

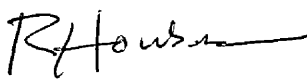
Presidential Leadership in Education:
The Federal Education Policies from Lyndon Johnson to Bill Clinton

by

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Introduction

The role of the President of the United States in education policy has changed. Early in our republic, the president did virtually nothing in this area. As the country evolved and expanded, education eventually became a prominent aspect of a president's domestic policy concerns.

Historically, presidential leadership in education policy held a low priority. This is based mostly on the absence of the mention of "education" or "schools" in the U.S. constitution. Since the country's framers did not mention education or schools in the constitution, this meant that the issue became a state and local issue. The 10th amendment basically reserves rights to the states of those powers not listed in the constitution are those powers of the states. These constitutional constraints have limited and even prevented many presidents from setting national education policy and goals. As a result, few American presidents have exercised distinctive and widespread educational leadership for our country.

The purpose of education in our country's early history was mostly for citizenship. The founders had declared their independence and fought a war against the powerful British Empire for it. The founders were concerned that democracy must be preserved and education was the key in maintaining it. George Washington described the importance of education in his farewell address saying, "Promote then, as an object of primary importance, institutions for the general diffusion of knowledge. In proportion as the structure of government gives force to public opinion, it is essential that public

opinion should be enlightened.” Washington was not promoting federal involvement in education. Education was strictly a state and local role.

Presidential interest in education was sporadic until the middle part of the twentieth century. More specifically, with the rise of technology after World War II, the U.S. economy became increasingly dependent on newer technology. Presidents were confronted with the need to develop a more educated work force. At that moment, education became important for our economy.¹

It was during this time, the middle of the twentieth century, where we have a turning point of national concern. America emerged after World War II as an international and economic world power. With some hesitation, American Presidents were confronted with educational demands of a technological age.²

As our country has become more complex, the demand for an educated citizenry increased. As a result some presidents have realized the concern of the American public and most have responded. A few presidents even declared themselves education presidents and have proposed massive education reforms. Presidents Johnson and Reagan have pushed for some of the most changes while others maintained the status quo.

The office of the Presidency is arguably the most influential office in the country. This is one major reason why Americans have looked to him in our recent history to get things done. As the President realized the public's want for more federal involvement in education, many presidents have listened and reacted. Some presidents have used their strong influence and power to be proactive in setting education policy. Presidents have

¹ Berube, Maurice R, *American Presidents and Education*, (New York, NY: Greenwood Press, 1991). p.1.

² Berube, p. 7.

used basically two ways to influence national education policy. First, some have proposed federal programs to address national issues. The best example of this would be President Johnson. Johnson based much of his war on poverty programs on education.

Others mainly have used the office of the Presidency as a rhetorical presidency or “bully pulpit” to advocate reforms. In advocating for reforms, the president uses the media to become the media to become the “teacher and preacher in chief” for changes. He has used the office to influence public opinion and in turn policy makers at the state and federal levels. The rhetorical president uses their major weapons in advancing his agenda. These weapons include inaugural addresses, state of the union messages, and other major speeches. Since the advent of television, presidents have used the tool to spread their policy messages. They could reach massive amounts of people unheard of before its advent. American Presidents have been able to help mold public opinion using the media to their advantage. Ronald Reagan was probably the best at using the media for his own purposes. He used the office in proposing reforms and in a sense to bully the American public to share his views. He was successful and probably helped him earn the title of the “Great Communicator.”³

While some have used the media as a tool to advance reforms in education, others didn't think that much of the President's role in education. Some have maintained the traditional relationship of the schools and the federal government. The traditional relationship shows little involvement. Nixon more than anyone probably best fits this model. He firmly believed that education was a state and local issue and continually battled the Congress over education spending budgets.

³ Berube, p. 2.

This paper is a short history of educational policies of the Presidents from the Johnson administration to the end of the century. It seemed logical to begin with Johnson because he was the first to propose massive educational reforms. President Johnson, more than any other President took a giant leap forward in being a catalyst for the President advancing educational matters. This paper shows their basic ideology, major policy beliefs, and their major accomplishments of their educational agendas. It also shows some shortcomings of some Presidents concerning their agendas and battles over dollars and budgets.

Lyndon Johnson

Lyndon Johnson could be considered the ultimate education president. Johnson believed that education was the key part of his “Great Society”. He strongly believed that the federal government should take an active and strong role in solving society’s problems and education was the answer. He strongly promoted education through his “bully pulpit” and eventually helped enact over 60 education laws.⁴

Johnson’s background helped mold his education policy. While Johnson was in college at Southwest Texas State Teacher’s College, he ran out of money and took time off to get a job to pay his tuition. He took a one-year assignment as principal and teacher at an elementary school in Cotulla, Texas. This work led Johnson to see the educational effects of socioeconomic deprivation, a theme heavily emphasized in his War on Poverty programs. After his year at Cotulla, he returned to college and graduated. Soon after graduation he landed a job at Sam Houston High School in Houston Texas.⁵

Although Johnson’s original career was in education, politics would be his career. He left teaching and worked in government. He eventually was named the Texas director of the National Youth Administration (NYA). These projects helped to put young people to work during the Great Depression. Two of these projects; the Freshman College Center and the College Aid program were designed specifically to education. Johnson’s position at the NYA greatly shaped his educational policies as president. Johnson saw

⁴ Berube, p. 59.

⁵ Gutek, Gerald L, American Education 1945-2000, (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2000), p. 171.

how FDR's New Deal involved the federal government's role in promoting social welfare.⁶

Johnson's political career then led to serving in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1937 – 1948. He was then elected to the U.S. Senate from 1949 – 1961. As Senator, he supported federal aid to education. He supported school construction, facilities improvement, and raising teacher salaries all with federal monies. Johnson then became Vice President of the U.S. when Kennedy selected him as a running mate in the 1960 presidential election. Johnson then became president in 1963 after the assassination of Kennedy.⁷

In 1964, Johnson won the presidential election. Also, the Democrats won a landslide in the House and Senate. The House stood at a 295 – 140 majority and a 62 – 38 in the Senate.⁸ Johnson now knowing he had overwhelming majorities in the Congress on his side went for change. He developed a Great Society program that included a legislative program on education. He declared: "We have an opportunity to move not only toward a rich society, but upward to the Great Society.... So I want to talk to you today about the three places where we begin to build the Great Society – in our cities, in our countryside, and in our classroom...these are the three central issues of the Great Society."⁹

Johnson made an educational pledge. "because of my convictions, I made a personal decision during the 1964 campaign to make education a fundamental issue and to put it on the nation's agenda. Furthermore the Democratic platform of 1964

⁶ Gutek., p. 172.

⁷ Gutek., p. 173.

⁸ McAndrews, Laurence, *The Era of Education: The Presidents and the Schools, 1965-2001*, (University of Illinois Press, 2006), p. 9.

guaranteed college to anyone even if they couldn't pay. Part of it read, "...Every person shall have the opportunity to become all that he or she is capable of becoming...knowledge is essential to individual freedom and to conduct a free society.... Regardless of financial status, therefore education should be open to every boy and girl in America up to the highest level which he or she is able to master."¹⁰

President Johnson's Great Society's programs fell into three categories: education, social welfare and civil rights. In education, the president can claim three major accomplishments. First, Johnson scored breakthrough with the first federal aid to education bill. Second, he followed with the higher education act. Third, he incorporated preschool education for the children of the poor with Head Start in his poverty program.¹¹

His education strategy included three main parts. They included: 1) education, considered in larger context than schooling, should be related to national socioeconomic well being; 2) educational legislation should be formed more as a total package of related programs, rather than as separate items that appear disconnected; 3) educational programs, supported by federal aid, should move education in new, innovative direction rather than reinforce and subsidize the status quo. Furthermore, school districts receiving federal aid should be actively moving toward desegregation.¹²

Johnson's education strategy was based on several premises. Federal aid proposals would be part of a comprehensive program that was part of broad

⁹ Lyndon B. Johnson, "The Goals: Ann Arbor," in *The Great Society Reader: The Failure of American Liberalism*, ed, Marvin E. Gettleman and David Mermelstein (New York: Random House, 1967) p. 15.

¹⁰ Berube, p. 69.

¹¹ Berube, p. 60.

¹² Gutek., p. 174.

socioeconomic change. Education was needed as part of a federal policy for eliminating poverty, promoting social welfare, and spurring economic growth.¹³

The administration, in consultation with educators, would define educational goals and propose programs to achieve them rather than having education lobbies define its needs. Rather than supplementing the states and local districts, federal programs would be used to stimulate and diffuse innovation throughout the nation's schools. Finally, and most importantly, this huge program would require massive assistance.¹⁴

Johnson knew that getting federal funding for public schooling would be difficult even though he had Congress on his side. Federal funding for education was nonexistent. Johnson tried to build a consensus that related education to the larger war on poverty. Improving educational opportunities in high poverty areas was of major concern. To avoid the complicated church-state issue, aid would be given directly to poverty-impacted children rather than directly to schools. Johnson also wanted to strengthen state departments of education. He wanted to create educational centers for research and development. The passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which empowered the federal government to bring suit and withdraw funds to enforce desegregation, helped take the race issue out of the federal aid to education debate.¹⁵

In his first state of the union speech following Kennedy's assassination, Johnson declared an unconditional "war on poverty". He signaled out education as the key: "Our chief weapon in a more pinpointed attack will be better schools. Very often a lack of jobs and money is not the cause of poverty, but the symptom. The cause may lie deeper in our

¹³ Gutek, p. 174.

¹⁴ Gutek, p. 174.

¹⁵ Diane Ravitch, *The Troubled Crusade: American Education, 1945-1980* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), pp. 163-64.

failure to give our fellow citizens a fair chance to develop their own capacities, in a lack of education and training.”¹⁶

Earlier efforts to pass federal educational packages were halted. They were usually stopped by racial issues of segregation as well as religious ones concerning church and state separation. The passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 sparked a new federal government involvement never seen before. More specifically, Title VI of the act gave more powers to the U.S. office of Education. The office was empowered to disperse federal funds and to assure that districts were complying with the acts discrimination policy. Guidelines for distributing federal funds specified: 1) districts were to file an assurance of compliance that segregation had been eliminated in pupil and faculty assignments; 2) districts in the process of desegregation were to report on their progress, especially in the assignment of pupils and faculty; 3) districts could file a voluntary plan indicating how they would fully desegregate their schools by 1967. The Civil Rights Act along with the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) was a catalyst for racial integration of the public schools.¹⁷

After the lopsided Democrat victories in the Congress, Johnson pushed forth his education proposals. They were sent to Congress in January 1965. With little change, Johnson proposals passed. Alongside his 3rd grade teacher in the one-room schoolhouse he had once attended, Johnson enacted what he called “the most significant step in this century to provide widespread help to all of America’s schoolchildren.”¹⁸

¹⁶ The American Presidency Project. Lyndon B. Johnson. XXXVI President of the United States: 1963-1969. Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union. January 8, 1964. Retrieved March 2009. <<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=26787#axzz1OmhhYYT9>>

¹⁷ Gutek, p. 177-178.

