

Policy Brief about American Children and the Education System

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The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) according to The U.S. Department of Education (n.d.) reenacted the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) which gave children education rights. The U.S. Department of Education states that ESSA was enacted by Obama in 2015 and branched from the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2002. This policy had many sections that addressed several needs in the education system. The U.S. Department of Education (n.d.) talks about how the policy helps states provide for disadvantaged children, has higher levels of teaching, high standard assessments, invests in innovations, allows more access to preschools, and increases accountability for low-performing schools. Gaille (2019) shows that ESSA continues to provide equity in education by helping the schools and parents communicate more, helping children access preschool which prepares them for kindergarten, and it makes the schools accountable if they are low on their education standards. Schools now have better testing standards that Moussaoui (2017) says help to not have a one size fits, but instead can assess the strengths and weaknesses of the child. Moussaoui (2017) states that after schools are assessed the lowest 5% of that state will require them to come up with a plan to change this or they will be closed. Every state has its own requirements to address its low standard and has an opportunity to raise its scores.

The Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (2020) shows that they will help with transportation for kids to get to schools that are performing well. The program also gives money to schools for career and technical education. Many of the ESSA are carried over from NCLB according to the U.S. Department of Education (2005) the plan includes providing more communication to the parents on how the child is doing academically, better teacher quality, and testing standards. The Understood Team (n.d.) show the differences between NCLB and ESSA

that now states have more control than they used to such as students can be given fewer alternative tests than they used to, and the federal government does not encourage the states to have specific standards of operation but gives the state their own choice of how they want to operate. They show that schools look at the student's academic factors more than just reading and math scores. They show that schools get more money and make an evidenced-based plan of action rather than firing employees and getting penalties, and there is a new literacy program. They also include parents in decision-making, create personalized learning for kids, and allow states a opt out of testing choices for the student and parent. According to the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (n.d.), there is still data on desegregation selection and reporting that the No Child Left Behind Act had. This means that they published data on things like race, socioeconomic status, disabilities, etc. There are beneficial educational developments that have improved the education system in the U.S.

Marx (2016) explains that the ESSA helps students with disabilities by taking away the requirement for their teachers to be certified in special education and in the subject they are teaching thereby allowing them to have more teachers. Marx (2016) explains that they will get evidenced-based interventions, and more support systems to allow them to be in general education classrooms and to have the curriculum they need.

Zinskie & Rae (2016) talk about how ESSA is a program to help students at risk of failing academically by giving them more support. They explain that the states come up with plans to improve their learning. The system looks at the student's growth and not just standard tests like it did in the past. They show that groups that have disabilities are economically disadvantaged, have language barriers, as well as homeless, are in foster care, or parents in the military that need more support will have that data removed from the statewide reporting. Zinski

& Rae (2016) talk about the teachers will use evidence-based curricula and will need to understand how to find, evaluate, apply, and teach evidence-based research. They explain this is done by teaching the educators through ESSA funding. They discuss after-school programs for low socioeconomic areas to help the students to achieve academic success through the use of media or technology.

What is Missing?

Wealthier states have an advantage over the lower socioeconomic states even when more money is allocated to the lower socioeconomic schools. Knight et al. (2022) tell how the state aid average money given to higher poverty districts is 54% more than the lower poverty districts. They show how each state is different for example California's state aid is 74% for high-poverty districts and 37% for low-poverty districts and how cutting the funding for states really hurts the socioeconomic disadvantaged. The schools have higher educated teachers in the wealthy districts because of the location alone. States that don't meet the standards of education according to the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (n.d.) underperforming schools have four years to correct the problems with the low test standard or a graduation rate of less than 67%. The U.S. Department of Education said that 22.7 billion was used for schools in the 2003-2004 school year and 242 billion before that in funding since the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Act but they show that the achievement differences between socioeconomic differences and racial differences are still a problem. The poor-performing schools are still declining but they show that some schools in this bracket have improved so those schools are the example that other schools can emulate to change their performance rates. Riser-Kositsky (2023) shows that 7.6% of the 795 billion is from government money in 2019-2020 therefore the government gave a total of 60 billion to public schools.

