# NCLB AND NEW JERSEY: A CASE STUDY ON HOW NEW JERSEY IMPLEMENTED NCLB MANDATES TO CLOSE THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP BLACK AND WHITE STUDENTS

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#### ABSTRACT

# NCLB AND NEW JERSEY: A CASE STUDY ON HOW NEW JERSEY IMPLEMENTED NCLB MANDATES TO CLOSE THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP BLACK AND WHITE STUDENTS

#### Janene Howard-Rodriguez

This doctoral dissertation investigates the effects of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) policy on educational equity in New Jersey, focusing on three primary research questions. Firstly, the study examines whether the implementation of NCLB mandates led to the closure of achievement gaps between black and white students, as evidenced by disparities in state assessment scores and National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores. Secondly, it explores potential factors contributing to the persistence of achievement gaps, particularly examining differences in opportunities among schools within the state. Lastly, the study investigates the impact of NCLB mandates on instructional practices and student achievement in New Jersey schools.

The methodology involved a multi-faceted approach. Firstly, the study examined New Jersey's education policies before and during the implementation of NCLB to provide context for understanding the policy's impact. Secondly, quantitative analysis was conducted by examining state test scores (e.g., NJASK, GEPA, HSPA) for 4th, 8th, and high school students and comparing these scores to NAEP data to identify trends in achievement over time. Additionally, qualitative insights were gathered through interviews with education professionals who were active during the NCLB era, providing valuable perspectives on the implementation of NCLB mandates at the district level.

By employing this comprehensive methodology, this dissertation aims to provide a thorough assessment of NCLB's impact on educational equity in New Jersey. The findings of this study have implications for educational policy and practice, informing efforts to address achievement gaps and promote equitable opportunities for all students in the state and beyond.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## THE PROBLEM

School was always a place of pleasure for me. I attended Catholic School for eight years and then attended public high school in a Middlesex County, New Jersey, suburb. Teachers constantly pushed me to do my best and, for the most part, challenged me. I recall having class competitions in elementary school where our class would compete to see who memorized their multiplication tables or knew the month's spelling words. These competitions motivated me to study, as I did not want to be the first one out. High school was a place where I learned to evaluate and analyze. Healthy discussions were a regular part of my English and history classes. Learning had meaning. The class was a safe place where I was able to shine. I made relationships with classmates and teachers I remember fondly to this day.

My experience in school, as well as my experience in college as a tutor, changed my career path, and becoming a teacher became my goal. I began teaching social studies, reading, and science to 3rd, 4th, and 5th graders in an urban school district in New Jersey in 1997. I quickly realized the differences between my educational experience in a small private school and the school where I was teaching. Having been educated in a suburban school district, I had access to materials and opportunities that were absent in my building. For example, they expected me to teach science and conduct lab experiments without any equipment! I understood that an inquiry approach was the best way for students to learn and internalize the concepts. When students engage in inquiry-based approaches in science, they ask questions and construct explanations as well as use critical and logical thinking (Şimşek and Kabapınar 1190-1194). Furthermore, inquiry based instruction allows for differentiation and improves soft skills such as

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collaboration and communication (Taylor and Bilbrey 6). I spent the first few years building the science program and purchasing several pieces of lab equipment. In 2003, *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) was signed into law, which changed the accountability levels of schools. These changes directly affected how my school prepared for the state administration of these assessments and, thus, the amount of time I was allotted to teach science.

The focus of my teaching changed with the implementation of NCLB. During this time, New Jersey tested students in science, but the state report card did not include science scores. As such, my inquiry approach to teaching science received some support from my school's administration. However, the entire school went into test mode two months before the test administration. Focus on tested subjects became a priority. They put away the wonderful inquirybased science lessons and brought out the test preparation books. All day, students would focus on English and math, working from "test prep" books at the expense of other subjects. Students often became fatigued due to the constant focus on only math, reading, and occasionally science. Drill-and-kill became the model of teaching. For months, I focused on completing lessons in the test preparation books to prepare students for the state test. The focus shifted from inquiry-rich effective instruction to rote test preparation.

The intended purpose of NCLB was to ensure equity in traditionally failing schools and, by doing so, close the achievement gap between marginalized and white students. Unlike previous federal educational mandates, NCLB increased the stakes for schools. Schools would increasingly face stiff penalties if students did not perform well or meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). As such, schools often focused on tested areas at the expense of other content areas, and complex, inquiry-based discussions with peers all but vanished. George Hillocks Jr., in *The Testing Trap*, examined the influence state assessments had on teaching and found that state assessments profoundly influenced teaching. Teachers would often craft their instruction to meet the goals of the assessment. In his study, Hillocks concluded that the focus on the formulaic approach to writing to pass the state assessment eroded the rich organic approach, which allowed students to find their voice and style. Furthermore, Jane L. David noted that in states that tested specific content areas, teachers often dedicated time to those content areas at the expense of non-tested subjects and content. David also found in her research that "Five years into NCLB, ...75 percent of districts with at least one school identified as needing improvement—increased the amount of time spent on language arts and math in elementary schools....Correspondingly, these districts decreased time allotted to other subjects and activities, including science, social studies, art, music, physical education, and recess" (David, par. 8).

Like many schools, my school reduced rich inquiry-based, authentic learning opportunities and Socratic experiences to lessons using worksheets from test books containing company-prepared multiple-choice and short constructed response questions. Students were denied rich and balanced learning opportunities, which were often replaced by test prep. Teachers and administrators felt the pressure to have students pass the test. Schools that failed to meet yearly benchmarks were labeled "failing schools." Failure to meet AYP for five consecutive years resulted in school restructuring and financial consequences. For schools already struggling to attract highly qualified and innovative teachers, these punitive measures tended to deter good teachers. I felt this shift then, and now, decades later, as a principal and instructional leader in an urban Title I school with a majority of black and brown students, I question how effective the early punitive mandates were in improving schools, ensuring equity, and closing achievement gaps. Attracting and maintaining quality teachers is essential for school consistency, which affects instructional continuity. Research by the Learning Policy Institute found that high teacher turnover in schools affects not only the classroom performance of the new teacher but also that of the entire school (Sutcher et al., par. 11). Implementing effective teaching strategies is only acquired through planned and targeted professional development, which effectively, with any new initiative, takes three to five years to see the results. Consistency in staffing also contributes to the effects. Sutcher et al., in their study "A Coming Crisis in Teaching? Teacher Supply, Demand, and Shortages in the U.S.", argue that consistent collaboration and planning among teachers, driven by a shared sense of efficacy, significantly contribute to teacher effectiveness. Teacher practice also improves more rapidly in a supportive and collegial environment. Therefore, the label of failing schools, the threat of restructuring, financial consequences, and the focus on test preparation affected how many traditionally low-performing schools operated. The question is, did these punitive measures in NCLB work? Did NCLB close the achievement gap as intended and provide instructional equity as the mandate intended?

# **Purpose of the Research**

The achievement gap between black and white students indicates that black students have not performed as well as their white peers for decades. For more than a generation, educators have been discussing how to close the achievement gap between white and black students and improve their education quality. Shedding light on the historical ebb and flow of progress of black students, "During the 1970s and the better part of the 1980s, black school children were making more rapid gains than whites on the standardized tests administered periodically to a representative sample of students by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). ...between 1980 and 1988, it widened by more than a year and a half in the following decade, erasing half of the previous gain (Thernstrom 263). NCLB's mandate addressed the disparity between white and black students. The federal government intended to close the achievement gap and use student performance on state assessments as a measurement. Researchers have focused on whether NCLB mandates effectively closed the achievement gap by examining state assessment scores, school policies, and social indicators such as socioeconomic status, class, and parental involvement. The present study explores New Jersey's response to the federally mandated No Child Left Behind law. Specifically, the research traces the achievement gap between black and white students in the state alongside the state's implementation of policies intended to satisfy NCLB.

My experience as a teacher and focusing on "test prep" as a strategy to meet NCLB benchmarks questions the impact NCLB mandates had on providing equity in education and thus closing the achievement gap. To evaluate the impact of NCLB on the state of New Jersey, we must look at the effect the mandates had on closing the achievement gap, as measured by standardized test scores, between black and white students and the measurement tool used to evaluate students. Finding these answers can be done by examining New Jersey's education policies before and during NCLB, analyzing New Jersey's disaggregated state test scores in grades 4, 8, and high school, comparing New Jersey's National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores with the national average as well as analyzing New Jersey's test score data with New Jersey's NAEP scores, and New Jersey's graduation rate before and after the implementation of NCLB.

In order to assess the effects of NCLB on the state of New Jersey, this dissertation poses three primary research questions. 1. Gaps in state assessment scores and NAEP scores in New Jersey indicate an achievement gap between black and white students. Were those gaps closed during the first ten years of NCLB mandates?

2. If the achievement gap failed to shrink, was the failure to shrink the achievement gap a result of differences in opportunities in some New Jersey schools and not others?

3. How did NCLB mandates affect instruction, and did they impact student achievement?

These questions must be answered critically by examining the data from state assessments, NAEP scores, and anecdotal evidence from teachers and administrators who were in education during those years. In order to explore these questions, I analyzed data of black and white students in math and ELA over the ten years of NCLB on the state assessment and NAEP in grades 4, 8, and 11. I analyzed the data in context with interviews conducted with teachers and administrators working under early NCLB mandates in order to assess the impact NCLB mandates had on their instructional practices. Lastly, I examined how New Jersey's policies and governance impacted implementation of NCLB mandates.