¹⁸ McAndrews, p. 9.

The result was the ESEA. The essence of ESEA was Title I, which was categorical aid to the children of the poor in public and private schools. This allocated an unprecedented \$1 billion for needy kids.¹⁹ Title I aimed to improve not only educational opportunities, but educational outcomes, for disadvantaged children. The emphasis was on the aid to children and not schools. The money allotment under Title I went for textbooks and technology in the classrooms. Title II provided \$100 million for school libraries. Title III earmarked \$100 million for “supplemental services and centers”.²⁰ Title IV earmarked \$100 million to modernize and coordinate federal education research and Title V allocated \$100 million to improve state education agencies.²¹ One important aspect of the ESEA was the requirement that the programs would be evaluated. Districts would submit yearly evaluations of the effectiveness of the programs.²²

Johnson was ecstatic about the passage of ESEA. He called it “the most significant education bill in the history of Congress” He tended to romanticize his early poverty and experiences as a schoolteacher and was therefore extremely sympathetic to the cause of public education.²³ It was a great accomplishment for Johnson and he even called himself an “education president”. Johnson had all but rewritten the constitution where once education was rarely ever thought of by the federal government. Now education would be permanently established for future presidents and Congress to consider.²⁴

¹⁹ Berube, p. 76.

²⁰ Federal Education Policy and the States, 1945-2009 The Johnson Years: ESEA Title I Provisions. U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved March 2009.

<http://www.archives.nysed.gov/edpolicy/research/res_essay_johnson_esea_prov.shtml>

²¹ McAndrews, p. 9.

²² Gutek, p. 179.

²³ Berube, p. 59.

²⁴ McAndrews, p. 9.

As part of the ESEA, districts were to submit annual objective evaluations of the effectiveness of the programs that used ESEA funding. In 1966, James Coleman released his study, *Equality of Educational Opportunity* evaluating racial desegregation and integration and the relationship of school resources and facilities to students academic achievement. The study would basically answer the question about which strategy would be more likely to equalize education opportunities for poor minority students – compensatory education or racial integration?²⁵

Many thought that this report would validate the conventional wisdom that differences in staff, facilities, and resources had a significant impact on student achievement. Coleman’s study couldn’t back up these claims. Coleman did find however that family, neighborhood, and social class as the important factor of school success. He found nothing that supported that integration alone improved student performances. Coleman wrote, “our interpretation of the data is that racial integration is unrelated to achievement insofar as the data can show a relationship.” Coleman also added that compensatory education, whether offered in racially integrated or racially segregated schools were similarly unlikely to improve achievement levels.²⁶

The Coleman Report imparted implications for questions of equity in education. Equalization of a school’s physical facilities and staff would not necessarily provide an equal education for all. It was a child’s total life context, his or her environment that had the greatest influence on academic achievement. President Nixon as a reference point to argue against the use of busing to help achieve a racial balance in schools would later use

²⁵ Gutek, p. 146.

²⁶ Federal Education Policy and the States, 1945-2009 The Johnson Years: The Coleman Report – Equal Education Opportunity. U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved March 2009.
<http://www.archives.nysed.gov/edpolicy/research/res_essay_johnson_cole.shtml>

the Coleman report. It also helped solidify Johnson's belief that if you eliminated poverty, you would better the schools by having a better opportunity to succeed.²⁷

Federal aid to education money increased significantly, yet more calls for more money from superintendents across the country continued. The president agreed, and in his second annual message on Education and Health, Johnson requested a 36% increase in funds for Title I and the ESEA. Congress wasn't quite as agreeable. Some members of Congress wanted a reduction in spending while others wanted to give "block grants" for the states for education. After some compromising, the president got most of what he wanted. Some of the money would go for block grants in 1969 and by 1970 all of the money would. Congressman Morse called it, "one of the most important of the landmark education bills we have passed." The president said the bill (named the Elementary and Secondary Act Amendments of 1967), "gave every child in America a better chance to touch his outermost limits."²⁸

Another aspect of Johnson's War on Poverty was The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964. This had three main sections: education, job training, and community action. The education section was a bold new experiment in preschool for poor children. The program was called Head Start and it was to capitalize on recent early childhood research. It was easily comprehensible; it was Pre School for the poor. The Johnson administration felt that since upper and middle class families had long had preschool that it was only fair to have it accessible to the lower class as well. What made this different was that it was not only for the poor, but it was based on new evidence that children

²⁷ Coleman, James S., *Equality of Educational Opportunity* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1966).

²⁸ McAndrews, p. 10-12.

develop their mental capacities early. In his book, *Stability and Change in Human Characteristics*, Benjamin Bloom showed that children develop half their intelligence by age four and the other half by age 8. Johnson reasoned that early intervention had the promise of reaching children at an important part in their development.²⁹

The basis for Head Start held three major assumptions: 1) the environment of poverty created cultural deficits that had a negative impact on children's learning; 2) it was possible to compensate for deficits and remediate them by an early intervention in the child's life; 3) such an early intervention would create a learning readiness that would give poverty-impacted children a needed head start at school.³⁰

The developers of Head Start believed it was more important to nurture children in a secure environment and to develop learning readiness instead of an early introduction to the academic basics. Head Start Programs incorporated a wide range of objectives: the children's all around social, psychological, cultural, and motor skill development, the development of a family's parenting skills; and general health and nutrition.³¹

Another aspect of the program was to have community involvement. Parents would be part of the advisory boards. The aim was to make Head Start part of the larger community and not just learning in the classroom. Parents could see what was working and what changes could be made if necessary. Head Start began in 1965 with over 500,000 kids enrolled during its first summer.³²

Along with Head Start, federal aid to the poor in education, Johnson also embraced the idea of federal aid for bilingual programs to serve a rising number of non-

²⁹ Berube, p. 74.

³⁰ Ravitch, p. 158.

³¹ Gutek, p. 180.

English speaking immigrant students. Since 1965, the U.S. had ended quotas that had been in place for 40 years and now the U.S. had unprecedented numbers of Asians and Latino's entering the country. Florida, Texas, Arizona, and New Mexico had begun to experiment with local bilingual programs. In 1967, Congress added Title VII, the Bilingual Education Act to the ESEA. The purpose was to help educationally disadvantaged kids because of their inability to speak English. It was aimed at immigrant children whose parents earned less than \$3,000 a year. The program provided start up funds for pilot programs in bilingual and bicultural education in a variety of settings.³³

The ESEA was quickly followed by the Higher Education Act of 1965. This was help for lower education college students by offering low interest loans, work-study programs, and a scholarship program. It also aided black colleges and established a National Teacher Corps.³⁴

Poverty in America was rediscovered in the early 1960's by a number of scholars. Of the books published, Michael Harrington's *The Other America* did for poverty what Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* did for the abolition of slavery. *The Other America* defined a severe problem and galvanized the nation-more properly, the federal government into action.³⁵

Johnson eliminated the long-standing opposition of general aid by proposing categorical aid. Moreover, it continued a tradition in American education of a federal response to a national need. Lincoln signed the Morrill Land Grant Act to help the

³² Gutek, p. 180.

³³ Federal Education Policy and the States, 1945-2009 The Johnson Years: Bilingual Education – ESEA Title VII. Retrieved March, 2009.

<http://www.archives.nysed.gov/edpolicy/research/res_essay_johnson_bilingual.shtml>

³⁴ Berube, p. 63.

³⁵ Berube, p. 64.

falling agricultural economy; Roosevelt began the G.I. Bill of Rights for veterans of World War II at a time when technology was increasing; Eisenhower proposed the National Defense of Education Act in response to the Soviet launch of Sputnik; Johnson insisted on federal aid to help eliminate poverty in America.³⁶

Johnson could rightfully claim himself as the first education president. He could point to over 60 education laws passed during his time in office. He could also point to his landmark achievements in getting the first legislation passed resulting in federal aid for schools. Furthermore, the passage and continuous extensions of the ESEA were historic landmark achievements for helping poor children get a shot at the American dream. Finally, Johnson could also take credit for his landmark higher education act and Head Start as successful and needed programs for the country.

Johnson did not seek reelection in 1968, mostly because of the ongoing conflict in Vietnam. Johnson's presidency is most remembered for the escalation of troops in Vietnam. His strides in education seem to be an afterthought if remembered at all by most Americans.

³⁶ Berube, p. 77.

Richard Nixon

Richard Nixon, unlike his predecessor, had no teaching experience. However, he did believe that education “should be at the top of our list of domestic priorities”.³⁷

Nixon won the presidential election of 1968 by defeating his Democratic opponent Hubert Humphrey. As part of his party’s platform, Nixon ran on “law and order”. He claimed that his victory was a mandate for the “silent majority” who were fed up and disgusted with the chaos of the 60’s”. Concerning education, Nixon told the right things to the right people about elementary and secondary education. He told liberals that he would spend more federal money in the nation’s public while at the same time he told conservatives that he would return control of education to the states. He also pledged greater federal research and accountability.³⁸

While Nixon talked a good game on education, in reality, it wasn’t a high priority for him. Nixon was much more interested in foreign policy. He and his advisors, notably his chief foreign policy advisor Henry Kissinger, sought to extricate American military forces from the war in Vietnam. Nixon also wanted to maintain an eye on the Soviet Union and countries over cold war policies. Finally, Nixon sought to normalize relations with the People’s Republic of China.³⁹

Continuing Johnson’s massive educational changes in the country would be difficult for Nixon to do. Ideologically, Nixon thought that Johnson had gone too far and that the county needed a reduction of the federal government’s role in education.

³⁷ McAndrews, p. 15.

³⁸ Gutek, p. 249.