According to Ogletree & Jenkins Robinson (2016), ESSA does not include a long-term plan of change for the school systems that will be sustainable. They talk about how funding for the schools is not reliable and is often cut when there is a financial crisis such as a recession. Ogletree & Robinson (2016) state that the schools are still being funded by the tax money that comes from each school's zip code and that funding continues to be inequitable for quality education for all children.

Kirabo Jackson et al. (2022) show how the recession caused student scores to decline by 3.9% per \$1000 lost in income, the teachers have a reduction in pay, and benefits, and they hire fewer teachers. They show that the racial gap increases between white and black students by 6% for every \$1000 lost. They also state that school decline continues despite funds from the Federal American Recovery Act of 2009. Moussaoui (2017) states that the policy does not address the fact that children who are disadvantaged may not have quality teachers.

What is in The Policy That Shouldn't be There?

Knight et al (2022) talk about how the funding was designed to be more equitable but the lower-income schools are still struggling to be at the range that they need to be at. Knight (2022) shows how even though the lower socioeconomic schools receive more funding when budgets are cut these schools are worse off, hurting this vulnerable population of children the most.

Instead of schools competing for more funding kind of programs, or sending so much money elsewhere the government could focus on fixing America's level of basic needs in the community. The socioeconomic areas put the schools at a disadvantage causing the American Recovery Plan to have a Maintenance of Equity Provision to help with much-needed money. The problem of poverty and education is that poverty is multifaceted and needs to be addressed from different angles.

The closing of schools may not be the best way to handle the low-score standards. Schools are overcrowded and not every child who is forced to leave their school can start homeschooling especially if their parents both work. Research could be conducted on the schools that have made a turnaround and improved scores out of the low achieving levels can be looked at to learn what has worked and incorporated to change the other low-scoring schools. The states and the federal government could collaborate better on funding. The government needs to give more funding instead of leaving most of it to the states.

Does The Policy Need to Meet The Needs of More Than the Stated Population?

The barriers for the socioeconomic disadvantaged contribute to the quality of learning and teaching in these areas. The testing ESSA requires may not be a reliable way to assess the schools depending on the area. The lower socioeconomic area has challenges that could affect them and their testing abilities. Heissel et al.(2021) show that children grade 3-8 under testing stress show higher stress hormone cortisol in their saliva 18% higher prior to testing and in boys the weeks of testing up to 35% higher in those weeks. They show that the children with the highest cortisol are children in situations of neighborhood violence, family stress, and poverty. They talk about cortisol levels during testing days cause children to act out more or throw up and school policies need to think about these reactions when looking at scores. One can imagine if you know your school is in the 5% scores that would be an added stress when testing.

These poor testing scores results are affected by many things like healthy food choices, sleep or stress issues, and language barriers. Block & Subramanian (2015) explains that the lack of grocery stores causes food disparities to become a problem for low socioeconomic areas and this leads to nutrition deficiencies in what has been called food deserts. Some people don't have cars to get to a location where there is a store to get their food. Vilar-Compte et al. (2021) state

55% of today and 70% by 2050 live in these poverty Urban locations. They show that income and healthy food availability is a problem because the poorest populations have more access to unhealthy foods rather than healthy foods like fruits and vegetables. Prado & Dewey (2014) talk about poor nutrition even before birth will affect the thinking and performance of children as they go through school years.

Patel et al. (2021) describe how pollution from things like factories, traffic, and waste that are near the poverty districts causes health problems for children. They show statistically black children are eight times more likely to die from asthma than white children due to the location they live. They show this has been a long-standing issue starting from the past redlining effects that continue today. They show that living under social stress and in polluted areas causes chronic diseases, especially for the Black, Asian, and Hispanic populations.