#### **CHAPTER 2**

### HISTORY OF NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND

The federal government initially recognized an educational achievement gap through Brown versus the Board of Education. The Supreme Court based its conclusions on a history of unequal education established by *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896, which established the standard for the education of African American students. Schools for African Americans under Plessy v. *Ferguson* were underfunded. White schools often had more essential materials than black schools because of the belief that blacks were not "intellectually advanced enough for the funding to serve them well at their schools" (Morningstar, par. 3). Until the landmark Supreme Court case Brown v. Board of Education desegregated schools, the underfunding and substandard conditions of schools attended by black students were legally sanctioned. Despite the ruling declaring unequal funding for these schools illegal, the practice persisted. The Supreme Court agreed that separate facilities were inherently unequal and that "legallysanctioned segregation based on race necessarily inflicted on black children a psychological wound that could not be solved by the provision of materially equivalent schooling facilities and resources" (Reardon 34). Federal initiatives enforced desegregation of schools, initially resulting in decreases in gaps in test scores between black and white students (Wexler). As court-ordered desegregation stopped and racial segregation in schools remained, gaps between black and white students began to grow once again. Research by Stanford Sociologist Sean Reardon found "a strong association between racial segregation and academic achievement gaps" (Reardon 51). Not surprisingly, when court-ordered desegregation stopped, achievement gaps grew. Although

Brown desegregated schools, they remained segregated based on economics and class, a form of segregation known as de facto segregation (Morningstar).

The recognition and attention to the achievement gap between black and white students did not become discussed in educational policy until the 1960s when educational policymakers once again recognized an achievement gap between black and white students. As such, federal educational funding, including the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and Title I during the Johnson administration, were passed to provide additional funding for education and equity for children living in economically depressed areas. These initiatives would have an impact on the achievement of children living in economically depressed areas. These initiatives would have an impact on the achievement of children living in economically depressed areas. Lee's analysis, which focused on gaps in reading and math scores over the last three decades showed that "during the 1970s and the first half of the 1980s showed NAEP showed substantial academic improvement of Black and Hispanic students and a significant narrowing of the Black-White and Hispanic-White achievement gaps" (Lee 3). Additionally, analysis of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores indicated significant gains in the achievement of poor, urban students, traditionally students of color, during the 1980s. Lee attributed these gains to the impact of narrowing gaps in Black-White "gaps in socioeconomic and family conditions... from the1970s through the1990s....(Lee 7).

Unfortunately, these gains would become stagnant during the 1980s. For several administrations, the answer to closing the achievement gap had been increasing federal funding, which in the 1970s resulted in measurable gains for black students. ("The Federal Role in Advancing Education Equity and Excellence") The Reagan administration would take a different approach. Reagan argued that money alone would not solve the problem in America's schools.

Reagan would argue "that ....federal spending on education had failed to make the nation's public schools better, but had made them worse" (Hight 39). Researchers began to measure more critically whether increased financial support positively impacted educational outcomes and if increased financial support could contribute to closing the achievement gap. Hanushek supported Reagan's assertions and pointed to "a growing body of research [that] casts doubt on the effectiveness of school districts at turning added resources into higher student achievement" (Hanushek et al.). Hanushek's 1986 and 1989 research found that "detailed research spanning two decades and observing performance in many different educational settings provides strong and consistent evidence that expenditures are not systematically related to student achievement." Furthermore, Hanushek found that "higher expenditures fail to produce commensurate gains in achievement" (American Educational Research Association and Hanushek 49) Hanushek also argues that there is little evidence to support the effectiveness of teacher education, teacher pay or class size on student achievement. This conclusion is often disputed. Reagan's criticism of American schools was greatly influenced by the findings from the 1981 National Commission on Excellence in Education study, A Nation at Risk. In 1983, A Nation at Risk painted a bleak picture of education and student performance in the United States. In part, the report found the following:

About 13 percent of all 17-year-olds in the United States could be considered functionally illiterate, and among minority youth, that number increases to as high as 40 percent. Nearly 40 percent of 17-year-olds could not draw references from written materials 3. Remedial mathematics courses in four-year colleges increased by 72 percent and [constituted] onequarter of all mathematics courses taught in those institutions. School content had become diluted without a central purpose. Expectations had decreased [which included] declining amounts of homework, fewer required mathematics and science courses, increased enrollment in less demanding electives, and lack of challenge to students due to written-down textbooks. The teaching field was not attracting enough academically able students, and that teacher preparation programs needed substantial improvement. [Also there was a serious] shortage in key fields...especially mathematics and science subjects. (Gardner et al. 11) Consequently, *A Nation at Risk* and Hanushek's research would profoundly impact the mandates in NCLB.

The achievement gap has persisted despite the implementation of various federal education programs since *Brown v. Board* to narrow the gap, including Title I funding under The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). There are several theories as to why the achievement gap exists, with many pointing to the lack of proper funding for schools with large minority groups, implicit biases, and economic and family structure. Reardon attributed the achievement gap to economic segregation among schools and continued exposure to poverty. At the same time, McKown and Weinstein contributed to the persistence of the achievement gap with low expectations for black and Hispanic children by teachers (McKown and Weinstein par. 2). A more comprehensive study by Vincent Roscigno in 2007, *The Black-White Achievement Gap, Family-School Links, and the Importance of Place,* cites the influences of the family, family structure, and racial inequality on the persistent achievement gap.

Like the previous administration's concern about the state of education and a persistent achievement gap, 2003 President George W. Bush implemented the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) to hold states accountable for individual student achievement, especially disenfranchised students. More specifically, NCLB aimed to identify subgroups of traditionally marginalized students: socioeconomically disadvantaged, ethnic minority, special education, and English language learners. Proponents of NCLB believed the mandates outlined in the act would close the achievement gap by holding states accountable, mandating highly qualified teachers, demanding universal state curriculum standards, and implementing state assessments to assess the effectiveness of these standards on student achievement.

Before NCLB, the responsibility of improving education for underachieving students was left up to states. Although educational mandates were implemented at the federal level, local control of public schools often stymied the absolute authority of federal mandates. President George Bush recognized those obstacles of local control, which in the past, "blocked earlier federal efforts to boost public achievement...promoted a more forceful role...that would use managed tests and consequences to compel state and school cooperation while increasing parental choice of schools and granting states more freedom in spending their federal aid" (Hess 4). NCLB mandates held states accountable for student achievement more than any other educational mandate. In addition to holding states accountable for subgroups by requiring benchmarks for Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), NCLB mandated that states publicly publish how each subgroup performed in their state's report card. Under NCLB, individual states determined the number of Black, Asian, Hispanic, Pacific Islanders, Native Americans, Special Education, English language learners, and economically disadvantaged students in these subgroups a school had before counting their scores. School districts were required to publish and count their results towards the district's AYP. Under the law, "States were required to bring all students to the 'proficient level' on state tests by the 2013-2014 school year" (Klein par. 8). The law also outlined the following conditions:

State tests must be the primary factor in the state's measure of AYP, but the use of at least one other academic indicator of school performance is required, and additional indicators are permitted; For secondary schools, the other academic indicator must be the high school graduation rate; States must set a baseline for measuring students' performance toward the goal of 100 percent proficiency by the spring of 2014. The baseline is based on data from the 2001-02 school year; States must also create benchmarks for how students will progress each year to meet the goal of 100 percent proficiency by the spring of 2014; A state's AYP must include separate reading/language arts and math measures. Also, the measures must apply not only to students on average but also to students in four "subgroups": economically disadvantaged students, students from major racial and ethnic groups, students with disabilities, and students with limited English proficiency; To make AYP, at least 95 percent of students in each of the four subgroups, as well as 95 percent of students in a school as a whole, must take the state tests, and each subgroup of students must meet or exceed the measurable annual objectives set by the state for each year.

Furthermore, the law outlined checkpoints to keep schools on track:

1. A school that misses two years has to allow students to transfer to a better-performing public school in the same district. 2. If a school misses AYP three years in a row, it must offer free tutoring [either at the school or through an independent agency], 3. Schools that continue to miss achievement targets could face state intervention. States could choose to shut these schools down, turn them into charter schools, take them over, or use another significant turnaround strategy. 4. Schools that do not make AYP must set aside a portion of their federal Title I dollars for tutoring and school choice. Schools at the point of having to offer school choice must hold back 10 percent of their Title I money. (Klein)

Although there were educational mandates before NCLB, none carried the punitive consequences as those in the NCLB mandates. For many schools, especially those serving lowincome students and those with several of the six subgroups, these sanctions unfairly burdened them. Mandates and restructuring of schools only applied to schools that received Title I funding. First and foremost, NCLB relied heavily on standardized testing to measure student achievement and school performance. Additionally, poor districts often serve students from disadvantaged backgrounds who face numerous challenges outside the classroom, such as poverty, inadequate healthcare, and unstable home environments. High-stakes testing may not accurately reflect the abilities and progress of these students, leading to schools in poor districts being labeled as failing and facing sanctions. Many districts serving low income communities already struggle to meet basic educational needs. Mandates under NCLB were designed not just to provide much needed financial assistance to failing schools, but also provide interventions for schools that were failing to meet AYP. Punitive financial sanctions present districts with further financial strain and disruption. Additionally, NCLB mandated highly qualified teachers in every classroom, which posed challenges for poor districts with limited resources for recruiting and retaining qualified educators especially if the schools in the district are labeled a failing school. Schools

serving low income communities may struggle to compete with wealthier districts in attracting skilled teachers, leading to a concentration of less-experienced or underqualified staff in schools serving disadvantaged students.