³⁹ Gutek, p. 249.

Traditionally, education was left to the states and local school districts. The federal government should be limited in scope. While Nixon won the Vice presidency under President Eisenhower, Nixon went along with the president's policies of a limited federal role.

Backing up his argument of a limited federal role, Nixon believed that Johnson's massive education expenditures; most notably the ESEA had not been worthwhile. He also believed it may have even aggravated socioeconomic problems of the country. Nixon criticized the several educational programs under the Johnson administration because they were not coherent and comprehensible. Nixon said that they had gone in too many directions. He also believed that too much was expected of the schools in that they "have been expected not only to educate, but also to accomplish a social transformation."⁴⁰

In January 1969, Nixon appointed James E Allen Jr., former state commissioner of education in New York, to serve as both federal commissioner and assistant secretary of education in the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW). Allen required schools receiving Title I aid to include parents "in the early stages of program planning and in discussions concerning the needs of the children in the various eligible attendance areas." Allen's goal was to promote community involvement and more effectiveness.⁴¹

Criticism of federally funded education programs resulted from a study by Ruby Martin and Phyllis McClure. This study, *Title I of ESEA: Is it Helping Poor Children?* asserted that a number of states had misused Title I funds and in the process, had undermined the programs goals. They discovered for example that Title I funds had not

⁴⁰ Gutek, p. 250.

been equally distributed to urban schools. Instead funds had flowed disproportionately to suburban districts. Furthermore, when they audited Title I programs they found terrible data collection processes, including attendance records, inadequate procedures, and unremitted unused funds.⁴²

The 70's economically had the problem of inflation and stagflation. Nixon knew that at budget time, there would have to be cuts. In April of 1969, he submitted to Congress dramatic reductions of the ESEA because of its excessive cost. The next year, the House of Representatives voted to add \$900 million to the education budget. Nixon said to a White House aid, "I've never assumed that education is the sacred cow some believe it is. It is so goddam ridiculous to assume everyone should go to college...I'm willing to put a lot of money in some education programs, but we have to be selective."⁴³

Nixon continued with his pledge to be more selective in monies for education. On Jan. 26, 1970, a bill containing \$19.7 billion in funds for education, health and antipoverty programs was vetoed by the president. Later in the week the president vowed to fight the NEA. In August 1970, Congress passed education appropriations for the next year for \$500 million of additional spending. Nixon again vetoed the legislation citing his economic concerns for the country. Congress however eventually would override the president's veto.⁴⁴

Another veto by the president came when he disagreed over an appropriations bill towards labor and education of \$2 billion. The NEA and AFT condemned all of the

⁴¹ Federal Education Policy and the States, 1945-2009 The Nixon Years: Challenging ESEA – Title I
<http://www.archives.nysed.gov/edpolicy/research/res_essay_nixon_martin_mclure.shtml>

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ McAndrews, p. 16.

⁴⁴ McAndrews, p. 17.

president's vetoes. The two teacher's unions out of disgust towards Nixon even joined forces to try to get George McGovern elected to the presidency.⁴⁵

In November of 1970, the Nixon administration had plans to consolidate federal education programs into block grants for the states. Nixon said "categorical grants would be given to the states for four broad interests. The grants would go to the areas of compensatory education for the disadvantaged, education for the handicapped, vocational education and impact aid." The president even would provide \$192 million in additional funds for the next fiscal year. Nixon's reasoning was that it would be most effective to return initiatives and control for education to the states and local districts. Overall, Nixon's educational policy turned away from large issues that related schools to socioeconomic status espoused by Johnson. Instead it sought more limited objectives, especially innovations more specifically related to curriculum and instruction.⁴⁶

In March of 1970, Nixon announced the Experimental Schools Program (ESP) and the creation of the National Institute of Education (NIE). Under ESP, local districts could apply for funding if they developed a comprehensive school plan to bring about curricular and instructional innovations that involved students across all grade levels. Under ESP \$50 million was provided between 1970 – 1975. The NIE was designed to connect educational research to actual school practices. Citing the Coleman Report, Nixon said that previous educational policies were unsuccessful in helping the poor.

In 1972, Nixon launched a "Right to Read" program. The primary objective was to ensure that by 1990, 99 percent of those under 16 "will have the skills to read to the full of their desires." When the program began, there were 7 million elementary and

⁴⁵ McAndrws, p. 18.

⁴⁶ Gutek, p. 251.

secondary students with severe reading problems, almost half of who lived in the urban areas. Right to Read directed \$500 million to provide information and technical assistance in reading-related programs such as bilingual education and library services.⁴⁷

A Nixon advisor on education, Neal McElroy called for “the provision of emergency financial aid to assist large central city schools and to expand programs of early childhood education beginning at age 4.” The president promised to give it “every consideration” but then largely ignored it.⁴⁸

In 1974, amendments were added to the ESEA. These amendments expanded federal aid to education in low-income areas. It funded various projects including dropout prevention projects, school health services, gifted children’s programs, women’s equity programs, career education, arts education, metric education, consumer education, ethnic heritage centers, federal programs for migratory, delinquent, and Native American pupils, and dozens of other programs. Educational spending increased by 23 percent from 1974-1975. The Education Amendments of 1974 allocated more than \$12 billion over four years to categorical programs in public schools.⁴⁹

The most prominent of the Amendments was Title I, which distributed \$1.8 billion in 1975. Title VII for non-English speaking students distributed \$100 million but had some major changes. Title VII had originally fit with the anti-poverty rationale of the ESEA, but the Education Amendments of 1974 removed the poverty criteria for Title VII eligibility. Effectively, non-English speakers received funds not because of

⁴⁷ McAndrews, p. 21-22.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Federal Education Policy and the States, 1945-2009 The Nixon Years: The Education Amendments of 1974. <http://www.archives.nysed.gov/edpolicy/research/res_essay_nixon_amends1974.shtml>

economic disadvantages, but because of language deficiencies. They didn't have to be poor to receive support. The same applied to other disabled students as well. These included the mentally retarded, physically handicapped, and emotionally impaired students. One of the most significant shifts in federal aid after 1974 was the addition of non-poverty related to poverty related criteria for eligibility.⁵⁰

Racial segregation in the schools was another issue that Nixon had to face during his administration. He faced a hostile situation regarding the federal role in enforcing desegregation and encouraging racial integration. Throughout the country in large cities, court imposed busing to achieve racial integration had generated large protests and resentment. Opponents of busing wanted to preserve local control of neighborhood schools. Nixon's policies of segregation were careful and pragmatic. He promised to continue to eliminate de facto segregation while preserving local control of neighborhood schools. He announced that his administration continue to enforce the *Brown* and other decisions that prohibited de jure segregation in public schools while opposing "compulsory busing of pupils beyond normal geographic school zones for the purpose of achieving racial balance."⁵¹

Nixon believed that the federal government had no right in eliminating de facto segregation; segregation by housing, but on de jure segregation he said, "de jure segregation brought about by deliberate school board gerrymandering exists in the North and South; in both areas this must be remedied. In all respects, the law should be applied equally, North and South, East and West."⁵²

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Gutek, p. 251.

⁵² Ibid, p. 252.

Nixon could claim that he had fulfilled his major promises on education policy. First, he could say that he had increased federal spending on public schools from \$3.2 billion in 1969-70 to \$4.9 billion in 1974-74. Second, he could note that he had sought to transfer some of the burden of education spending from the federal levels to the states and local governments. Third, as evidence of his commitment to public schools, he could point out his mentioning of education in his first inaugural address and two state of the union addresses; five annual messages on education and a 1971 White House meeting with educators. Finally, he could cite the reorganization of the Office of Education, the Right to Read program, the NIE and the ESP as results of his administration's hard work and vision.⁵³

Despite some changes and programs Nixon may have achieved, there were some drawbacks and failures. Nixon originally had hoped that education would be a top priority domestic issue. Over time and rising inflation across the country led Nixon to state, "the primary national objective now is to stop the rise in prices." The nation's troubling economy forced Nixon to limit some spending on education. Even though spending increased, some criticized him for not spending even more. He had vetoed three education bills because of its high cost and excessiveness.⁵⁴

Nixon's policies upset the Teachers Unions (NEA and AFT). 70% of superintendents thought that the ESEA was under funded. The teacher's unions were openly angry of Nixon and his seemingly anti-education programs. Nixon in turn shunned the teacher's unions. He did not meet with any leaders on education in the first year and a half of his administration. He never met with an NEA president. Antagonism

⁵³ McAndrews, p. 23.

⁵⁴ McAndrews, p. 23-25.

grew when the NEA unofficially backed a George McGovern's presidential bid against Nixon in 1972. NEA president George Fischer said of the Nixon administration "has proceeded to slash programs to the extent that some would be wiped out entirely." The AFT executive council one time concluded, "Mr. Nixon has told us that he is going to do nothing about education."⁵⁵

Watergate eventually brought Nixon down. He resigned from the presidency on August 9, 1974. Gerald Ford then took office to try to rebuild American confidence in their country. On education, Nixon was originally enthusiastic and said the right things to the right people. He ended up his presidency hostile towards educational leaders and a disgrace to the nation. Despite some of his successful policies and ideas on education, Nixon will be remembered for his open hostility towards the educational establishment and anyone who seemed to disagree with him.

⁵⁵ McAndrews, p. 17-28.

Gerald Ford

Gerald Ford's path to the presidency was like no other in our history. He became Vice President when Spiro Agnew resigned and eventually became president when Nixon quit because of the Watergate scandal. The Ford administration clearly saw that it needed to offer the nation a "time to heal". There was an opportunity to move away from the problems from Watergate and Vietnam and to a period of stability.

In educational policy, Ford had similar ideas of the traditional Republican Party. Ford was convinced that education was a state and district function. Therefore as president, he and the federal government should have a limited role. His traditional thinking shaped his actions on educational policy, especially federal assistance and court ordered busing. The Ford administration had four prominent initiatives. First, they would continue efforts to consolidate federal assistance from categorical programs into local block grants. Second, they would limit the use of court ordered busing to achieve racial desegregation. Third, they would develop a strategy to link work to education. Finally, the President would sign the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, or PL 94-142.⁵⁶

As Ford entered the White House, the question was not whether he could emulate Nixon in education policy, but which Nixon would he emulate. Would he retrench or reform? Ford began with a cost quality approach on education and ended with a social context outlook. Like Nixon, he never really found an effective combination of both.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Gutek, p. 253-256.