Mueller & Gasteyer (2021) state that the federal government's Safe Water and Drinking Act has 1,165 violations and 21,035 permittees are in violation. They show that in the U.S. these water issues are in the poverty areas and 489,836 households don't have hot or cold water because they lack complete plumbing. Water Aid (2019) shows that the government increased its funding for international aid to other countries to help them have clean water, sanitation, and hygiene in the amount of 435 million in 2019. The United States Environmental Protection Agency (2022) disclosed that the government has spent many billions to improve the U.S. systems over time but there are still 6 to 10 million lead water service lines still existing for towns and cities mostly in low-income or colored communities. The Centers for Disease Control (2022) discusses the health effects of lead in children cause brain and nervous system damage, learning, and behavioral problems, lower IQ, and attention problems. They show that even when lead exposure stops it may take decades to leave the bones in the body.

Dale & Smith (2013) explain that the theory of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs state that human has five levels of needs they require for their life. They show that these need to be met from basic needs to higher needs starting from survival needs to safety and security needs first. Then they show how other needs can be met after that such as love needs, esteem, and finally self-actualization. The children in poverty struggle with these basic needs like food, housing, or quality air or water. These needs make the school day more difficult to complete than a student who does not have to think about things like hunger or homelessness. When a child worries about the safety of their neighborhoods or whether to get a job to help feed the family or stay in school they may not be able to concentrate on testing. Children need to have their basic needs met with clean air, water, food, and housing. They need safety in their neighborhoods and schools. They need the skills to cope with life stressors.

Dale and Smith (2013) discuss Erickson's Stages of Development that people go through in life where the children in school would be in the industry versus the stagnation stage. They show how a person can get stagnant in a stage and the child can feel inferior especially if they are struggling and becoming labeled. They may be made to feel like an outcast and their self-esteem can be damaged. The Covid pandemic negatively changed the school systems and many children were affected by it. These children will need to have extra support and require extra work to bring them to where they would have been had Covid not happened.

Children need lower classroom sizes and more teacher support. They need more programs that help them to catch up in their learning. All of these things take more funding than they are getting. The state funding and the small percentage of government funding are not enough. The government must spend money to improve the lead pipes and the environment in the poverty districts. They need more funding for teachers and teacher training. ESSA is a good

start but there are many more things that could be done. The government needs to have a good plan that will address the education issues to improve them and then have the states implement it.

How The Policy Doesn't Meet The Population's Needs

The policy can meet the needs of the wealthy districts better than the districts in poverty. The wealthier states have more tax money to spend on schools than the socioeconomically disadvantaged. According to Jones (2022) the ESSA was dependent on testing results to measure how effective the schools are. Gaille (2019) states that testing can be unreliable, the policy does not address the real causes of inequality, and it does not stop the schools from closing thereby hurting the children who are vulnerable to low socioeconomic backgrounds, children of color, or children with language barriers, and children with disabilities. Gaille (2022) describes the ESSA as a weak patchwork system where the federal government has less control. The state has control in making sure the schools have equity. They are to use research-backed effective results that each state will implement to improve the education system with the federal standards of testing requirements yet there is no consensus on how to do this.

Allen (n.d) talks about the Race to The Top Policy which was to have the schools test and meet certain standards in order to qualify for some of the 3.5 billion in funding. This policy has resulted in states competing for funding. Currently, schools have testing standards they must meet, and if they cannot the schools close down affecting the children's lives that go to that school. The number of students in classrooms are large so closing schools will make this worse.

The Covid pandemic hit and forced students out of school. According to the research Kuhfeld et al. (2022) show that the Covid shutdowns and then absenteeism have resulted in them falling behind academically in math and reading. They show the gaps between the wealthy and

poor districts had risen in math by 20% and reading rose 15%. Kuhfeld et al. (2022) state that the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief tried to help the learning disparity by allotting 22 billion out of the 200 billion given to the schools but those programs they had implemented take time and money such as tutoring students or summer programs, and smaller classrooms. Kuhfeld et al (2022) explain that high-poverty areas have fallen farther behind during Covid because the children schooling at home oftentimes didn't have internet, and the older children may have had to get a job. They state that children often didn't have any help with their work, they may have lost loved ones to Covid or may have become homeless during that time. This is concerning because the policy gives a limited time to improve the testing of schools. The schools do have money allotted for certain areas to help, but money runs out quickly with programs that the students need. Programs such as summer programs or tutoring are expensive.