The implementation of NCLB required many state legislators to change their education policies, including increasing their standards for teachers and forcing states to focus on specific populations of students who, in the past, had been ignored. The legislation required states to change how they certified teachers, assessed students, gathered and reported data, and addressed inequities in education in their states. NCLB mandates "increased focus on student populations that have traditionally performed at low levels" (Maleyko 21). Before the adoption of NCLB mandates, educational reforms "that included high stakes accountability, had largely occurred at the state level with several of the most visible reforms taking place in the south, notably, Texas, Kentucky, and North Carolina" (Opfer et al. 299). NCLB legislation was drafted "on the belief that incentives that have consequences attached [would be] effective ways to motivate educators to improve student performance," based on the premise that the lack of student performance and large achievement gaps were solely the result of teacher and administrative ineptness (Opfer et al. 300).

Critics of NCLB questioned whether AYP could accurately measure the goals outlined in the Title I purpose statement of the NCLB legislation, specifically assuring that all students meet proficiency by 2014. Many critics focus on limitations to the efficiency of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in measuring the achievement gap. Critics also question if "sanctions are doing anything more than punishing schools for poor performance" and question whether NCLB mandates would be more effective if more emphasis was put on instructional intervention (Hess and Finn 65). The flexibility in the legislation reflected sources of doubt, as states were allowed to develop their standards, test score proficiency levels, and statistical measurement formulas under AYP. Research by Cronin, Dahlin, and Kingsbury in 2007 found that "proficiency widely [varied] from state to state...[and that] over the past few years, twice as many states have seen their tests become easier in at least two grades as have seen their tests become more difficult" (Cronin et al. 58).

Cronin's research also found that not only were there discrepancies between states, there were also erratic discrepancies "from place to place and grade to grade and year to year in ways that have little or nothing to do with true differences in pupil achievement" (Cronin et al. 3). Additionally, a study by Bruce Fuller and Colleagues document a growing disparity between student performance data on state assessments and National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) since the introduction of NCLB. (Fuller et al. 2) They conclude that state assessments have become less rigorous during NCLB in an effort for schools to reach APY and avoid the severe consequences under the mandates (Dee and Jacob 54). Additionally, Olson and Jacob in 2006 revealed that "over 1.9 million students ... [were] not being counted for AYP purposes due to minimal subgroup requirements" (qtd from Maleyko and Gawlik). This means that there was no accountability for the progress of those students. As such, the data evaluating the achievement gap closing may be better or worse than what the data reveals. Therefore, can AYP under NCLB tell us whether the achievement gap between black and white students is closing? When each state sets the standard for proficiency, how accurate are state assessments as an indicator of the progress of black students and, thus, the closing of the achievement gap?

With so many different measures of student achievement and very little consistency in determining whether or not students are genuinely achieving, it is difficult to determine whether NCLB mandates are genuinely closing the achievement gap. Additionally, because all states

were required to implement NCLB mandates, measuring a control group of students who were not subject to accountability under NCLB is challenging. Therefore, to determine whether or not NCLB aided in narrowing the achievement gap, the focus must be on changes states have made in policies, testing procedures, and state goals, as well as state assessment data, NAEP scores, and graduation data.

In order to evaluate the impact of NCLB, it is essential to evaluate the arguments of proponents and opponents of the law. Proponents of the law argue that focusing on standardized testing holds both teachers and schools accountable. Publicizing test scores becomes "helpful for parents to be capable of making well informed decisions about the well being of their child" (Holmes 14). They also argue that NCLB mandates would "boost student achievement overall and.. reduce gaps between disadvantaged student subgroups and their more advantaged counterparts" (Ladd 461). Proponents of NCLB assert that graduation rates have increased since implementing NCLB mandates. However, how accurate are those rates when, for many states, graduation requirements are often tied to state assessments, which differ significantly by state? Opponents of the law argue that accountability is not a problem. The problem is using one identifier to assess accountability: test scores. In The Death and Life of the Great American School System, Diane Ravitch argues that "the problem with using tests to make important decisions about people's lives is that standardized tests are not precise instruments" (Ravitch 161). Ravitch goes on to say that "tests vary in their quality[and therefore] testing experts frequently remind school officials that standardized test scores should be used not in isolation to make consequential decisions about students, but only in conjunction with other measures of student performance, such as grades, class participation, homework, and teacher recommendation" (Ravitch 161). Opponents of NCLB assert that any gains seen during the

implementation of NCLB mandates resulted from "the upward trend that had begun in the 1990s" (Ladd 462). The public is equally mixed in their feelings about NCLB. A 2005 Phi Delta Kappan/Gallup Poll indicated that "the more people know about NCLB, the less likely they are to support the act." Additionally, an "ETS/Hart Poll shows.... although more people consistently favor NCLB than oppose it, the gap between support and opposition is narrowing" (Loveless et al 4)

#### **NEW JERSEY'S RESPONSE TO NCLB MANDATES**

NCLB's goal was to reduce the achievement gap between disaffected students. States were required to put systems in place to address the root causes of educational inequities. These systems needed to comply with specific guidelines outlined in the NCLB Legislation. States needed to implement challenging standards emphasizing reading and math, as these were the two content areas where states would have to administer statewide assessments. States would also be required to document the results of these assessments and disaggregate the results to determine the effect rigorous statewide standards had on the achievement gap between black, white, Hispanic, Asian, and native students, as well as economically disadvantaged students. The results would determine whether or not the achievement gap between disenfranchised students was closing. Standards would have to be rigorous, and students would be tested annually in grades three through eight and high school with "annual statewide progress objectives ensuring that all groups of students reach proficiency within 12 years. Assessment results and State progress objectives must be broken out by poverty, race, ethnicity, disability, and limited English proficiency to ensure that no group is left behind" (Executive summary of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001). Although New Jersey received only about 4% of its total annual funding

from the Federal government, the amount of money would be a "considerable amount to lose if the state failed to comply with NCLB" (McGuinn 155).

Before NCLB, New Jersey implemented statewide assessments to determine student proficiency and preparation. The New Jersey Legislature passed the Public School Education Act (PSEA) in 1975 "to provide to all children of New Jersey, regardless of socioeconomic status or geographic location, the educational opportunity which will prepare them to function politically, economically and socially in a democratic society" (New Jersey Department of Education). PSEA of 1975 also "initiated statewide academic standards and a minimum basic skills test, and outlined a school accountability system" (McGuinn 153). In 1976, the state legislature amended the PSEA, implemented minimum uniform achievement standards, and required passing a state assessment as a graduation requirement. Between 1978 and 1982, New Jersey administered a Minimum Basic Skills test (MBS) for math and reading for students in grades three, six, and nine. Starting in 1981-1982, the grade 9 MBS became a requirement for graduation. In 1983, the state legislature changed the MBS test to a more challenging test that assessed students in reading, writing, and mathematics in grade 9, the High School Proficiency Test (HSPT9), which again in 1985 became a graduation requirement. More changes occurred in 1988, which moved the High School Proficiency Assessment from grade 9 to grade 11. They also implemented a grade 8 Early Warning Test (EWT) to identify students needing intervention to prepare them for the HSPT (11). The HSPT (11) would not become a graduation requirement until 1993. The additional time would give districts time to align their curriculum with the rigor of the new assessment.

One final change occurred before the adoption of NCLB. In May 1996, New Jersey adopted the Core Curriculum Content Standards and implemented another state assessment in grade 3. NJDOE mandated tests in 1999. From 1997-2002, all students in grade 3 took the Elementary School Proficiency Assessment (ESPA). In grade 8, they replaced the Early Warning Test with the Grade Eight Proficiency Assessment (GEPA), and they replaced the High School Proficiency Test (HSPT 11) with the High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA), which became a high school graduation requirement in 2001.

Although New Jersey had implemented standardized testing before the NCLB mandates, New Jersey's assessment system would undergo further changes with the enactment of NCLB. New Jersey revised its elementary assessment, which became the New Jersey Assessment Skills and Knowledge (NJ ASK3) in 2003, and the ESPA became the New Jersey Assessment Skills and Knowledge (NJ ASK3) in 2003, and the ESPA became the New Jersey Assessment Skills the changes in compliance with NCLB mandates.

Despite the fact that New Jersey made several changes prior to the adaptation of NCLB, the state did not have a smooth transition with the adoption and implementation of NCLB mandates, specifically because of New Jersey's long tradition of home rule as well as the state's multiple governing bodies, the state's Division of Abbott Implementation, The state's Title I office and the New Jersey Department of Education. To further complicate the adaptation of NCLB mandates, school districts labeled Abbott districts were often encumbered with various plans and directives frequently contradictory to NCLB.