⁵⁷ McAndrews, p. 30.

Ford considered his education in Grand Rapids Michigan a “very positive experience that all American children should have.” Ford won election to the House of Representatives in 1948 with the interest in ensuring educational opportunity as long as the cost wasn’t so great. He voted for the 2-year extension of ESEA but voted against the original version in 1965. He voted for a vocation education bill but voted against 2 school construction bills. When Ford became president in 1974, his first piece of legislation that he inherited from Nixon was HR 69, the 3-year extension of ESEA. Ford didn’t agree with the bill 100%. He believed that there were some unacceptable and possibly unconstitutional encroachments by Congress. Ford was convinced by an advisor to sign the bill because a better version would never develop. Ford acknowledged the bills shortcomings, but eventually signed the bill. Ford would later tell representatives of the NEA that he was proud that his first piece of legislation signed was HR 69.⁵⁸

Ford and Congress would not always see eye to eye. Congress had later passed a bill for education totaling, \$7.5 billion and in 1976, it was a whopping 23% increase over the presidents budget. Ford vetoed the legislation stating like Nixon did many times before, that it was too costly. The Congress overrode the veto easily. The NEA president who once claimed the president’s administration “couldn’t begin on a better note” eventually called the Ford administration a disgrace in education leadership and policy. Ford seemed to be in a no win situation.⁵⁹

A top priority of Ford in education was to consolidate education programs into a more efficient structure. He believed this would maximize state choices and minimize federal regulations. Ford maintained that the educational legislation of Johnson’s Great

⁵⁸ McAndrews, p. 30-31.

⁵⁹ McAndrews, p. 32.

Society had added program on top of program and created a “maze of complex guidelines and requirements.” Ford’s nature, like Nixon was to reduce federal spending during inflationary periods, limit the role of the federal governments in education, and give states greater autonomy and flexibility using federal assistance. The administration thought that it would reduce red tape. Ford was unsuccessful in getting these policies through Congress.⁶⁰

Congress virtually ignored the president’s request and in 1977 submitted another overpriced budget with education. The president vetoed it again. The Congress overrode the veto again. “We cannot buy quick miracles in education by spending more money. It would be a lot easier if we could measure education quality in dollars and cents but we cannot.”, the president said of the Congress.⁶¹

Only five days into his administration, a White House Aid outlined three major directions for school reform for the administration. These included helping the states and local governments to promote equality of opportunity for all in education. Secondly, the federal government would support research and development designed to accelerate reform and innovation. Finally, the administration would provide leadership in the process of reform for a rapidly changing society.

Like Nixon, Ford believed that Title I of the ESEA was not achieving its first goal of equality in opportunity. Ford believed that education had worsened over the past ten years. About the red tape and Title I Ford said, “Too often we have found ourselves asking whether federal forms have been properly filled out, not whether children have

⁶⁰ Gutek, p. 256-257.

⁶¹ McAndrews, p. 30.

been properly educated.” There was little the president could do to reform Title I since Congress and the education interests backed ESEA the way it currently stood.⁶²

Ford pursued his second objective of a greater federal role in education research and development. To help find more remedies for the country’s education problems, Ford sought \$130 million in the fiscal year 1975 budget for the NIE. Congress didn’t agree with Ford on this issue totally. The House voted for only \$80 million while the Senate agreed to \$70 million. Therefore, the Ford administration did little research at all.

The third goal advocated by Ford was to help education keep pace with a changing society. This goal produced the most noteworthy attention from the Ford administration. At a speech in 1974, Ford encouraged education, business, and labor leaders to form a new “community of learning”. “The time has come for a fusion of the realities of the workday with the teachings of academic institutions”, the president said. The works education initiative idea led to the creation of several joint task forces that included officials of the Departments of Labor, Commerce, and HEW. Ford sought to break down the barriers that seemed to exist between schools, corporations, and labor unions. One finding by the task force concluded that problems involving transitions to work included: 1) students having little knowledge of the world of work; 2) they needed help with career planning; 3) career guidance in schools was inadequate and; 4) there was little planning and coordination in connection among schools, businesses and employment agencies. Despite its findings, no specific legislation was ever proposed. One of Ford’s advisors believed that career education needed more study, current occupational information was inadequate, and new job placement offices were

⁶² McAndrews, p. 34.

unnecessary. Although this idea of a works education initiative seemed like a good idea from its inception, implementation of a policy never developed.⁶³

While the general goals endorsed by Ford on education policy seem unsuccessful, the administration did have one major piece of legislation passed. PL 94-112, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act was signed into law on November 29, 1975. The Act would guarantee a free appropriate public education to all children with handicaps. Among its provisions were: 1) State and local districts were to establish procedures to identify handicapped children; 2) Each handicapped child was to have an Individualized Education Program (IEP), specifying the type and scope of special education program; 3) To be eligible for funds, states were to establish procedures to assure handicapped children were educated with non handicapped students to the maximum appropriate extent. PL 94-142 had far reaching effects on education, especially the requirement that children with handicaps be educated in the least restrictive environment.⁶⁴

The law dramatically increased the federal commitment to categorical aid to special education. The cost of the Act would be \$ 4 billion over the next five years. It authorized funds to cover “excess” expenses associated with special education. Ford’s view however thought that the law promised more that the federal government could deliver. He said, “Even the strongest supporters of this measure know as well as I that they are falsely raising the expectations of the groups affected [i.e. handicapped children and their parents] by claiming authorization levels which are excessive and unrealistic.”

⁶³ McAndrews, p. 34-35.

⁶⁴ Gutek, pp. 261-263.

When the law would take effect in 1977, Ford warned that Congress would have to trim its financial promises and regulatory requirements. He worried that it would become an “unfunded mandate” and that the tax dollars would be used mostly for administrative paperwork instead of direct classroom assistance.⁶⁵

Originally students with special needs were segregated and excluded from regular students. Conventional wisdom was to put them in special schools similar to schools for the deaf and blind. Educators believed that exclusion actually benefitted students with handicaps by providing special services by special teachers. Slowly this mode of thinking began to erode, especially with the passing of the court case of *Brown v. Board of Education* that ruled that segregation was unconstitutional. It took more than 20 more years for special needs kids to be fully included into the non-segregated classrooms.⁶⁶

Another major issue concerning schools that Ford had to deal with was busing. Court ordered busing had become a highly emotional issue in the country’s cities. Ford announced his opposition to racial segregation and would enforce the laws passed by the Courts. He did express reservations about using court ordered busing to achieve racial integration. Ford believed that money spent on busing students would be better used to improve education. He also believed that the reliance on federal courts on busing to achieve desegregation would erode local community control.⁶⁷

To limit the extent on court ordered busing, the Ford administration proposed the School Desegregation and Assistance Act of 1976 that would among other things require that busing be limited to eliminating the degree of student racial concentration caused by

⁶⁵ Federal Education Policy and the States, 1945-2009 The Ford Years: P.L. 94-142 – Ford’s Doubts. Retrieved April, 2009.

<http://www.archives.nysed.gov/edpolicy/research/res_essay_ford_pl94_142_doubts.shtml>

⁶⁶ Gutek, p. 260.

proven and unlawful acts of discrimination. This proposal was never voted upon in the Congress and was criticized by the NAACP as a retreat on race relations.⁶⁸

The Ford presidency on education can be looked upon with mostly struggles. He tried to be cost effective while battling education groups and Congress with the education budgets similar to Nixon. When asked about Ford's commitment to education NEA president John Ryor said, "What commitment?"⁶⁹

The next presidential election of 1976 saw the AFT and the NEA not endorsing the president. Ford told the NEA in 1975 that, "Once the economy gets back on track"; he would support "new and major initiatives in education at the federal level". The economy never recovered and the president identified as inflation as the number one problem of America. Nixon for the most part ignored education as a major issue for his administration since the economy was hurting. In his state of the union speeches he dealt exclusively with the economy, energy, and defense.⁷⁰

Despite his battles and struggles with education groups and Congress, Ford did sign the Education for All Handicapped Children Act that dramatically increased federal aid for handicapped children. Despite his reservations of costs and accountability, the concepts of mainstreaming and equality for special needs children affect millions of students today. Ford's presidency seems clouded and seemingly forgotten by Americans but he did help leave a lasting legacy helping students with disabilities in the schools.

⁶⁷ Gutek, p. 257.

⁶⁸ Gutek, p. 258.

⁶⁹ McAndrews, p. 36-37.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

Jimmy Carter

Jimmy Carter defeated President Ford in the presidential election of 1976. The candidate had differing views on the federal role in education. While Ford essentially believed that education was best reserved for the states and local districts, Carter thought the federal government should play a larger role in education.

Jimmy Carter was a graduate of the Naval Academy and served seven years in his country's school board before running for the Georgia Senate because as he said, "I was concerned about the threats to our system of education." As a state senator, he sat on the education committee and as governor he served as an active member of a commission that studied long-term educational needs for the state, and the recommendation made by the group made their way into new legislative initiatives.⁷¹

Carter in an address to the national NEA convention in 1976 pledged to work for the creation of a federal Department of Education. The department would be cabinet level and he argued that it would be an efficient way of bringing the more than 300 federal education programs under the control of a single agency. Since Carter believed that education was an important national concern, the NEA for the first time in its history endorsed a presidential candidate- Jimmy Carter.⁷²

There had been a long history of efforts to create a federal department of education. Between 1908 and 1951, 50 bills were introduced to Congress while another 48 were introduced between 1965 and 1975. During the Johnson administration the office of Education was so overwhelmed by the rush of new education legislation, such

⁷¹ McAndrews, p. 38.

as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act that Johnson decided on an administration reorganization of the existing office rather than attempting to create a new department. In two different addresses to Congress, President Carter pledged for a Department of Education. He argued that it would: 1) provide a federal focus on education policy; 2) permit closer coordination of federal education programs; 3) reduce duplication of federal requirements and regulations; and 4) assist school districts in making better use of local resources.⁷³

The creation of the department encountered usual divisions among professional organizations and interest groups. Among the groups supporting the creation of a department of education were groups such as the NEA (National Education Association), the National Parent-Teacher Association (PTA), the National School Boards Association (NSBA). Those who opposed it were the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), most Catholic educators and most Republicans.

