently as a member of the Glenn Commission (National Commission on Mathematics and Science Teaching). He has the grounding of a practitioner with the perspective of a policy maven. His view is simultaneously on the ground and at 30,000 feet.

Perhaps more to the point, Paul's defense of NCLB is not defensive but generous. A friendly critic, Paul first sets NCLB in its historical context. He argues that NCLB is not only conceptually correct but also worth reforming to smooth out the rough spots. That is tough love.

This, his latest book, is "an attempt to be a useful guide for understanding how NCLB became a law and, most important, building organizational capacity to implement school improvement to comply with it." He focuses on building organizational capacity to avoid repeating mistakes of the past and to help educators understand the process of reform "to prevent more policy mandates in the future." To do so, he encourages practitioners to "recognize the importance of acquiring, managing, and implementing knowledge to inform decision making."

This is a tall order, particularly when many educators are notoriously averse to data-driven decision making. In fairness, it must be said that there is a reason for this aversion; historically, education data were something a third party required you to gather (about yourself) to embarrass you with 90 to 120 days later—or so it seemed. When data are used diagnostically, however—and to celebrate success as well as pinpoint problems—it is no longer a game of gotcha. As Montgomery County, Maryland, Superintendent Jerry D. Weast notes, today he uses data to catch you doing something right. That, indeed, is the promise of systematic knowledge acquisition, management, and implementation. It is made possible

by modern information technology, which puts data in the hands of users in real time.

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As Paul points out, rarely does legislation see the light of day that is so widely praised for its intent: Who can argue with so noble a sentiment as to leave no child behind? Yet, as this book goes to print, the drums of NCLB war are beating. Among other critics, the National Education Association is suing, all the while saying precious little about the framers' noble intentions. Also, a small but increasing number of states are threatening to go their own way. Among the shrinking list of defenders of the federal role is the Education Trust, one of NCLB's most stalwart supporters. It at least is keeping faith.

In this connection, it is worth noting that NCLB is a direct outgrowth of half a century of federal concern about school improvement. Interestingly, the school improvement impulse—until the present day—was not rooted in pedagogical concerns but, rather, grew organically out of the commendable impulse to extend and defend the civil rights of the poor, dispossessed, and racially and ethnically different. Equity and access were the issues, and rightly so. They had been systematically denied and could be counted and weighed; there was no pretending otherwise. As so many of us thought at the time, performance would take care of itself.

Because the denial of access and equity was undemocratic in the extreme, the solution appeared to be straightforward: to achieve access, open doors; to achieve equity, spend more money. As Irving Kristol noted in another context, solving the problem of poverty among the elderly was simple: Give them money. This is precisely what happened and explains why poverty among the elderly declined so steeply in the late 20th century.

Education and civil rights, however, although natural collaborators, were a different matter. Not to put too fine a point on it, Lyndon B. Johnson's concurrent War on Poverty and Elementary and Secondary Education Act rested on a shared assumption that

education was the way up and out. Establish access (open doors) and initiate equity (let money flow) and the poor and dispossessed would flock to education like bees to honey. Not only would they flock to education, *mirabile dictu*, education would work its magic. To those of us who shared this vision, the logic seemed impeccable: The poor had been denied. The end of denial would spell the end of poverty. Would that it had been so.

The bitter truth is that even with all the goodwill in the world, spontaneous transformation was not an option. Title 1, for example, between its inception and NCLB's enactment, spent \$135 billion on the most commendable of objectives—to improve the academic performance (in reading and math) of low-income youngsters. Unfortunately, a third of a century later, there is precious little in the way of academic improvement to show for it.

Thus, the mantra, *mend not end*, speaks not just to fine-tuning NCLB but also to the federal role in education. Remember, it took a seismic shift in the body politic to launch a federal role at all: Russia's Sputnik did us all a favor by permitting Ike to mobilize a limited but significant foray into heretofore foreign territory. The National Defense Education Act was the federal government's maiden voyage into the uncharted seas of elementary and secondary education, even in a small way. (Twenty years later, it prompted Education Commissioner Ernie Boyer to wistfully wish that the Japanese would put a Toyota in orbit.)

The second and bigger seismic shift was the assassination of John F. Kennedy and the ascendancy of Lyndon B. Johnson, a larger-than-life wheeler-dealer with the most powerful connections and persuasive skills imaginable. In his first 100 days, Johnson was able to do what no predecessor could have even tried: He forged a sweeping federal role that is with us to this day. Indeed, so deeply embedded is it that it is difficult to even imagine that it was not always thus.