NCLB mandates required schools that failed to meet AYP for two consecutive years to provide parents with school choice and those that failed to meet AYP for three consecutive years to offer students school choice and Supplemental Educational Services (SES). Like many other states, New Jersey was slow to comply with providing students with SES services. Providing school choice under the provisions of NCLB was almost nonexistent. The nature of the school structure in New Jersey made it very difficult for school districts to provide educational alternatives to students. Often, there were few alternative opportunities in the existing school district. In the cases where school districts did have alternative school choices, the choices were limited as the need often was greater than the availability.

While districts in New Jersey were generally more successful in complying with the Supplemental Educational Services (SES) provisions of NCLB than with school choice, the overall picture was one of significant variability. The success of the adaptation, like many other NCLB mandates, was highly dependent on the district. The New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) provided guidance, but the lack of set regulations or standards that districts were mandated to implement or follow led to inconsistencies. This lack of regulation resulted in a lower number of students receiving SES than the number of eligible students, based on the number of schools failing to meet AYP.

Lastly, NCLB mandates required schools that failed to meet AYP in four years to submit a corrective action plan. Those that failed to meet AYP in five years must restructure either "the school's governance...[open] as a charter school...or replace all or most of the school staff which may include the principal" (McGuinn 172). NJDOE gave schools flexibility in the options they chose to implement to address schools in the restructuring phase. NJDOE also adopted Collaborative Assessment and Planning for Achievement (CAPA) Teams to provide districts with interventions prior to reaching the restructuring phase. Although CAPA Teams were taunted for providing direct support for schools failing to meet AYP, especially with analyzing student data, CAPA teams were limited in the scope of assistance they could provide mainly due to the expense of CAPA, limited staffing, lack of additional funding for districts to implement recommendations, as well as limited focus on professional development and instructional interventions to address struggling students. The inconsistencies in the implementation of NCLB regulations and the dependence of home rule would have an effect on the ability for New Jersey to close the achievement gap between black and white students in the state.

### CHAPTER 3

### TEST DATA

One of the conditions in the NCLB legislation required all states to implement more rigorous standards to impact the achievement gap. Each state responded to these mandates differently with varying rigor, primarily through state assessments, curriculum changes, and proficiency cut scores. Without a universal assessment, it becomes challenging to compare New Jersey's success in closing or shrinking the achievement gap, one of the goals of NCLB, between white and black students, with those of other states. The closest method compares the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Score's national averages with New Jersey's NAEP scores and students' growth percentage on N.J.'s state assessments over ten years to the rate of growth on NAEP. Scores of white students in New Jersey should be compared to the performance of black and white students nationally.

NAEP was first administered in 1969 to measure student achievement nationally. (NAEP U.S. History: U.S. History Results) Educators use the results to measure elementary and secondary school students' educational performance trends. These results frequently inform assessments of national progress and drive improvements in educational policy (NAEP U.S. History: U.S. History Results). Lastly, in order to measure if the performance gap between black and white students closed between 2000 - 2010, it is essential to compare the percentage of performance progress between black and white students in New Jersey on the NAEP as well as the percentage of performance progress between black and white students on the New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJASK) and Grade Eight Proficiency Assessment (GEPA). Students on both the NAEP, NJASK, and GEPA were scored either partially proficient

(indicating the student did not meet grade-level standards), proficient (indicating the student met grade-level standards), or advanced proficient (indicating the student exceeded grade-level standards). It is also important to note that NAEP scores only estimate a sample size because NAEP only assesses a random selection of students, not every eligible student. Lastly, students selected to take the NAEP do not take the entire NAEP assessment but a sample. Therefore, "measurement variance arises from the fact that a student's proficiency in a subject (e.g., how good the student is at mathematics) is not directly observed, but has to be estimated based on the answers that the student provides to the items on the assessment. It is possible that, were the assessment given on a different day, the student might provide slightly different answers. Similarly, a different version of the assessment, comprised of different but equally valid items, would give slightly different estimates of students' proficiency" (National Center for Education Statistics). As such, NAEP proficiency calculations differ notably from the NJASK and NJ GEPA, where every eligible student completes the assessment.

From the 2000 to 2011 administration of the NAEP, 12% more students scored proficient and advanced on the NAEP 4th grade math assessment in New Jersey compared to 8% more students nationally. As seen in Table 1, the difference in scores between black and white students nationally ranged from 33% to as high as 36%, while in New Jersey, the differences in scores between black and white students ranged from 36% to 43%. Also, black students in New Jersey in 4th grade outperformed black students nationally in math by seven percentage points. Although black students in New Jersey outperformed their national counterparts, black students nationally consistently improved their scores annually on the 4th-grade math assessment. Black students in New Jersey outperformed black students nationally and saw a 100% growth compared to an 89% growth of black students nationally from 2003- 2011. This trend is also evident in the data for white students when comparing NAEP scores, although the difference is not as pronounced. White students in New Jersey experienced a 25.49% growth on the 4th grade NAEP Math assessment compared to white students nationally, who experienced a 23.81% growth on the 4th grade NAEP math assessment. Both black and white students in New Jersey outperformed their peers nationally on the 4th-grade math NAEP assessment.

		Average scale score	% Proficient and Advanced	Average scale score	% Proficient and Advanced	Delta
Year	Jurisdiction	Black Students	Black Students	White Students	White Students	
2000	National					
	New Jersey					
2003	National	216	9%	243	42%	-33%
	New Jersey	217	12%	248	51%	-39%
2005	National	220	13%	246	47%	-34%
	New Jersey	224	17%	251	55%	-38%
2007	National	222	15%	248	51%	-36%
	New Jersey	232	26%	255	62%	-36%
2009	National	222	16%	248	50%	-34%
	New Jersey	228	20%	255	63%	-43%
2011	National	224	17%	249	52%	-35%
	New Jersey	231	24%	256	64%	-40%

 Table 1: NAEP Average scale scores and percentages for grade 4 Mathematics

The grade 8 mathematics assessment data showed similar trends. From the 2000 to 2011 administration of the NAEP, 17% more students scored proficient and advanced on the NAEP 8th grade math assessment in New Jersey compared to 7% of students nationally. As seen in Table 2, the difference in scores between black and white students nationally ranged from 28%

to as high as 31%, while in New Jersey, the differences in scores between black and white students ranged from 31% to 38%. Unlike the 4th grade assessment, there was a steady increase in the percentage of black students who scored proficient or advanced in New Jersey and nationally. Black students in New Jersey outperformed black students nationally and saw a 200% growth over the ten years compared to a 140% growth of black students nationally. White students also outperformed their peers nationally and saw a 10.20% increase in scores compared to a 5% increase in 8th-grade math scores of white students nationally, which resulted in a 37.21% growth compared to a 13.1% growth of white students nationally.

		Average scale score	% Proficient and Advanced	Average scale score	% Proficient and Advanced	Delta
Year	Jurisdiction	Black Students	Black Students	White Students	White Students	
2000	National	243	5%	283	33%	-28%
	New Jersey					
2003	National	252	7%	287	38%	-31%
	New Jersey		7%	292	43%	-36%
2005	National	254	9%	288	37%	-28%
	New Jersey	260	11%	295	47%	-36%
2007	National	259	11%	290	41%	-30%
	New Jersey	264	14%	298	52%	-38%
2009	National	260	12%	292	42%	-30%
	New Jersey	267	16%	302	54%	-38%
2011	National	262	12%	293	43%	-31%
	New Jersey	272	21%	304	59%	-38%

 Table 2: NAEP Average scale scores and percentages for grade 8 Mathematics

Both black and white students' achievement trends in the NAEP 4th and 8th-grade

reading assessments mirrored those observed in the NAEP 4th and 8th-grade math assessments.

From the 2000 to 2011 administration of the NAEP, 11% more students scored proficient and advanced on the NAEP 4th grade reading assessment in New Jersey compared to 7% more nationally. As seen in Table 3, the difference in scores between black and white students nationally ranged from 26% to as high as 27%, while in New Jersey, the differences in scores between black and white students ranged from 29% to 35%. Although black students in New Jersey outperformed black students nationally on the 4th-grade reading assessment, both saw similar growth. Black students nationally experienced a 77% growth, while black students in New Jersey experienced a 78% growth on the 4th grade reading assessment from 2000 to 2011. While black students in New Jersey demonstrated improved performance compared to their national peers, white students in New Jersey were surpassed by their national counterparts on the 4th-grade reading assessment. White students in New Jersey saw an increase of 5% in students who scored proficient or advanced proficient, resulting in 10.2% growth. White students nationally saw an increase of 6% more students scoring proficient or advanced in the 4th-grade reading assessment, resulting in 16.6% growth.