Advocates argued that the proposed department would give education the visibility it needed in Washington. They argued that education was so important to the national interest that it needed to be addressed by a federal department. Opponents believed that the new department would intrude upon the historic traditions of state and local control of education. They contended that the enlarged federal education bureaucracy would create more “red tape” and burden local school administrations with more complicated and cumbersome regulations.⁷⁴

In April 1978, President Carter submitted to Congress a proposal for the creation of a federal department of education. The Department of Education would include 164

⁷² Gutek, p. 263.

⁷³ Gutek, p. 265.

existing programs with a budget of \$17.5 billion. It would include a school lunch program, a college housing program, the Interior's Department's Indian Schools, and Head Start. The president faced intense opposition but was determined to get the federal department created. In submitting his proposal Carter said the department could help to ensure equal educational opportunities; increase access to post secondary education by low and middle income students; generate research and provide information to help our educational systems meet special needs; prepare students for employment; and encourage improvements in the quality of education.⁷⁵

The Senate voted for the department 69-22 and the House the next day barely passed it with a 210-206 vote. The House had removed the three most controversial parts of the bill: Head Start, Indian education, and child nutrition.⁷⁶ The bill created the Offices of Elementary and Secondary Education, Vocational and Adult Education, Post secondary schools, Overseas Schools, Special Education and Rehabilitation Services, Bilingual Education, Educational Research and Improvements and Civil Rights.⁷⁷

On October 17, 1979, President Carter signed the Department of Education Organization Act, which legally established the Department of Education as the 13th cabinet level agency of the federal government. At the signing Carter said, "The time had passed where the federal government can afford to give second level, part time attention to its responsibilities in American education...Educational issues will now receive the top-level priority they deserve." Carter was pressured by the NEA to nominate an educator as the department's first secretary. Instead, Carter selected Shirley

⁷⁴ Gutek, p. 265.

⁷⁵ McAndrews, p. 41.

⁷⁶ Gutek, p. 265.

⁷⁷ McAndrews, p. 42.

Hufstedler, a federal appeals judge whose only professional educational credentials were her memberships on the boards of trustees of the California Institute of Technology, Occidental College, and the Aspen Institute for Humanities. The Senate easily confirmed her.⁷⁸

President Carter had two major objectives for the department: 1) Streamlining, coordinating and consolidating existing programs; 2) working to make education a national priority to restore what appeared to be a growing malaise among schools and teachers.

The department's future was an issue in the 1980 presidential campaign. In responding to a question from the educational journal *Instructor*, Carter vowing its continuation, responded that the department would "be the catalyst of a new commitment" to make educational programs "more accountable to the students and our people. Most of all he said that it would "heighten attention to education and the challenges it and we face today."⁷⁹

While on the campaign trail for the presidency, Carter had promised to reduce the number of governmental agencies from 1900 to 200. Candidate Carter also envisioned a department of Education that would "consolidate the grant programs, job training, early childhood education, literacy training, and many other functions currently scattered throughout the government." All of President Carter's key appointees opposed a narrowly defined Department of Education, yet he essentially created such a department.

This seemed to be paradoxical. The White House Chief of Staff Hamilton Jordan explained, "The teachers organizations are the fastest growing, most active, and by most

⁷⁸ Gutek, p. 266-267.

standards, the most effective political organization in the country.” Jordan concluded, “establishing the department is one of the few things we can do for the teachers’ organization in the next few years as additional funds for education will be difficult with our goal of balancing the budget.”⁸⁰

“After eight years of Nixon and Ford neglect in education”, thought an advisor to Carter, “the education community is looking to you for leadership”. However Carter seemed to display a lack of enthusiasm for federally directed educational innovation and had an overriding concern for a cost benefit analysis of education programs. Carter even said about some school districts, “Some do too much experimenting and not enough teaching.”⁸¹

During his second year in office, President Carter sent an education message to Congress. His proposals would “enhance the primary roles of the states and local communities, strengthen our commitment to basic skills education in Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, and strengthen the bilingual education program with primary emphasis on teaching English.” He promised to “give education a more prominent and visible role in the federal government.”

The record of Carter is ironic. Even though the president spoke highly on education, he virtually maintained the status quo. No major initiatives, innovations, or ideas came from the administration while at the same time the president thought the schools were not excelling. He was not and will never be considered an education president, however he was the one who essentially created the department the Education Department as a full cabinet level position. He was a president who promised to spend

⁷⁹ Gutek, p. 267.

⁸⁰ McAndrews, p. 42-43.

more money on education than the previous administrations. One advisor said of Carter and education, “It wasn’t a question of making ceremonial speeches written by someone else...Dollar signs speak much louder.” Carter didn’t question existing federal innovation in education but he did accept them. He did overall seek to expand the federal role like most other Democrats but didn’t have a clear vision of what to do.⁸²

Overall, education was not a major priority of the Carter administration. High unemployment, inflation, the Iran hostage crisis, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan helped relegate education to a lesser status; however Carter did little to elevate it.

⁸¹ McAndrews, p. 43-44.

⁸² McAndrews, p. 47.

Ronald Reagan

The election of 1980 saw Jimmy Carter facing off against the Republican challenger Ronald Reagan. Carter's tenure at the White House saw high unemployment rates, high inflation rates, and the Iran Hostage crisis. Americans felt they needed to change the country's leader. Reagan would be that man.

Reagan won the election easily in 1980. During his campaign, Reagan stressed a strong neoconservative platform against Carter. He put forth consistent goals including reducing the size of the federal government, dismantling social welfare programs by putting more people to work, and deregulating the economy to let the free market work. In education, Reagan championed previous Republican presidents. He believed that education was a state and local function and should be free from federal interference. While he argued for a reduced federal role in education, he pledged that if elected, he would abolish the newly created Department of Education and drastically curb federal intrusion into education.⁸³

Reagan decried declining academic achievement, lowered standards, the lack of discipline, and the rise of violence in the schools. He argued that not only that federal spending on education had failed to make the nation's public schools better, but had made them worse. He believed that the local communities could do a much better job of handling public education.⁸⁴

⁸³ Gutek, p. 275-276.

⁸⁴ McAndrews, p. 121.

In his first term, Reagan proposed a dual strategy to achieve more local control in education. His fiscal year 1982 budget reduced the rate of increase by \$4.4 billion while his fiscal year 1983 budget proposed a \$2.1 billion reduction. While federal education spending would decrease as a percentage of overall education expenditures from 8.7 percent in Carter's last year to 6.2 percent in Reagan's final year, total education spending at all levels would increase from \$218 to \$308 billion. Whereas federal outlays for education declined as a percentage of gross national product from 0.6 percent to 0.4 percent over Reagan's eight years, they grew in absolute numbers from \$13.9 billion to \$21.7 billion.⁸⁵

At his first press conference as president on January 29, 1981, Reagan asserted that he had "not retreated from" his campaign pledges to abolish the infant departments of Education and Energy. He had asked the Secretary of Education Terrel Bell to "look at the appropriate role of the federal government in education – if there is one."⁸⁶

The administration considered three alternatives for the department. The first approach would restore the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW). This approach would visibly reduce the federal role in education however it could decrease the efficiency with even more bureaucracy. A second option was the distribution of the department's functions throughout several federal agencies. "Movement Conservatives" liked this plan because it diminished federal presence in education but it also would grow other federal agencies. The third proposal would replace the department with a sub cabinet foundation engaged in assisting rather than controlling education. It embodied

⁸⁵ McAndrews, p. 122.

⁸⁶ McAndrews, p. 120.

the pragmatic virtue but the ideological vice of eliminating the department while maintaining a substantial role.⁸⁷

In his 1982 budget, Reagan proposed the Foundation for Educational Assistance. This would transfer 23 programs to other departments while eliminating another 23 programs and eleven boards or commissions. The foundation would retain all of the major responsibilities of the department except for civil rights, which would move to the Justice Department. After visiting with nearly every member of the Senate, Secretary Bell could only get 19 Senators to favor the proposed bill. Later in the year the administration completely abandoned his legislative effort to abolish the department. In 1984, the Republican Party platform mentioned nothing on the issue.⁸⁸

Another major component of Reagan's budget plan was to streamline the federal role through education block grants. The administration proposed to combine 44 federal school aid programs into two block grants to the states. This step would restore education to the people and would virtually eliminate Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), and the Education for All Handicapped Children Act. Instead, states and local governments would be free to target federal monies as they wished. After compromise in the Congress, the passage of the Education and Consolidation Act was seen as a victory for the president and the Democrats in Congress. Title I was kept mostly in tact as chapter one of the new law while Reagan won consolidation of 28 other categorical school aid programs into chapter 2.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ McAndrews, p. 121

⁸⁸ McAndrews, p. 121

⁸⁹ McAndrews, p. 122

Reagan encouraged reform in education but continuously believed that it wasn't the federal government's job to do so. He encouraged the state governors and local districts to implement the neoconservative agenda. This agenda sought to: 1) focus the nation's attention on the need for educational reform; 2) use the federal government to encourage reform initiatives by the states and local school districts; 3) encourage specific educational initiatives such as a basic academic curriculum, merit review and pay for teachers, parental choice in school selection through vouchers, and the restoration of discipline, patriotism, and traditional values in schools; 4) reduce federal expenditures for education.⁹⁰

Department of Education Secretary Terrell Bell appointed a commission to conduct comprehensive studies of the quality of education in the country's schools in comparison to other countries. In 1983, the Commission in Excellence issued its report, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Education Reform*. This report touched the public nerve and it encouraged Reagan to assume a leadership role in educational reform.⁹¹

The report *Nation at Risk* was alarmist. Part of the report read, "If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre performance that exists today, we might have viewed it as an act of war." The report cited evidence of a high rate of functional illiteracy among kids and adults, declining performance on the College Boards SAT, and poor performance in science and mathematics. To fix the major problems of the failing school systems, the commission recommended that high school graduation requirements be strengthened. Among the requirements recommended by the commission for graduation was to require four years of English; three years of

⁹⁰ Gutek, p. 277.

⁹¹ Berube, p. 94.