A third of a century is a long time, even by Washington standards, and it is clear that an active federal role is here to stay. Change it must, change it will, but it will not go away. The logic of demanding performance is irreproachable. As Humphrey Institute

fellow and former Democratic state senator of Minnesota John Brandle states, "There will be more dollars for education when there is more education for the dollar."

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Indeed, so interesting is the fallout from President Bush's approach to the federal role that it bears a quick reexamination. Not long ago, education was a Democratic exclusive. Republicans decried the imminent death of that most American of icons—local control. Remember, President Reagan, conservative icon personified, had proposed that Jimmy Carter's Department of Education be abolished (Reagan could not find a sponsor for the necessary legislation and the idea died aborning). It is also entertaining to remember that Reagan's budget proposed education cuts so severe that the congressional Democrats declared it dead on arrival; in turn, their largess was unparalleled, permitting Reagan (when he ran for a second term) to claim that his was the presidency that spent more on education than any in history. (As Henry Kissinger was reputed to have said, it has the added virtue of being true.)

For his part, Mr. Dole (running against Bill Clinton) attacked the teachers' unions and the federal role in education generally to the glee of Democrats. All the more surprising that the second President Bush would engulf education in a passionate embrace. Like Nixon's opening to China, it took a fundamental role reversal to adopt what had heretofore been the exclusive province of liberal Democrats.

Americans have been and will continue to be generous with education because they believe in it. Indeed, the two largest domestic programs ever enacted—larger even than social security, the transcontinental railroads, or the interstate highway system—were education programs: the land grant colleges of the mid-19th century and the GI Bill of the mid-20th century. Each symbolized its time and place: The land grant colleges (the Morrill Act) used physical capital to collateralize human capital, whereas the GI Bill went straight to the source, paying stipends to underwrite human

capital formation. (In its initial incarnation, the GI Bill paid living expenses only, not tuition. The memory of McArthur pushing the Bonus Army out of Washington was still fresh, and the prospect of demobilizing 12 million veterans into a shaky economy was a daunting one.)

Indeed, so popular was the GI Bill and so widely admired was it that it has not attracted much in the way of critical scholarship. It worked, and it worked wonderfully well. As a consequence, it is worth remembering what critics of the day said: University of Chicago President Robert Maynard Hutchins archly predicted that if it were enacted it would turn American universities into “intellectual hobo jungles.” How wrong he was and how evocative the quote sounds, particularly in the context of NCLB.

Finally, more important even than making the ethical—even moral—case on behalf of NCLB, Paul Kimmelman makes the pragmatic case for implementation, arguing as it were that practice is policy. Do NCLB correctly and schooling in America will be transformed. A welcome lesson for policy wonks like myself, it is nonetheless a difficult lesson for many mainline educators who have seen reforms come and go. Skeptical by temperament (and made more so by experience), many teachers have seen it all and characteristically respond with the admonition, this too shall pass. Kimmelman’s strongest suit is that he speaks from hard-won experience in the trenches. He is one of their own, talking the talk because he has walked the walk.

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This book makes a singularly important contribution to the debate about NCLB both by remarrying the moral case and by forcefully and persuasively making the instrumental case. NCLB should be supported because it is the right and proper thing to do, Kimmelman reminds us. In a genuinely American and modern way, however, Kimmelman argues that NCLB is important for instrumental reasons as well. As a nation—from an economic and cultural perspective—we can afford to leave no one behind.

Indeed, to reconcile ourselves to leaving some behind is to set the stage for leaving everyone behind, the obverse, as it were, of the moving Hebrew admonition, he who saves one man saves the world entire.

As it is, we have the advantage of a comparative example—the Japanese economic miracle. It was fueled by an education miracle in which no Japanese were left behind. As Merry White, author of *The Japanese Educational Challenge* (1987), has noted, the Japanese have a secret trade weapon: their schools. They produce the best educated workforce in the world. For those who want empirical evidence, it is to be found in the following fact: Not content with having among the world's highest test scores, Japanese scores cluster around the mean. There are few outliers. Everyone does well in Japan. The implications of this are staggering, particularly in a world that is growing flat, as New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman reminds us. By this he means that we compete on a global basis, and the workers of a country who outperform the workers of another will enjoy their day in the sun. Their country will too.

In the final analysis, Kimmelman does something even more important than preaching the gospel of NCLB—he offers constructive suggestions and examples of how to not just deal with it but also make it work and make it work well. That, indeed, is the acid test to which NCLB will be put.

This is a must-read book for anyone who cares about NCLB. By owning up to the difficulty of implementation—and proffering real ideas for meeting NCLB's challenges—it provides the armature for essential reform and improvement efforts. Also, it reminds us of the power of the old political adage: Take care that the best does not become the enemy of the good.

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