		Average scale score	% Proficient and Advanced	Average scale score	% Proficient and Advanced	Delta
Year	Jurisdiction	Black Students	Black Students	White Students	White Students	
2000	National	189	9%	223	36%	-27%
	New Jersey					
2003	National	197	13%	227	40%	-27%
	New Jersey	200	14%	235	49%	-35%
2005	National	199	13%	228	40%	-27%
	New Jersey	199	15%	232	46%	-31%
2007	National	203	14%	230	41%	-27%
	New Jersey	212	22%	238	52%	-30%
2009	National	204	15%	229	41%	-26%

		New Jersey	213	19%	237	51%	-32%
2	2011	National	205	16%	230	42%	-26%
		New Jersey	216	25%	239	54%	-29%

Table 3: NAEP Average scale scores and percentages for grade 4 Reading

Lastly, from the 2000 to 2011 administration of the NAEP grade 8 reading assessment, 5% more students scored proficient and advanced in New Jersey compared to 3% more nationally. As seen in Table 4, the difference in scores between black and white students nationally ranged from 26% to as high as 27%, while in New Jersey, the differences in scores between black and white students ranged from 30% to 35%. Although black students in New Jersey outperformed black students nationally on the 8th-grade reading assessment, growth for black students nationally and in New Jersey was small. Black students nationally experienced a 25% growth. In comparison, black students in New Jersey experienced a 31% growth on the 8thgrade reading assessment from 2000 to 2011, a smaller percentage of growth than in math in grades 4 and 8. For white students, 10% more students scored proficient and advanced on the 8th-grade reading assessment in New Jersey compared to 3% more students nationally, which resulted in 21.74% growth in the 8th-grade reading scores compared to white students nationally who experienced 5.13% growth on the 8th-grade NAEP reading assessment.

		Average scale score	% Proficient and Advanced	Average scale score	% Proficient and Advanced	Delta
Yea r	Jurisdiction	Black Students	Black Students	White Students	White Students	
2002	National	244	12%	271	39%	-27%
	New Jersey					
2003	National	244	12%	270	39%	-27%
	New Jersey	248	16%	277	46%	-30%

2005	National	242	11%	269	37%	-26%
	New Jersey	251	15%	278	48%	-33%
2007	National	244	11%	270	38%	-27%
	New Jersey	249	16%	278	48%	-32%
2009	National	245	12%	271	39%	-27%
	New Jersey	250	18%	281	51%	-33%
2011	National	248	15%	272	41%	-26%
	New Jersey	256	21%	284	56%	-35%

Table 4: NAEP Average scale scores and percentages for grade 8th Grade Reading

It is essential to evaluate the effect NCLB mandates had on closing the performance gap in New Jersey compared with other states by looking at NAEP scores and comparing black students in New Jersey to black students nationally. Although black students outperformed their peers nationally, the performance gap between black and white students on the NAEP assessment, NJASK, and GEPA persists, especially when comparing the percentage of black students who scored proficient and advanced on the New Jersey assessments to those on the NAEP as seen in Table 5. Would the achievement gap between black and white students in New Jersey remain when comparing student achievement on New Jersey's state assessments? Although black students in New Jersey outperformed their peers nationally in 4th and 8th-grade math and reading, the percentage of black students who scored proficient or advanced on the NAEP compared to those who scored proficient or advanced on the NJASK and GEPA is dramatically lower. In 2003, 12% of black students scored proficient or advanced on the NAEP 4th grade math assessment compared to 41.9% of black students who scored proficient or advanced on the NJASK. By 2009, the number of black students who scored proficient or advanced on the NAEP 4th grade math increased to 20% compared to 50.5% of black students

who scored proficient or advanced on the NJASK. We observe this same trend in both the 4thgrade reading and the 8th-grade math and reading assessments. (see Table 5)

	4th grade math	4th grade math	4th grade reading	4th grade reading	8th grade math	8th grade math	8th grade reading	8th grade reading
	NJASK: % of black students proficient and Advanced	NAEP: % of black students proficient and Advanced	NJASK: % of black students proficient and Advanced	NAEP: % of black students proficient and Advanced	NJASK: % of black students proficient and Advanced	NAEP: % of black students proficient and Advanced	NJASK: % of black students proficient and Advanced	NAEP: % of black students proficient and Advanced
2003	41.9	12	58	14	24.9	7	47.5	16
2005	60.4	17	65.5	15	30.3	11	47.8	15
2007	68.3	26	62.9	22	38.4	14	49	16
0000	50.5		00.0	10	44.0	40	61.6	10

Table 5: NJ Assessment results compared to NAEP Results (black students)

White students also show a similar trend. Although white students in New Jersey outperformed their peers nationally on the NAEP in 4th and 8th-grade math and 8th-grade reading, the percentage of white students scoring proficient or advanced on the NAEP compared with the NJASK and GEPA is also dramatically lower. In 2003, 51% of white students scored proficient or advanced on the NAEP 4th grade math assessment compared to 78.6% of white students who scored proficient or advanced on the NJASK. By 2009, the number of white students scoring proficient or advanced on the NAEP 4th grade math increased to 61% compared to 81.8% of white students who scored proficient or advanced on the NAEP 4th grade math increased to 61% compared to 81.8% of white students who scored proficient or advanced on the NAEP 4th grade math increased to 61% compared to 81.8% of white students who scored proficient or advanced on the NJASK. We observe this trend in the 4th grade reading and the GEPA 8th grade math and reading assessments. (see Table

	4th grade math	4th grade math	4th grade reading	4th grade reading	8th grade math	8th grade math	8th grade reading	8th grade reading
	NJASK: % of white students proficient and Advanced	NAEP: % of white students proficient and Advanced	NJASK: % of white students proficient and Advanced	NAEP: % of white students proficient and Advanced	NJASK: % of white students proficient and Advanced	NAEP: % of white students proficient and Advanced	NJASK: % of white students proficient and Advanced	NAEP: % of white students proficient and Advanced
2003	78.6	51	86.9	49	69.2	43	84.9	46
2005	88	55	89.8	46	75.4	47	88.3	48
2007	90.9	62	87.8	52	80.3	52	83.2	48
2009	81.8	63	74.2	51	81.6	54	90.7	51

Table 6: NJ Assessment Result comparing NAEP Results (white students)

Both black and white students in New Jersey outperformed their peers nationally on the NAEP. However, the percentage of black and white students who scored proficient and advanced on the NAEP compared to New Jersey's assessments is dramatically lower.

## NEW JERSEY STATE ASSESSMENT: MATH DATA

Before the enactment of NCLB mandates, New Jersey changed their implementation of mandatory assessments and adopted more rigorous content standards in compliance with NCLB mandates. These changes aimed to ultimately increase the achievement of black and white students and shrink the gap between black and white students in math and reading scores. In 2003, all fourth-grade students took the New Jersey Assessment Skills and Knowledge test. Like the NAEP, "The scores range from 100-199 (Partially Proficient), 200-249 (Proficient), and 250-300 (Advanced Proficient)" (New Jersey Assessment of skills and knowledge).

From the 2002 to 2010 administration of the NJASK, there was growth in the achievement level of black students in math, but the growth was inconsistent. As seen in Table 7, 38.9% of black students scored proficient and advanced on the 2002 NJASK grade 4 math test. Subsequently, in the 2010 administration of the NJASK grade 4 math test, 55% of black students scored proficient and advanced. Over the eight years, there was a 13.1% increase in the number of grade 4 black students who scored proficient and advanced on the NJASK 4. The most significant increase in black students scoring proficient and advanced occurred during the 2008 NJASK 4 administration, where 68% of grade 4 black students scored proficient and advanced. Comparatively, 80.3% of white students scored proficient and advanced on the 2002 NJASK grade 4 math test. During the 2010 administration of the NJASK grade 4 math test, 85.4% of white students scored proficient and advanced. Over the eight years, there was a 6.8% increase in grade 4 white students who scored proficient and advanced on the NJASK 4. Although there was an increase in the percentage of grade 4 black students who scored proficient and advanced on the NJASK math test from 2002-2010, and the performance gap between black grade 4 students and white grade 4 students decreased, the gap between the two groups remained high. The difference in performance between black and white students during the 2002-2003 administration of the grade 4 NJASK math test was 39.4% and decreased as low as 23.4% during the 2006-2007 NJASK grade 4 math test. (see Table 7)

	Black Proficient and Advanced Grade 4	White Proficient and Advanced Grade 4	Delta
2002	38.9	80.3	-41.4
2003	41.9	78.6	-39.4
2004	50.2	81.1	-30.9
2005	60.4	88	-27.6
2006	63.4	89.8	-26.4
2007	68.3	90.9	-22.6
2008	68	91.6	-23.6
2009	50.5	81.8	-31.3
2010	55	85.4	-30.4

Table 7: Percentage of students scoring proficient and advanced proficient on the NJASK 4 Math

# **EIGHTH GRADE MATH**

Like the NJASK 4 assessment, New Jersey also changed their grade 8 assessment to comply with NCLB mandates. During the 2002 to 2010 administration of the GEPA 8th grade test, there was growth in the achievement level of black students in math, but as with the NJASK 4 assessment results, the growth was not consistent. On the 2002 GEPA grade 8 math test, 24.9% of black students scored proficient and advanced. In the 2010 administration of the GEPA grade 8 math test, 42.5% of black students scored proficient and advanced. As seen in Table 8, over the eight years during the administration of the GEPA, there was a 17.6% increase in the number of grade 8 black students who scored proficient and advanced on the GEPA. The most significant increase in black students scoring proficient and advanced occurred during the 2009
administration, where 44.6% of grade 8 black students scored proficient and advanced. On the 2002 GEPA grade 8 math test, 70.2% of white students scored proficient and advanced compared to the 2010 administration of the NJASK grade 8 math test, where 78.2% of white students scored proficient and advanced. Over the eight years, there was a 9% increase in grade 8 white students who scored proficient and advanced on the GEPA. The largest increase occurred during the 2009 administration of the test, where 81.6% of white students scored proficient and advanced.