Mathematics; three years of science; three years of social studies; and one half year of computer science. It also recommended for college bound students to take two years of a foreign language.⁹²

After reviewing the Nation at Risk report, Reagan saw its role as using the office as a “bully pulpit” for pushing the neoconservative agenda. He perceived the report as cost free education reform. For Reagan, A Nation at Risk meant, “American schools don’t need vast new sums of money as much as they need fundamental reforms.”⁹³

Reagan continuously throughout his presidency hammered the less federal role in education is good. He said, “Advocates of more and more government interference in education have had ample time to make their case and they’ve failed.”⁹⁴

Reagan more importantly believed that parents and not the government are the catalyst to improve education. He said, “Education does not begin with Washington officials...it begins in the home where it is the right and responsibility of every American.” Furthermore, he admonished the educational system “to restore parents to their rightful place in the educational process”.⁹⁵

After the publicity of A Nation at Risk, Reagan claimed that his administration was leading “a grassroots movement that promises to strengthen every school in the country.”⁹⁶

In his 1983 state of the union message, three months before a nation at Risk, Reagan perceived a need to establish a superior educational system to compete with

⁹² National Commission on Excellence in Education, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1983), pp. 23-31.

⁹³ Berube, p. 96.

⁹⁴ Berube, p. 97.

⁹⁵ Berube, p. 97.

⁹⁶ Gutek, p. 279.

Japan. He said, “while we have grown complacent, others have acted. Japan, with a population only half the size of ours, graduates from its universities more engineers than we do.” Reagan proposed 4 major education goals. These included: 1) upgrading requirements for math and science; 2) education savings accounts for average Americans to pay for college; 3) vouchers to permit children to attend “private or religiously affiliated schools”; and 4) a constitutional amendment to permit school prayer. It was in this address that Reagan pledged to America “to set a standard of excellence”. This was an early usage of the term that would characterize the school reform movement of the 1980’s.⁹⁷

A year later in his 1984 State of the union address, Reagan announced that he had established the National Commission in Excellence in Education that produced A Nation at Risk. He gloated that in a year’s time “schools are reporting progress in math and reading skills.” He also said that America must “encourage the teaching of basics” and “enforce tougher education standards.”⁹⁸

Again in his 1985 State of the Union message, Reagan reported another glowing report card on excellence reform. Reagan said, “We’re retuning to excellence.” Schools were stressing “basics of discipline, vigorous testing and homework.” He concluded, “We must go forward in our commitment to the new basics.”⁹⁹

Furthermore, in his next two state of the union addresses Reagan even added school vouchers and school prayer to the debate. He spoke of the “renaissance in

⁹⁷ The American Presidency Project. Ronald Reagan XL President of the United States: 1981-1989. Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union. January 25, 1983. <<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=41698#axzz1JMPW0GRW>>

⁹⁸ The American Presidency Project. Ronald Reagan XL President of the United States: 1981-1989. Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union. January 25, 1984. <<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=40205#axzz1JMPW0GRW>>

⁹⁹ Berube, p. 100-101.

education” that was evident in the rising SAT scores over the past three years. Reagan gave much more credit to the American people who are reaching for a return to excellence had “turned education around”.

In the 1987 state of the union message Reagan briefly addressed education. It mentioned that drugs were ruining the educational environment. His final state of the union message the following year was a return to his excellence reform begun earlier. He criticized what he perceived as failure of the schools in the 60’s and 70’s. He called the past two decades as a “sorry story” which produced “soaring spending and plummeting test scores.” He also commented on the trend begun during his presidency where obsession was replaced from dollars along with a commitment to quality and test scores started back up. Reagan said, “In a child’s education, money can never take the place of basics like discipline, hard work, and yes, homework.” In commenting on the most important thing that the government can do on education Reagan said, “...reaffirm that control of schools belongs to the states, local communities, and most of all, to the parents and teachers.”¹⁰⁰

Reagan’s radio addresses also dealt with education similar to his State of the Union speeches. Ten times during his radio addresses during his first term Reagan mentioned education. His first term before *A Nation at Risk* came out usually mentioned the importance of returning prayer to public schools and the benefits of tuition tax credits and vouchers.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ The American Presidency Project. Ronald Reagan XL President of the United States: 1981-1989. Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union. January 27, 1987. <<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=34430#axzz1JMPW0GRW>>

¹⁰¹ Berube, p. 101.

During his second term, Reagan hammered education quality because of the Nation at Risk report. He continuously used the radio to propose higher standards and a core curriculum. He added the schools needed to “restore parental choice and influence and to increase competition between schools.”¹⁰²

In his final take on schools in September of 1988, he took a rare approach in that he blamed the kids for some of the problems in education. He said that he didn’t want to sound like a scolding parent, but he admonished kids for “watching too much TV.” He also mentioned that he had concern for the “problem of dropouts.”

Reagan had also mentioned in his final speech that he “had a bold objective to regain at least half of what he lost in the 60’s and 70’s over SAT scores...before the decade is out.” Reagan was happy that his excellence reforms seemed to be working. Overall the Reagan radio talks established Reagan’s position a “teacher and preacher in chief” in education.¹⁰³

Education reform of the 80’s came from several ideas and studies. International studies and comparisons showed that Americans ranked low in math and science. SAT scores were in decline. Even college professors claimed that many high schools were doing such a poor job in preparing students for higher education that colleges had to establish remedial programs in English and math. The school curriculum was diluted and electives lacked academic rigor. Schools had low academic standards with increased discipline problems. The publishing of *A Nation at Risk* brought these problems to national attention.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Berube, p. 102.

¹⁰³ Berube, p. 100-102.

¹⁰⁴ Gutek, p. 281.

Another problem discussed in the Nation at Risk report was the issue of teacher competency. It alleged that low scores by students could be attributed not only to an easy curriculum but the presence of incompetent teachers. In response, many of the states by Reagan's urging mandated teacher competency testing as part of teacher certification requirements. By the end of Reagan's presidency, 46 states required some form of teacher competency testing.

Reagan's record on education is mixed. Throughout his presidency before a Nation at Risk was published, he did things "the way they've been done before." Like previous administration, Reagan often cited dollars in his policies. The total budget for education in the U.S. is far greater than the defense budget Reagan claimed in May of 1983. Reagan firmly believed that money alone wouldn't solve the issue.¹⁰⁵

Similarly, Reagan often was at odds with the education interests, especially the NEA and the AFT. An AFT director Greg Humphrey wrote in February 1981, that "few would find it responsible to cut over \$1.5 billion" as Reagan's block grants would. In 1982 one critic of Reagan told the NEA convention, "We are at war" to defend against "the unprecedented attack on public education" from the result of the proposed Reagan spending cuts. The teacher groups believed that all teachers were underpaid and blasted that it was wrong to talk about merit pay or other salary bonuses without having adequate pay for everyone.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ McAndrews, p. 126.

¹⁰⁶ McAndrews, p. 128.

Reagan himself seemed to show disdain to the teachers groups. Reagan refused to meet with an NEA executive in 1983 and the NEA convention was eliminated as a potential speaking engagement because of a “potentially hostile audience.”¹⁰⁷

Reagan’s policies were his own. Meaning he didn’t always follow the polls. However when helping his agenda, he did use poll numbers as reference. A Reagan advisor cited that 80% of the public supported a school prayer to be added to the constitution. In the same poll, discipline was identified as the major educational concern. Reagan even concluded that “there had been a shift...Republicans and conservatives have to come to realize that the federal role in education is here to stay...They also realize that it is silly to concede the issue to the Democrats.” Reagan learned to use the polls to his advantage and realized that education would probably forever have some federal role.¹⁰⁸

Reagan however did make some tough decisions on education despite the feelings of the American public. Reagan’s budget reduction proposals were unpopular. Reagan advocated for a longer school day and year despite opposition by the public. Even Reagan’s initiative on school discipline arrived when the issue was losing ground to the public. He refused to allot more education dollars for his initiatives. Finally, some say that he failed to “go the extra mile” in lobbying for the overwhelmingly popular school prayer amendment.¹⁰⁹

When Reagan took office in 1981, education was not a major part of his platform. He did have six major goals but they lacked much detail. The goals included to substantially reduce federal spending for education. Second, he wanted to strengthen

¹⁰⁷ McAndrews, p. 128.

¹⁰⁸ McAndrews, p. 129-130.

¹⁰⁹ McAndrews, p. 132.

local and state control in education. Third, Reagan wanted to maintain a limited federal role. Fourth, the president wanted to expand parental choice that would increase competition. Fifth, the President wanted to encourage a substantial reduction in federal judicial activity. Finally, Reagan wanted to abolish the Department of Education completely.

In looking at his original goals, Reagan achieved none of these during his presidency. He did however transform the education debate. He did use the office of the president to communicate that improving education was a national interest. He was successful through his energy and passion in getting education a prominent role of the federal government in a way it had not been since the Johnson administration.¹¹⁰ It was through his speeches and ability to connect with the public that Reagan deservedly earned the nickname of the “Great Communicator.”

¹¹⁰ McAndrews, p. 153

George H.W. Bush

Vice President George H.W. Bush defeated the Democrat opponent Michael Dukakis in the 1988 presidential election and for the most part, continued the educational policies of his predecessor. He perceived education to be the responsibility of the states with the role of the federal government to suggest a national agenda for the states. Bush was determined to continue the excellence reform movement begun during the Reagan administration through the bully pulpit.¹¹¹

Bush' campaign for president was unlike any in history. For the first time, education became a bipartisan issue. It also was the first time in history education became a theme of all the candidates during the primaries in both major parties. Before this campaign year, it was an issue occupied by the Democrats. The excellence reform movement under Reagan changed this. Education had reached a national concern and had reached presidential level. During his campaign for the presidency, Bush and his opponent Dukakis even issued position papers describing their platform on education. Bush' position paper was about a page long emphasizing local control and higher academic standards with emphasis on discipline and parental participation.¹¹²

During his acceptance speech of the Republican nomination, Bush reiterated the substance of the excellence school reform movement done during the Reagan years. He wanted to see "power in the hands of parents" and proclaimed that "every one of our children deserves a first rate school."¹¹³

¹¹¹ Berube, p. 121.

¹¹² Berube, p. 124.

¹¹³ Berube, p. 125.