Children could face more shutdowns and then overcrowding in other schools that they must move to. Schools have been facing overcrowding for a long time now. Walden University shows how overcrowded classrooms cause more noise, disruptions, disciplinary issues, less one on one teaching, and increased illnesses. They state that these conditions make it hard for teachers to do their job and can lead to higher rates of burnout. Edwardson (2022) shows survey results by Alberta educators 92% have fatigue 80% stress, and one-third may not return to teaching the following year (or at all) since Covid. Reduction in pay, overcrowded classrooms, Covid, and a noisy stressful environment leads to a shortage of teachers. Extra training for teachers, lowering class size, and hiring more teachers in schools that are showing poor test scores could be an option to improve them. Teaching mental health and life coping skills in the classrooms may help them show better testing results.

Conclusion

Dynarski (2017) shows how money does have an impact on achievement and how teachers in low-performing schools are what make a difference. The federal government can oversee and collaborate with the states to have stricter policies on the teacher-to-child ratio. There needs to be more funding for the hiring of teachers at fair pay. Teachers that are doing good work can be looked at to see how they are different and this can teach others what works. Teachers who test low at their skill level could receive some additional training to try to remedy this. The additional funding for schools needs to be a continued revenue stream with additional funding after pandemics is necessary for schools to provide tutors and summer programs. Mental health and coping skills training could be included in the classrooms and for teachers. These skills can be implemented early on and continued to be taught throughout not just the child's education years but throughout their life. These skills may help children living with stress or that have test anxiety to cope. Teaching children more about critical thinking skills rather than how to pass test questions would give them the ability to function and solve problems as an adult in society.

The government and the school funding system as a system of meritocratic function. Stanford University (n.d.) says that judging a school system based on merit works well for the wealthy population who pay for their children to attend the best schools and ensure their child is successful or the most meritorious, keeping those children above the less fortunate. What doesn't need to be continued is a system of inequality in resources. More equitable funding for all schools needs to be done more than what is being done currently. The wealthy states will have more funding than the rest so the government needs to provide the poor states more funding to have more equity in testing standards. The wealthy population often places their children in

private schools so they will continue to have an advantage even if the public school systems could attain more equity in their education. The standard education for all U.S. children is a basic human right.

The closing of schools needs to be stopped. Research and utilize the methods other schools have used that have proven positive results. Then if those practices can be transferred to all schools that have low standard scores then this can improve the learning for those children, especially after a pandemic. The schools that have the lower scores should continue to get the funding but also the government should give more funding. The schools that are not in the 5% bracket but still are on the lower end should receive more funding from the government to keep them out of the 5% bracket.

Gray (2017) shows the countries that spend the most on their education system in 2014 were the UK, Denmark, and New Zealand 2014. In 2023 global citizens for Human rights survey showed Denmark, Finland, and Japan are in the lead. The World Population Review (2023) shows the U.S. is ranking number one in the Best Countries Report of the best school systems in 2020, yet the math and science scores compared to others and ranking 38th in math and 24 in science scores and the World Population Review (2023) states this is because the U.S. has not kept up with the inflation on spending to keep the education standards up. In the study that was done on 15-year-olds around the world in the math subject China, Korea, and Finland did the best. This shows that long-term education spending yields better results. The U.S. is doing better than many other countries but the testing scores need to improve.

The state schools and parents are all doing what they come up with education plans that work but not all of their plans are working. There needs to be more research into schools and programs that are working around the world. Those systems that are effective can be tried on a

research trial basis. Then the plan can be adjusted to come up with better programs or teaching methods. Other countries can be looked at as well to see what is working in their programs. The government has many issues to fix in the education system. Poverty is a large and expensive issue. Lead pipes will have effects on the testing in states. Issues such as these need to be a priority. The government has to come up with a better basic plan to improve education. The government has to take more control to enact this plan. The government has to provide more funding than they do for the plan and programs to create more equity in the education system. Changes to the economy have decreased funding in the education system but instead of decreasing funding for schools, more funding will create educated people who will pay more in taxes rather than taxing the system. Providing funding for children's education is an investment in the American economy.

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