Although there was an increase in the percentage of grade 8 black students who scored proficient and advanced on the GEPA math test from 2002-2010, and the gap between black grade 8 students and white grade 8 students decreased, the gap between the two groups remained high. The achievement gap during the 2002-2003 grade 8 GEPA math test administration was 44.3%. The achievement gap increased as high as 46.2% during the 2006 test administration and decreased as low as 35.7% during the 2010 GEPA grade 8 math test.

(see Table 8)

	Black Proficient and Advanced Grade 8	White Proficient and Advanced Grade 8	Delta
2002	24.9	70.2	-45.3
2003	24.9	69.2	-44.3
2004	30.2	74.2	-44
2005	30.3	75.4	-45.1
2006	31.7	77.9	-46.2
2007	38.4	80.3	-41.9

2008	38.1	79.1	-41
2009	44.6	81.6	-37
2010	42.5	78.2	-35.7

Table 8: Percentage of students scoring proficient and advanced proficient on the GEPA Math

#### **ELEVENTH GRADE MATH**

Similar to the grade four and eight assessments, authorities changed the high school math assessment to comply with NCLB mandates. During the 2002 to 2010 administration of the HSPA 11th grade Math test, there was consistent growth in the achievement level of black students. On the 2002 HSPA grade 11 math test, 35.6% of black students scored proficient and advanced. During the 2010 administration of the HSPA grade 11 math test, 46.9% of black students scored proficient and advanced. As seen in Table 9, over eight years, there was an 11.3% increase in the number of grade 11 black students who scored proficient and advanced on the HSPA math test. The most significant increase in black students scoring proficient and advanced occurred during the 2010 administration, where 46.9% of grade 11 black students scored proficient and advanced in math. Comparatively, on the 2002 HSPA grade 11 math test, 79.3% of white students scored proficient and advanced, and during the 2010 administration of the HSPA grade 11 math test, 83.7% of white students scored proficient and advanced. Over the eight years, there was a 4.4% increase in grade 11 white students who scored proficient and advanced on the HSPA math. The most significant increase occurred during the 2006 administration of the test, where 86.1% of white students scored proficient and advanced.

Although there was an increase in the percentage of grade 11 black students who scored proficient and advanced on the HSPA math test from 2002-2010, and the performance gap between black grade 11 students and white grade 11 students decreased, the performance gap

remained high. The performance gap during the 2002 administration of the grade 11 HSPA math test was 43.7%. The performance gap increased as high as 44.5% during the 2003 test administration and decreased as low as 36.8% during the 2010 HSPA grade 11 math test. (see Table 9)

	Black Proficient and Advanced Grade 11	White Proficient and Advanced Grade 11	Delta
2002	35.6	79.3	-43.7
2003	32.8	77.3	-44.5
2004	38.7	81	-42.3
2005	46.8	85.3	-38.5
2006	46.3	86.1	-39.8
2007	43	83.8	-40.8
2008	44.9	85.2	-40.3
2009	42.7	82.9	-40.2
2010	46.9	83.7	-36.8

Table 9: Percentage scoring proficient and advanced proficient on the HSPA 11 Math

## **READING ASSESSMENT DATA**

In preparation for compliance with NCLB mandates, New Jersey also changed their reading assessment and content standards to increase the percentage of students reading on grade level by the end of grade 3 and lessen the achievement gap between black and white students.

(Historical Context: Overview of New Jersey's Statewide Testing Program) On the 2002 NJASK grade 4 reading test, 60.8% of black students scored proficient and advanced. During the 2010 administration of the NJASK grade 4 reading test, 38.3% of black students scored proficient and advanced. As seen in Table 10, over the eight years, there was a 22.5% decrease in the number of grade 4 black students who scored proficient and advanced on the NJASK 4 reading assessment.

The most significant increase in black students scoring proficient and advanced occurred during the 2008 administration, where 66.9% of grade 4 black students scored proficient and advanced. The most significant decrease in black students scoring proficient and advanced occurred during the 2010 administration, where only 38.3 % of grade 4 black students scored proficient and advanced. Comparatively, on the 2002 NJASK grade 4 reading test, 86.9% of white students scored proficient and advanced. During the 2010 administration of the NJASK grade 4 reading test, 70% of white students scored proficient and advanced. Over the eight years, there was a 16.9% decrease in the number of grade 4 white students scored proficient and advanced on the NJASK 4. The most significant increase in white students scoring proficient and advanced occurred during the 2004 administration, where 89.1% of grade 4 white students scoring proficient and advanced. The most significant decrease in white students scoring proficient and advanced occurred during the 2010 administration, where only 70 % of grade 4 white students scoring proficient and advanced occurred during the 2010 administration, where only 70 % of grade 4 white students scoring proficient and advanced occurred during the 2010 administration, where only 70 % of grade 4 white students scoring proficient and advanced occurred during the 2010 administration, where only 70 % of grade 4 white students scoring proficient and advanced occurred during the 2010 administration, where only 70 % of grade 4 white students scored proficient and advanced.

Although there was a decrease in the percentage of grade 4 black students who scored proficient and advanced on the NJASK reading test from 2002-2010, the performance gap between black grade 4 students and white grade 4 students increased. The performance gap during the 2002-2003 administration of the grade 4 NJASK reading test was 28.9%. The

performance gap increased to 34.6% during the 2008-2009 NJASK grade 4 reading test and as low as 23% during the 2003-2004 administration of the NJASK 4 reading test. (see Table 10)

	Black Proficient and Advanced Grade 4	White Proficient and Advanced Grade 4	Delta
2002	60.8	86.9	-26.1
2003	58	86.9	-28.9
2004	66.8	89.8	-23
2005	65.5	88.6	-23.1
2006	62.9	87.8	-24.9
2007	62.9	87.4	-24.5
2008	66.9	89.1	-22.2
2009	39.6	74.2	-34.6
2010	38.3	70	-31.7

Table 10 Percentage scoring proficient and advanced proficient on the NJASK 4 Reading

## EIGHTH GRADE READING

Like the NJASK 4 reading assessment, New Jersey also changed their grade 8 assessment to comply with NCLB mandates. During the 2002 to 2010 administration of the GEPA 8th grade reading test, there was consistent growth in the achievement level of black students. As seen in Table 11, on the 2002 GEPA grade 8 reading test, 45.7% of black students scored proficient and advanced. In the 2010 administration of the GEPA grade 8 reading test, 64.5% of black students scored proficient and advanced. Over the eight years, there was an 18.8% increase in grade 8 black students who scored proficient and advanced on the GEPA reading test. The most tremendous increase in black students scoring proficient and advanced occurred during the 2010 administration, where 64.5% of black students in grade 8 scored proficient and advanced. Comparatively, on the 2002 GEPA grade 8 reading test, 84.3% of white students scored proficient and advanced. During the 2010 administration of the GEPA grade 8 reading test, 90.4% of white students scored proficient and advanced. Over the eight years, there was a 5.5% increase of white students in grade 8 who scored proficient and advanced on the GEPA reading. The most significant increase occurred during the 2009 administration of the test, where 90.7% of white students scored proficient and advanced.

Between 2002 and 2010, there was also an increase in the percentage of grade 8 black students who scored proficient and advanced on the GEPA reading test, accompanied by a decrease in the gap between black grade 8 students and white grade 8 students. The performance gap during the 2003 grade 8 GEPA reading test administration was 37.4%. The gap increased as high as 40.5% during the 2005 test administration and decreased as low as 25.9% during the 2010 GEPA grade 8 reading test. (see Table 11)

	Black Proficient and Advanced Grade 8	White Proficient and Advanced Grade 8	Delta
2002	45.7	84.3	-38.6
2003	47.5	84.9	-37.4
2004	46.4	83.2	-36.8
2005	47.8	88.3	-40.5
2006	50.1	85.4	-35.3
2007	49	83.2	-34.2
2008	61.6	90	-28.4

2009	61.6	90.7	-29.1
2010	64.5	90.4	-25.9

Table 11 Percentage scoring proficient and advanced proficient on the GEPA Reading

## **ELEVENTH GRADE READING**

Like the grade four and eight assessments, the high school reading assessment was also changed to comply with NCL mandates. During the 2002 to 2010 administration of the HSPA 11th grade reading test, there was consistent growth in the achievement level of black students in reading. As seen in Table 12, on the 2002 HSPA grade 11 reading test, 62.6% of black students scored proficient and advanced. Eight years later, in the 2010 administration of the HSPA grade 11 reading test, 70.4% of black students scored proficient and advanced. Over the eight years, there was a 7.8% increase in grade 11 black students who scored proficient and advanced on the HSPA reading test. The greatest increase in black students scoring proficient and advanced occurred during the 2010 administration, where 70.4% of grade 11 black students scored proficient and advanced in reading. Comparatively, on the HSPA grade 11 reading test in 2002, 88.3% of white students scored proficient and advanced, and during the 2010 administration of the HSPA grade 11 reading test, 93.9% of white students scored proficient and advanced. Over the eight years, there was a 5.6% increase in the number of grade 11 white students who scored proficient and advanced on the HSPA reading. The most significant increase occurred during the 2010 administration of the test, where 93.9% of white students scored proficient and advanced.