During his general election campaign, the Republican Party platform bragged about the accomplishments of the Reagan administration concerning education. It stated in part, “Republican leadership has launched anew era in American education. Our vision of excellence has brought education back to parents, back to basics, and back on track of excellence leading to a brighter and stronger future for America...” Bush also called for an expansion of the curriculum to include history and geography. Furthermore, performance testing of the teachers and students was urged.¹¹⁴

Bush’s background is very impressive. He got into the oil business and was successful. He entered Texas politics and was elected in 1966 to Congress. He ran for the U.S. Senate in 1970 but lost. President Nixon appointed him U.S. ambassador to the United Nations and President Ford selected him as the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency. With all this background in foreign relations it was ironic that he wanted to be known as an education president.¹¹⁵

One of the president’s first acts was the presentation to Congress on education his four goals. These goals contained four principles: excellence, choice, accountability and need. In April the president presented to Congress the Educational Excellence Act. This law included the specifics of merit and magnet schools and continued federal funding of programs for the disadvantaged.¹¹⁶

The House of Representatives took the proposal; added millions of dollars in more spending to the bill. The Bush administration like other Republican Presidents had no enthusiasm in spending extra money on education and working with the Congress.

¹¹⁴ Berube, p. 126.

¹¹⁵ Berube, p. 128.

¹¹⁶ McAndrews, p. 134.

The bill didn't come for a vote in the Senate because the president had hinted at a potential veto.¹¹⁷

This was a major blow to the self-proclaimed education president. He thought that since education is a local and state issue that it would be easier to work with the state governments, specifically the governors, rather than the Congress. In July of 1989, Bush would call an education summit of all the governors. Bush was now trying to be an "education governor".¹¹⁸

The education summit of 1989 was only the third time in history that such a summit had been called by the president but this was the first specifically dealing with education. The purpose was clear. A joint statement by the president and the governors declared that the meeting was to "establish clear, national performance goals...that will make us internationally competitive." The summit was a powerful signal that education was a national concern in the wake of a crisis on international economic competition.¹¹⁹

The summit was to emphasize state and local control of education. It did however produce a set of national goals. These goals related to "the readiness of children to start school; the performance of students on international achievement tests, especially in math and science; the reduction of the dropout rate and improvement of academic performance, especially among at risk students; the functional literacy of adult Americans; the level of training necessary to guarantee a competitive work force; the supply of qualified teachers and up to date technology; and the establishment of safe, disciplined, and drug free schools." The president called for educational "restructuring". This would find ways to allocate the dollars more efficiently. Annual report cards would

¹¹⁷ McAndrews, p. 134-135.

¹¹⁸ McAndrews, p. 136.

be done on the progress of students, schools, the states, and even the federal government. The president and the governors concluded at the summit the federal role in education is limited but important to “promote national education equity” and “to provide research and development”.¹²⁰

The response to the summit was overwhelmingly positive. Arkansas governor Bill Clinton said of it, “This is the first time in history that we have even thought enough of education and ever understood its significance to our economic future enough to commit ourselves to national performance goals”.¹²¹

By 1990, President Bush in his state of the union address laid out the specifics from the general goals made during the education summit. In bipartisan effect, Bush announced six education goals: “By the year 2000, every child must start school ready to learn; the United States must increase the high school graduation rate to no less than ninety-percent; at the 4th, 8th and 12th grades, we must assess our students’ performance; by the year 2000 U.S. students must be first in the world in math and science achievement; every American adult must be a skilled, literate worker and citizen, and every school must offer a disciplined environment and...must be drug free.”¹²²

The speech did have its skeptics. The AFT president basically said that funding needed to be increased. Governor Clinton said that the U.S. to lead in math and science in ten years was neither achievable nor valuable. About 2/3rds of Americans believed that the President mostly just talked about education and didn’t expect much to change.

¹¹⁹ McAndrews, p. 129.

¹²⁰ Federal Education Policy and the States, 1945-2009 The George H.W. Bush Years: Education Summit. Retrieved June 2010.

<http://www.archives.nysed.gov/edpolicy/research/res_essay_bush_ghw_edsummit.shtml>

¹²¹ McAndrews, p. 136.

¹²² Gutek, p. 285-286.

NAEP reports showed that reading and writing skills had improved only slightly during the late 80's despite the education reforms instituted by the school districts. NAEP concluded very little education progress in the country since *A Nation at Risk* was published.¹²³

Before the summit began, Bush maintained in downplaying the federal role in providing federal aid. "Our focus must no longer be on our resources.", Bush told the country's governors. Bush believed that the amount of money spent on a child's public schooling at all levels of government was sufficient and concluded that money was not the problem.¹²⁴

As part of the Goals 2000 from the education summit, President Bush proposed the Education Excellence Act of 1991. As part of the law, the act provided \$180 million for New American schools, \$100 million for merit schools, \$70 million for governors' academies for teachers, \$22.5 million for academies for school leaders, \$25 million for alternate certification of teachers and principals, \$23 million for parental choice programs and \$38.2 million to develop standards and voluntary testing. It was a thorough and specific plan the president thought he could pass to further establish his title as an education president.¹²⁵

Unfortunately for the president the act was never passed. Congress didn't think it was acceptable because it left vouchers in state, rather than federal hands. The Senate rewrote the bill that the president thought had excessive and unrealistic expansion of

¹²³ McAndrews, p. 137-138

¹²⁴ Berube, p. 130

¹²⁵ McAndrews, p. 143-144

existing federal programs. Congress adjourned before the competing parties could produce a compromise. The president's initiative went no further in the next year.¹²⁶

One major part of the Bush philosophy that bears further discussion on education was his choice plan. During his presidential campaign it was not a strong issue but after the election it was the linchpin of his educational program.¹²⁷

The choice plan was simple. Parents could send their children to any public school within the school system. The idea was that parents and students would move to those schools they felt were the best. Choice would become a panacea in education without the huge amount of money spent. Bush argued that choice is "perhaps the single most promising of ideas". He linked choice to economic well being and that a good education was a path out of poverty. The president also believed that school choice mostly helped the poor. He argued that "it is the working poor and low income families who suffer most from the absence of choice in the public schools." He concluded, "For this reason alone...further expansion of public school choice is a national imperative." Choice would motivate teachers and administrators in a competitive environment. The competition would create a variety in schools. Most importantly, choice would establish the bedrock principle of democracy – participation. Parents and students would decide which schools the students would attend. The Bush administration even published pamphlets arguing for choice. The pamphlet listed eight reasons why states should adopt choice plans. The reasons included to develop individuality in students, promote

¹²⁶ McAndrews, p. 144

¹²⁷ Berube, p. 131

competition, retain potential school dropouts, increase parents' input, help the poor educationally, and restructure public schools.¹²⁸

Critics, most notably the NEA and Democrats, of choice contended that it would discriminate against the poor and minorities. Parents couldn't afford transportation costs. Furthermore, with the significant education problems in the country, critics thought it nearly impossible to make the necessary improvements without significant increase in education spending.

In the president's first major address to Congress, the President devoted a major portion of it to education. He announced, "The most important competitiveness program of all is one which improves education in America...we must hold all concerned accountable. In education, we cannot tolerate mediocrity." In one example, the President said that we have some students who can't locate America on the map and that a new approach was needed to fix the problem.¹²⁹

In 1990 the Bush administration issued a report *National Goals for Education*. The report reiterated some of the major themes of *A Nation at Risk*. When President Reagan was willing to work with Congress, President Bush seemed hostile. The sides couldn't compromise and education legislation was mostly discussed but not passed. Like Reagan, he did resort to the bully pulpit to focus education as a national issue. He however usually wanted to provide as his critics would say minimal funding but maintained a federal presence. He did maintain a national interest in education begun by the preceding administration.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Berube, p. 133

¹²⁹ Berube, p. 136

¹³⁰ Berube, p. 136-137

By the end of his term, international events had taken the debate away from education. The U.S. had entered the Persian Gulf War to rid Saddam Hussein from Kuwait. The Communist Soviet system disintegrated. In Eastern Europe former Soviet Communist nations threw off communist rule and established non-communist states. The Soviet Union ceased to exist. While these events were occurring internationally, the U.S. economy was slowing down. The self proclaimed “education president’s” time in office will not be remembered for his domestic accomplishments, but for his international role in foreign policy.

Bill Clinton

The 1990's saw a gradual rather than a dramatic change in education. The decade was one that possessed economic prosperity, low inflation, low unemployment, and lower budget deficits. The Governor of Arkansas Bill Clinton defeated the incumbent George H.W. Bush rather easily to assume the presidency. He would be reelected in a landslide in 1996. He, like his predecessors, knew education was an important issue for the country to and its national economic competitiveness.¹³¹

As Governor of Arkansas, Clinton proclaimed education to be his top legislative priority. Clinton proposed competency exams for teachers and some grade level achievement tests for students. He also proposed a "fair dismissal" law to protect teachers and higher teacher salaries. During his second term as governor Clinton required all school districts to offer kindergarten. He also continued his efforts and calls for higher teacher salaries and continued competency testing for teachers and students. He proposed a tax increase to pay for the initiative and despite opposition from the state teachers unions became law. Clinton's popularity soared and was eventually elected the next four elections. During this time he advocated smaller class size, a tougher curriculum, an increase in the number of school days, and even more counselors.¹³²

During Clinton's campaign for the presidency, Clinton supported greater funding for Chapter One of the ESEA, smaller class sizes, alternative education for teachers, and public school choice. He also was a proponent of national standards, goals, and examination for students but not for teachers. Despite some disagreements during his

¹³¹ Gutek, p. 291

reign as the Governor over teacher testing, the NEA endorsed Clinton for the presidency.¹³³

Ten years after *A Nation at Risk*, another book was published with a whirlwind of bad news about schools. *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools* written by Jonathan Kozol was published in 1993 detailed the inequalities in funding public schools by property taxes. Kozol further describes how the inner city schools are overwhelmed by large class sizes, few supplies, and deteriorating buildings. The newest education president entered the White House with hopes of solving the education problem. Clinton thought that redistribution of wealth was the best possible solution.¹³⁴

Chapter One funds targeted poor areas but only ten percent reached the poorest districts. The other ninety percent reached virtually every school district. The Clinton administration proposed to raise the percentage from the 10 percent of the poorest districts getting funds to fifty percent. This would transfer about \$510 million from wealthier districts to poorer ones. He also sought to reduce the threshold by which a district received Chapter One programs from 75% to 50% of pupils below the poverty line. This proposal would increase the number of schools from 12,000 to 20,000. The proposal would also require districts to administer health and nutrition tests at elementary schools with more than 50% of their students below the poverty line. The president also proposed to distribute Chapter One funds based on poverty level rather than achievement levels, and to allocate funds to poorer schools before funding wealthier schools in the

