

Implementing the No Child Left Behind Act: A Look Inside 33 School Districts

Elizabeth Pinkerton
Caitlin Scott
Barbara Buell
Nancy Kober

Center on Education Policy
Washington, DC

February 2004

Introduction to the Case Studies

Learning from Case Studies of the No Child Left Behind Act

What have school districts done since January 2003 to raise student achievement, ensure all teachers are highly qualified, provide school choice to children in under-performing schools, and meet the other far-reaching requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)? How do districts perceive the Act? What effects is it having?

To help answer these questions, the Center on Education Policy (CEP) commissioned case studies of local implementation of NCLB in 33 school districts. These districts were selected to be diverse in size and geography and to reflect the approximate distribution of urban, suburban, and rural districts in the nation. Conducted between May and December of 2003, these case studies were one of several research methods used by the Center to inform our multi-year national study of state and local implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act. We also surveyed state education agency officials in 47 states and the District of Columbia; conducted a nationally representative survey of 274 school districts; interviewed key officials in the U.S. Department of Education and the Congress; and conducted other kinds of research. Our findings from the second year of this broad study were published in January 2004, in the report entitled *From the Capital to the Classroom: Year 2 of Implementing the No Child Left Behind Act*.

Because the full study report includes only a portion of the rich information collected through the case studies, the Center has also published this compendium of case study reports from all 33 school districts. The case study reports presented here describe each district's progress in carrying out NCLB requirements, its challenges with implementation, and its strategies for addressing these challenges. The reports also include data from each district about enrollment and demographics, numbers of teachers and paraprofessionals that are not highly qualified according to NCLB criteria, and numbers of schools identified for school improvement or corrective action under the NCLB accountability requirements.

Our analysis focused on activities undertaken during school year 2002-03, but we also

made an effort to include updated information from fall 2003. Decisions and data related to NCLB are continually changing, however—for example, in several states, the lists of schools identified for improvement were still not final or were subject to appeal at the time we completed these case studies. Thus, the information in these case studies could have changed since publication and should not be viewed as the final word on NCLB implementation in 2002-03, but rather as a picture of where these districts stood as of December 2003.

Case Study Authors and Methods

Elizabeth Pinkerton, a consultant to the Center on Education Policy, conducted 31 of the 33 case studies described in this summary. Consultant Caitlin Scott did the case study of the Cleveland Municipal School District, and consultant Barbara Buell did the case study of the Chicago Public Schools. Nancy Kober, a consultant to the Center, edited the case studies.

To collect information for these case studies, Pinkerton, Scott, and Buell conducted telephone and personal interviews with key contact people in the school districts. Usually the primary contact was the district's coordinator of federal and state programs or Title I director, but contacts also included superintendents, assistant superintendents, assessment personnel, pupil services personnel, principals, directors of curriculum and instruction, and others. In addition to conducting interviews, the consultants did other general research about the districts. The research and interviews were done between May and December 2003.