

This article examines No Child Left Behind and what have been the effects.

Today it was reported on the news that over ten percent of the schools had failed to meet the minimum standards required by the No Child Left behind Act. The report also said that it was estimated that 30 to 40 percent of the schools would fail by 2013. What is the problem and why can't the schools meet the standards are questions many are asking? The simple answer is that the requirements of the No Child Left Behind act were and are impossible to meet. The Act requires every student to achieve a designated standard. This standard is usually the standard established for his age and class. In most cases the standard is arrived by giving a group or class an achievement test. Then use the average score to become the norm for students in similar classes and expect each student to achieve that level. Example all students in the 6th grade are given an achievement test covering several skills and subjects at the beginning of the school year. These scores are totaled and the average is computed. This average becomes 6.0 or the standard for the beginning 6th grade student. Therefore a 5th grade student to meet the requirement to enter 6th grade they must be able to achieve a score of 6.0 or better. It sounds logical and realistic, but is it? Remember that 6.0 score is the mean score of all students of a given age and grade level which means that there were students in the group that didn't score at the 6.0 level. Most likely 50 percent scored below that level. The reason behind that is that the mean and median are about the same when you have a large sample, a 1000 or more. By definition the median is a point where 50 percent of the population is above it and 50 percent below. If the standard is the mean of the group then there

always will be some in the group that will not meet the standard.

The idea behind the No Child Left Behind act was good but the unintended consequences have created some serious problems for states and schools. The states and schools trying to meet the requirements of the act have invested much money and have implemented all kinds of programs. Passing a test has almost become the primary objective of the education program. Study after study has indicated that there is much cheating on the tests going on in the schools. Recently several schools in the Houston Independent School District were found to be falsifying tests results in order to try and meet the requirements of the No Child Left Behind. I have had teachers from different school districts to tell me that they were under great pressure to be sure their students meet the required standards. As one teacher told me the administrator of the school told the faculty that their class that he didn't what they did but their class had better meet the required standard on the state test. Another teacher told me that the teachers in her school spent 33 school days preparing their students to take the required state test.

Levitt and Dubner¹ in their book, Freakonomics, Chapter 1 give a good report on incentives and an analysis of cheating in schools by teachers. They report on an analysis of test data which indicated that at least teachers in 200 classrooms, approximately 5 percent of the total, cheated the test results.² The results of the study were very conservative and only included teachers.

Cheating today does not have the negative social impact as it did a generation ago. A couple of years ago I read a report on the attitude of high school student on cheating. The report stated that 80 per cent of the students did not find

anything wrong with cheating. They seemed to think that most people cheat. In one way that probably is true if we consider moving the golf ball, looking at the other player's card and so on. Even they recognized that was different than cheating on a test or in situations that are important and affect others.

Why do students and teachers cheat when there is so much risk? One might say that they think it is a matter of survival. Often time that is as their job or advancement depends on that score. What is and what one perceives it is are not necessarily the same. Let's analyze the students and teachers' perception of the results will be if they don't meet the established standards. In the case of the students it mean failing and maybe not advancing to the next grade or graduating. To a student either situation is devastating and to some failing must be avoided at all cost. Students face many pressures to succeed. Some of these pressures are from parents, teachers, peers, society and the government. Teachers often tend to perceive themselves to be in an impossible situation which is that they are given a heterogeneous group of students whom they know all cannot achieve the standard that has been established. They often, and in many cases really, feel that their job, position and competency are at risk if they don't meet the requirements.

Judging from information that I have received from teachers and school administrators these perceptions have more than a grain of truth in them. Most people when they perceive their survival threaten will take whatever action they think will protect them. Pressures on teachers and administrators to meet mandated standards are great and failure to have severe consequences. Some of these consequences for the teachers are: losing their position, being reassigned, given undesirable

classes, loss of prestige, being considered incompetent, and loss of standing with parents. Consequences for the school administrators are: loss of professional status by peers, districts and state administrators, or that their schools will be rated unacceptable.

Now many years later there is little mention of no child left behind program. After millions of dollars and wasted effort people recognized that the program did more damage than good. However educators and politicians never learn so we still use programs that meet the needs of today, population and country.