¹³² McAndrews, p. 151-152

¹³³ McAndrews, p. 152

¹³⁴ McAndrews, p. 152-153

district. Finally, Clinton wanted to require states to develop standards consistent with Goals 2000 as a condition for receiving Chapter One funds.¹³⁵

Furthermore, Clinton not only wanted to spend more on Chapter One than did his predecessor (about \$400 million more) but he wanted to restore its original name back to Title One and to eliminate Chapter Two. Chapter Two was added during the Reagan administration in 1981 that had a \$400 million block grant package. Clinton believed that the nation's poverty rate for children was a national scandal and that some redistribution of the resources would help poor kids in high poverty areas in schools.¹³⁶

The President signed the Improving America's Schools Act of 1994. Most of the president's proposals were kept in the law. However the biggest change in the ESEA sought by Clinton included a funding formula to address the "savage inequalities" of federal school finance wasn't in the final bill proposed. Clinton was still happy he did get the law done and said, "...the lower expectation for poor children was an outrage and this was taken out of the old law." This in part was a victory for Clinton.¹³⁷

Probably the best accomplishment in education for President Clinton was Goals 2000, also known as the Educate America Act. Goals 2000 reaffirmed the national goals of the 1990's, which sought to increase children's school readiness, increase high school student's completion rate, provide evidence of demonstrated competency at specific grade levels in basic skills and subjects, improve math and science education, increase adult literacy and on-the-job competency, and maintain safe schools, free of alcohol and drugs. The law also added the goals of improving professional skills of teachers and

¹³⁵ McAndrews, p. 152-154

¹³⁶ McAndrews, p. 154

¹³⁷ McAndrews, p. 156

promoting parental partnerships in education of their children.¹³⁸ The cost of the program would end up being \$700 million.¹³⁹

Goals 2000 was unique in the fact that while the federal government had no authority to regulate public education, the Department of Education established a set of educational objectives that, while officially voluntary, essentially mandates a comprehensive educational reform plan for the entire nation. Clinton said of the enactment of the law, “This is a new and different approach for the national government that sets world class education standards for what every child at every American school should know in order to win when he or she becomes an adult. Today we can say America is serious about education.” The states were quick to change. Within a year of the law being enacted, 49 or the 50 states had begun developing new education standards. Unfortunately for Clinton and the Democrats, the Republicans gained control of the House and Senate during the mid term elections. The Congress then removed many of the key parts of Goals 2000, including the national education standards.¹⁴⁰

When Clinton won re-election, the “comeback kid” still pressed onward about his quest for national school standards. In his 4th state of the union address in 1997, the President introduced two 8th grade students and called education his “number one priority for the next four years.” He also urged a non-partisan commitment to education. Furthermore, Clinton then recited ten principles that constituted a “call for action” and a “national crusade” for education standards. Clinton continued by saying, “We will lead

¹³⁸ Gutek, p. 293

¹³⁹ McAndrews, p. 158

¹⁴⁰ McAndrews, p. 158

an effort over the next two years to develop national tests of student achievement in reading and math...”¹⁴¹

President Clinton and the Republican led Congress were regularly at odds, especially over the budget. The Congress was blamed for two partial government shutdowns in 1995 and the following year because of the budget. Clinton repeatedly said that he would not reduce spending on the schools. “I don’t want to spend more money on everything”, the president said. “I want to spend more money on the right things.” Spending more on education was what the president meant and the American people agreed with him. Clinton boldly then announced a twenty percent increase in federal funding for Goals 2000 and that the Department of Education would broaden NAEP and the 3rd International Mathematics and Science Study to evaluate students. The House overwhelmingly rejected the proposals with a 295-125 vote.¹⁴²

Clinton vowed to continue his campaign for national tests. Finally a compromise was done. Goals 2000 spending was cut to 15% but it restored the tests and placed them under the authority of the National Assessment Government Board. Clinton got his national tests while the Republicans got spending cuts and the test developed outside of the administration.¹⁴³

Teacher preparedness quickly soon became an issue for the Clinton administration. A report by the Education Department in 1998 reported only one in five public school teachers considered themselves qualified. This was a wake up call to get serious about better preparing our teachers for the classroom. In response of the report, Clinton said in his 1999 state of the union address that our kids were doing better in SAT

¹⁴¹ McAndrews, p. 156

¹⁴² McAndrews, p. 159-160

scores and math. “But there’s a problem.” the president said. “While our 4th graders outperform their peer in other countries in math and science, our 8th graders are around average, and our 12th graders are near the bottom.” He continued by repeating his belief in student testing by saying, “With our support, nearly every state has set higher academic standards...” he also mentioned that a voluntary national test was being developed to measure the progress of American students. For the first time though he proposed that as a condition for receiving federal aid, “new teachers should be required to pass performance exams and all teachers should know the subjects they are teaching.”¹⁴⁴

Although Republicans blocked many of Clinton’s initiatives in his second term, total education appropriations rose 38%, about \$33 billion between 1996 and 1999. Other education legislation signed by the president was the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Act, Vocational Education Act, and the Higher Education Act. The Clinton legacy in education will include IASA and Goals 2000. Schools and teachers are now beholden to a standards based environment with challenging curriculum for all students.¹⁴⁵

Clinton was successful at times persuading a Republican led Congress to spend more money on education during the 90’s. In October 1998, Congress agreed to Clinton’s plan to hire 100,000 new teachers over seven years to reduce class size. Some of Clinton’s other initiatives during the year were tax credits for school construction, paying for teachers to be appraised by a national standards based, boosting self esteem of

¹⁴³ McAndrews, p. 160

¹⁴⁴ McAndrews, p. 161

¹⁴⁵ Federal Education Policy and the States, 1945-2009 The Clinton Years: Clinton Years Summary. Retrieved: August 2010.

<http://www.archives.nysed.gov/edpolicy/research/res_essay_clinton_summary.shtml>

rural students, connecting every classroom to the internet, developing before and after school programs, increasing the number of drug prevention counselors.

During his first two years the president had a friendly Democrat congress and budget deficits. Clinton's top priority in education was goals 2000. After his first two years, the Republicans gained control of Congress and were consistently at odds over the budgets. The President maintained, "I have consistently said that if Congress sends me a budget that violates our values, I'll veto it." The values he mentioned were education and schools. Clinton promised to increase education spending and balance the budget. He did both. These actions helped save his presidency.¹⁴⁶

In his 1997 state of the union speech, Clinton devoted about 25% of it to education. In his next years speech he called it "the most important year for education in a generation." Clinton boasted that the administration expanded school choice, opened 3,000 charter schools, and expanded head start.¹⁴⁷

Clinton would be seen upon as another education president. He focused much of his domestic policy on it and used the bully pulpit to reach his goals. He helped enact more public school aid proposals in a single legislative session since the Lyndon Johnson administration. The Clinton era of education was all about standards and testing. An era continued by President George W. Bush during the new millennium.

¹⁴⁶ McAndrews, p. 166

¹⁴⁷ McAndrews, p. 166

Conclusion

Since 2000, the country has seen even more sweeping education reforms. The two most notably are the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) proposed by President George W. Bush and the Race to the Top (RTTT) proposed by President Barack Obama in 2009.

Major provisions of NCLB requires all public schools receiving federal funding to administer state-wide standardized tests yearly. The tests would show how well the students were learning. The Act would also require Title I schools to make adequate yearly progress. The Act also required the states have highly qualified teachers to all students. The laws purpose was to increase accountability of schools and teachers.¹⁴⁸

The other major presidential initiative this century is President Obama's Race to the Top. In his 2011 state of the union address he said to the fifty states regarding education, "If you show us the most innovative plans to improve teacher quality and student achievement, we'll show you the money."¹⁴⁹ President Obama wants to eliminate NCLB and work with something that is "more flexible and focused on what is best for kids."¹⁵⁰ The RTTT would have state competition for educational grants based on having high quality standards and assessments, turning around the lowest performing schools

¹⁴⁸ Overview: Four Pillars of Now Child Left Behind. Retrieved June 2011.
<<http://www2.ed.gov/nclb/overview/intro/4pillars.html>>

¹⁴⁹ Remarks by the President in State of Union Address, January 25, 2011. The White House Office of the Press Secretary, Washington D.C. Retrieved May 2011. <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/01/25/remarks-president-state-union-address>>

¹⁵⁰ Remarks by the President on Education, July 24, 2009. The White House Office of the Press Secretary, Washington D.C. Retrieved May 2011.
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-by-the-President-at-the-Department-of-Education/>

and using data to improve instruction. Eleven states and Washington D.C. have received approximately \$4.35 billion dollars in grants in 2010.¹⁵¹

Presidential leadership and educational policy seems to change with the times. With the beginning of the Johnson administration, there hasn't been a clear and consistent education policy. It has changed with the economy, political ideology, and government leaders. It has fluctuated time and again with Democrat and Republican presidents. The Democratic Party and its presidents generally have advocated issues such as equality and at risk students. The Republican Party generally has advocated local responsibility and an excellence agenda where America's best students would reverse the country's economic decline.

The continuous changing of the current educational initiatives has left parents and teachers confused. NCLB brought in sweeping reforms where schools worked frantically to even understand the laws let alone comply with it, now see the next president wanting to eliminate it. Questions still remain on the role of the president in America's schools. Is there a need for a national framework to end the confusion? Every major industrialized nation has a national system of education. It is only in America where we continually maintain a decentralized system.¹⁵²

Historically, presidents never meddled with education since it is not specifically mentioned in the Constitution. However, times have changed. Some scholars believe that a constitutional amendment is necessary for a national framework. Presidents for

¹⁵¹ "Nine States and the District of Columbia Win Second Round Race to the Top Grants". August 24, 2010. U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved June 2011. < <http://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/nine-states-and-district-columbia-win-second-round-race-top-grants>>

generations have dealt with various issues including energy, transportation, and the environment; none of which are mentioned in the constitution.

The American public now looks to the President for leadership when there is a U.S. problem no matter what it is. Our current educational system seems to be a mess. For over a generation, American schools are now being outperformed by most of the industrialized world. This is the major reason why recent presidents have advocated major changes in our school system. The one constant since the Reagan administration has been a commitment to leadership in the educational cause. There again however is the problem of consistency. We've fluctuated from huge federal funding programs to block grants, to excellence reform, to NCLB, to RTTT. If our school kids continue to get an inferior education, our educational policy will continue to change with each president. As the leader of the country, the president will be continually looked upon for guidance in education policy for the foreseeable future.

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