Although there was an increase in the percentage of grade 11 black students who scored proficient and advanced on the HSPA reading test from 2002-2010, and the performance gap between black grade 11 and white grade 11 students decreased, as with the grade 4 and grade 8 reading assessments, the difference in the performance gap remained high. The performance gap

during the 2003 administration of the grade 11 HSPA reading test was 25.7%, increased as high as 28% during the 2009 administration, and decreased as low as 23.3% during the 2007 HSPA grade 11 reading test. (see Table 12)

	Black Proficient and Advanced Grade 11	White Proficient and Advanced Grade 11	Delta
2002	62.6	88.3	-25.7
2003	60.5	88	-27.5
2004	65.4	89.9	-24.5
2005	65.6	91	-25.4
2006	64.3	91.5	-27.2
2007	69	92.3	-23.3
2008	64.5	90.3	-25.8
2009	63.2	91.2	-28
2010	70.4	93.9	-23.5

Table 12: Percentage of students scoring proficient and advanced proficient on the HSPA 11 Reading

## **DATA IMPLEMENTATION**

New Jersey's implementation of NCLB mandates was to increase the achievement of all students, but also close the achievement gap between historically marginalized students.

The achievement gap in education according to Susan Ansell,

"refers to the disparity in academic performance between groups of students... [that] shows up in

grades, standardized-test scores, course selection, dropout rates, and college-completion rates,

among other success measures. It is most often used to describe the troubling performance gaps between African-American and Hispanic students, at the lower end of the performance scale, and their non-Hispanic white peers, and the similar academic disparity between students from lowincome families and those who are better off" (Ansell par. 1).

Looking at New Jersey's test scores over ten years of implementing NCLB in New Jersey to determine if the achievement gap was closing, student scores in grades 4, 8, and 11 on the state assessment increased, except for the 4th grade reading assessment. There was a steady decline in the gap between black and white students on all tests, but the 4th grade reading assessment saw a steady decline, but then a sharp increase in the performance gap. This is evidenced by the scores in reading and math over ten years on the 4th, 8th, and 11th grade state assessments. Over ten years, 60.8% of black students scored proficient or advanced in reading in 2002 and 38.3% in reading in 2010 in grade 4, resulting in a regression of 37.1%. On the 8th grade reading assessment, 45.7% of black students scored proficient or advanced in reading in 2002 and 64.5% in 2010 in grade 8, resulting in a growth of 41.14%. Lastly, on the 11th grade reading assessment, 62.6% of black students scored proficient or advanced in reading in 2002 and 70.4% in 2010 resulting in growth of 12.46%. Additionally, from 2002-2010, 38.9% of black students scored proficient or advanced in math in 2002 and 55% in math, a growth of 41.39%. In 2010 in grade four, 24.9% of black students scored proficient or advanced in math in 2002 and 42.5% in 2010 in grade 8, a growth of 70.68%. Lastly, 35.6% of black students scored proficient or advanced in math in 2002 and 46.9% in reading in 2010 in grade 11 resulting in a growth of 31.74%. Based on gains in achievement of black students on the three state assessments, the achievement gap between black and white students decreased except for the NJASK reading test.

	Math 2002	Math 2010	Math Average Delta	Reading 2002	Reading 2010	Reading Average Delta
4th grade NJASK	-41.4	-30.4	-39.4	-26.1	-31.7	-26.5
8th grade GEPA	-45.3	-35.7	-42.27	-38.6	-25.9	-34
11th grade HSPA	-43.7	-36.8	-40.76	-25.7	-23.5	-25.65

Table 13: Average delta of black and white students scoring proficient and advanced proficient from 2002-2010

As seen in Table 13, the average differences between black and white students in achievement from 2002 through 2010 decreased, with the average differences between black and white students on the HSPA 11 reading assessment remaining the same over the eight years.

The decrease of the performance gap between black and white students can be attributed to growth in all scores except for the sizable decrease in scores of black students, as well as white students, on the NJASK reading test in 2009 and 2010. Prior to 2009, there was steady growth in the NJASK reading scores for black students, although only in small percentages. Proficiency rates rose from 60.8% in 2002 to 66.9% in 2008, a growth of 10.03%. The increase in reading scores narrowed the performance gap of students who scored proficient and advanced between black and white students in grade 4 reading to 22.2% points. The upward trend ended during the 2009 and 2010 administration of the NJASK grade 4 reading test. What could have accounted for such a slide in the performance of both black and white students?

Proficiency rates for black students dropped 27.3% in the percentage of black students performing on or above grade level on the NJASK 4 reading test and 14.9% in the percentage of white students performing at or above grade level on the NJASK 4 reading test in just one year.

This regression in performance for black and white students did not occur in the grade 8 or grade 11 assessment.

The content area that revealed the most progress from 2002 to 2010 was math, whose scores were deficient before NCLB compared to reading scores. Math proficiency rates in 2002 were 38.9% proficient and advanced in the 4th grade for black students, while reading proficiency rates were 60.8% proficient and advanced. The performance gap between black and white students was 41.4% points in math, but 26.1 % in reading. This same trend was seen in the grade 8 assessments. During the 2002 GEPA assessment, 24.9% of black students performed at or above grade level in math, while 45.7% performed at or above grade level in reading. The performance gap between black and white students was 45.3% points in math and 38.6% points in reading. The results on the grade 11 HSPA assessment showed a similar trend. In 2002, 35.6% of black students performed at or above grade level in reading. The performance gap between black and white students and white students in math, and 62.6% performed at or above grade level in reading. The performance between black and white students in math, and math and 38.7% points, but 25.7% points in reading. For grade 4 and grade 11, the difference in performance between black and white students in math was almost double that in reading. (see Tables 7-12)

Although the data shows sizable gains in math in grades 4, 8, and 11 and in reading for grades 8 and 11, there is still a sizable difference between black and white students who score proficient or advanced. Therefore, more work must be done to address math and reading education and look at how access to opportunities result in such differences in scores. The data is especially significant for grade 4 reading, where the upward trend in gains for both black and white students ended during the 2009 and 2010 NJASK 4 reading assessments. What contributed

to the loss of reading achievements in the grade 4 NJASK in 2009 and 2010? Was the loss of achievement in 2009 and 2010 indicative of a change in the test?

## **CHANGES IN THE TEST**

After years of a steady increase in the percentage of black students in grades 4, 8, and 11 scoring proficient and advanced proficient on the state assessment since the inception of NCLB, those numbers notably declined, particularly during the 2009 NJASK 4 reading assessment. During the Spring 2009 test administration, 4th-grade scores for black students in reading regressed by 27.3 percentage points and in math by 17.5 percentage points compared to the Spring 2008 NJASK 4 assessment. Additionally, 4th-grade scores for white students in reading regressed by 14.9 percentage points and math by 9.8 percentage points compared to the Spring 2008 NJASK 4 assessment. Because sizable losses occurred with black and white students, the achievement loss can be attributed to changes made in the test.

School districts that traditionally tested well also saw considerable changes in the percentage of students who scored proficient or advanced. Mike Yaple, a spokesperson for the New Jersey School Boards Association, stated that with the sudden decrease in scores, in several school districts "it may appear as if suddenly larger numbers of students aren't doing quite as well. That's because the bar has been raised" (Alloway par. 15). State Education Commissioner Lucille Davey orchestrated these changes, who believed that the "changes effectively raised the passing scores needed in both language arts and math for grades 5-7 [and the following year grades 3-4.] [Davey stated that] In some cases, the previous bar was so low students needed just 33% of the questions correct to be deemed 'proficient'" (Mooney par. 19). Davey went on to say that changes in the test "...gives schools a clearer indication at an earlier grade level that a child may need more help in making sure the skills that are necessary are being

developed" (Alloway par. 7). According to Assistant State Commissioner Gantwerk, the need to make changes in the early grades was essential if the state is going to move students forward and have all students performing on grade level.

According to the NJASK technical report, "In 2008 - 2009, the LAL and mathematics assessments in grades 3 and 4 were redesigned to reflect the new test design features implemented in 2007-2008 in grades 5-8....The redesign changes in grades 5-8 ....were also applied to the grade 3 and 4 assessments in 2008-2009" (NJ ASK 2009 Assessment Report). According to the 2009 NJASK Grades 3-8 Technical Report, these changes focused on the following elements:

Language Arts Literacy:

- An increase in the number of reading passages, the length of passages was shortened, and the content of the reading passages was more diverse.
- Two writing prompts (expository writing)
- No more picture prompt writing
- More test items and score points in total
- An increase in the total number of correct questions to score proficient and advanced proficient

# Math:

- New short-constructed response items
- More test items and score points in total
- Two days of testing

Although the same changes were made to the test in 2007-2008 for grades 5-8, grade 8 scores for 2008 saw a smaller percentage of regression. There was a 0.3 percentage point loss of

performance in math for 8th-grade black students from 2007 to 2008 when the changes were implemented in the test design. Conversely, there was a 12.6 percentage point gain in achievement in reading for 8th-grade black students from 2007 to 2008. The changes in the structure of the test did not have the same impact on the achievement of black students in grade 8 as they did on students in grade 4. The change in the redesign of the test, based on the data, did have an impact on the 4th grade. The redesign and increase in proficiency scores contributed to the drop in scores. It was essential to look at the cohort of students who experienced a decline in their scores on their previous year's scores (3rd-grade test results) and the following year's scores (5th-grade test results) to determine whether the regression in performance was a result of the changes in the assessments or the cohort of students.

During their third-grade administration of the NJASK, administered in 2008, 73.7% of black students scored proficient and advanced proficiency in reading compared to 91.6% of white students who scored proficient and advanced proficient in reading. The achievement gap between the two groups was 17.9%. During this same cohort's fourth-grade administration of the NJASK, which was administered in 2009, only 39.6% of black students scored proficient and advanced proficient in reading compared with 74.2% of white students who scored proficient and advanced proficient in reading. The achievement gap between the two groups grew to a 34.6% difference. The following year, when this same cohort of students took the fifth-grade administration of the NJASK in 2010, 41.7% of black students scored proficient and advanced proficient in reading compared to 73% of white students who scored proficient and advanced proficient in reading. The performance gap that year was a 31.3% difference. Although the performance gap lessened, it did not bounce back to the gap of 17.9% during the third-grade

administration of the NJASK. Subsequently, the growth of the performance gap in math for this cohort was less than the growth in reading.

	Black Proficient and Advanced	White Proficient and Advanced	Delta
3rd Grade 2008	73.7	91.6	17.9
4th Grade 2009	39.6	74.2	34.6
5th Grade 2010	41.7	73	31.3

Table 14:Cohort Scores Percentage scoring proficient & advanced proficient on the NJASK ELA

During their third-grade administration of the NJASK, administered in 2008, 71.7% of black students scored proficient and advanced proficient in math compared to 93.1% of white students who scored proficient and advanced proficient in math. The achievement gap between the two groups was 21.4%. During this same cohort's fourth-grade administration of the NJASK, administered in 2009, only 50.5% of black students scored proficient and advanced proficient in math compared with 81.8% of white students who scored proficient and advanced proficient in math. The achievement gap between the two groups grew to a 31.3% difference. The following year, when this same cohort of students took the fifth-grade administration of the NJASK in 2010, 58.3% of black students scored proficient and advanced proficient in math. The achievement gap that year was a 28.8% difference. Although the achievement gap lessened, it was not as great as seen in reading over the three years during the third-grade, fourth-grade, and fifth-grade administrations of the NJASK.

	Black Proficient and Advanced	White Proficient and Advanced	Delta
3rd Grade 2008	71.7	93.1	21.4
4th Grade 2009	50.5	81.8	31.3
5th Grade 2010	58.3	87.1	28.8

Table 15: Cohort Scores Percentage scoring proficient and advanced proficient on the NJASK Math

The achievement gap between black and white students in reading and math on the fourth-grade, eighth-grade, and eleventh-grade tests between 2002 and 2010 narrowed on the fourth-grade math assessment, the eighth-grade math assessment, the eleventh-grade math assessment, and the eleventh-grade reading assessment; this did not occur on the fourth grade or eighth-grade reading assessment. Although the data shows an increase in the percentage of black students scoring proficient and advanced proficient in both reading and math for eighth and eleventh grade, only fourth-grade reading experienced a decline in performance.

A close examination of performance by black and white students on New Jersey's NJ ASK, GEPA and HSPA 11 results indicate that although there was growth in the performance of black students in both math and reading, huge gaps between performance remain. NCLB mandates had not closed most performance gaps to an appreciable degree. When compared to the performance on the same assessments as white students, black students are still performing at least 22 percentage points below that of white students. In some cases, the differences were double. Therefore, the efforts put forth by New Jersey were not enough. Shifting the focus on what is causing the differences in achievement will be the next step.

#### CHAPTER FOUR

## EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES

NCLB mandates were implemented differently by many states. In 2001 the state of New Jersey consisted of 616 school districts, each with its own governing body and boards of education. Additionally, New Jersey had a distinction of "enormous disparities across school districts and [an] increasingly active role of the courts and the Department of Education in school finance and governance" which at times were at odds with NCLB mandates (McGuinn 153). As such, each school district implemented different strategies to close the achievement gap, which was the ultimate goal of NCLB mandates.

Although the term achievement gap has been used historically to describe the disparity in performance on standardized tests, scholars attribute this gap not on achievement, but opportunity. Furthermore, researchers like Sarita Shukla attribute the term achievement gap as part of a deficit thinking model which relies on blaming the victim and views the presence of an achievement gap as the primary problem instead of the symptom of a greater societal problem. Additionally, the focus on the term achievement gap instead of opportunity gaps, "minimizes attention to structural inequalities in education.and draws attention away from finding solutions that promote equitable learning" (Shukla et al. 4). Promoting equity in education was initially the goal of NCLB, but the data indicates that equitable learning did not happen. Schools struggling to meet AYP often focused on test preparation and teaching to the test. Additionally, many schools struggling to meet AYP often narrowed the scope of their curriculum, focusing on the content of the state assessment. As such, students in marginalized communities to whom NCLB

was intended to provide equitable educational opportunities were limited in their educational opportunities.

I interviewed four professionals (see Table 16) who worked in different districts from various district factor groups during NCLB who gave their accounts of their teaching experience under NCLB. What impact did NCLB mandates have on their teaching or district mandates? Two of the professionals were peers currently working in education as administrators, one was a current Superintendent and the other interviewee an Assistant Superintendent. The goal was to seek representation of professionals who worked in schools in high district factor groups, middle district factor groups and low district factor groups. District Factor Groups (DFGs) in New Jersey "were first developed in 1975 for the purpose of comparing students' performance on statewide assessments across demographically similar school districts...Since the DFGs were designed to provide an approximate measure of a community's relative socioeconomic status (SES), the classification system provided a useful tool for examining student achievement and comparing similarly-situated school districts" (District Factor Groups (DFG) for School Districts).

District factor groups are derived from census data using seven data points which include the percentage of the district population without a high school diploma, occupational status, percentage of individuals at or below the poverty level, population density, percentage of the district population with some college, medium family income of the district, and unemployment rate of the district. Districts are ranked from lowest socioeconomic status, District Factor Group A, to highest socioeconomic status, District Factor Group J. One of the interviewees worked in a County School which accepts students from multiple districts as well as District Factor Groups. The District Factor Groups assigned were derived from the 2000 census data.

Interview's Assigned Name	Position Held	District Factor Group
Larry	High School Teacher	G-H
	High School Vice Principal	
Katherine	Special Education Teacher	Ι
	Reading Specialist	
Katelyn	Vice Principal	County School District
Andrew	Vice Principal	А
	District Level Administrator	

Table 16

NCLB had an impact on educators during its implementation. The impact varied greatly depending on the position the educator held as well as the district in which each educator worked. I interviewed four educators who were working in education during NCLB to gain a perspective regarding their experience and how they were impacted by the mandates. Each participant was asked a series of scripted questions. (see Appendix A) Although each interviewee was asked a series of scripted questions, many times the conversations developed organically. Interviews took place in various places. All interviews took place in person. The purpose of the interviews was to give perspective to the data; to give a personal account of how the mandates impacted instruction in schools in multiple districts which may provide insight.

## NCLB STARTED CONVERSATIONS ABOUT SUBGROUP DISPARITIES

Larry was a high school teacher, vice principal, and principal in a suburban district with a district factor group G-H from 2003 through 2010 during the implementation of No Child Left Behind mandates. Larry worked as a teacher and an administrator in two school districts where

students traditionally performed well on state assessments prior to NCLB mandates. As a teacher, Larry never had to focus on the results of state assessments. Larry explained how the implementation of NCLB impacted his role as a teacher and an administrator. When NCLB was implemented, Larry indicated that for the first time in his career, he and his colleagues looked at the performance of groups traditionally omitted from the conversation.

Larry indicated that as a high school teacher prior to NCLB, he never focused on the performance gap between his students. NCLB forced educators like himself to look at subgroups as a school community. For the first time in his career, Larry was engaged in discourse about the performance of groups traditionally omitted from the conversation. Larry explained that "When it came to African American and Latino students, too many people evaded the conversation because it centered on race." Disaggregation of scores forced educators to engage in these conversations.

Larry believes that schools like the ones in which he worked who scored in the ninetieth percentile, patted themselves on the back for the scores their district received as a whole. By looking at the school's scores as a whole, Larry's district believed they were doing well. The district could no longer do that with the mandates in NCLB. Larry indicated that the "Disaggregation of scores uncovered some things in our practices that should have been talked about, and they did not have to be talked about in many places." Larry was referring to some communities with small numbers of minority students. Larry further elaborated, "If you had less than 30 students in a particular subgroup, you could get away without having those conversations. This is especially true in a place like New Jersey. It forced the conversation to look at subgroups and how they were performing. It started the conversation. Traditionally successful schools had to now look at how special education and African American students

were performing on state assessments. The conversations centered on the data, and the focus shifted to the achievement gap."

In Larry's district, workshops and professional development began to center on the achievement gap. Larry explained the process. "We talked about the achievement gap, and we looked at the achievement gap... There weren't always clear strategies in place [in terms of] what to do with this achievement gap, but there was a discussion that we have it [achievement gaps] and must address it." The conversation shifted. NCLB created a sense of accountability that was not there.

Larry continued to discuss the issue of how students learn and the advantage some students in specific communities have over other students. Larry believed that although the mandate stated that all students could learn, it did not consider that learning is not an exact science and that students learn at different rates, stages, and phases. The mandate did not consider students with different learning abilities, their cognitive challenges or different learning stages, especially when the mandate expected 100% of all students to meet specific benchmarks in reading and math by 2014. Larry elaborated.

What NCLB did not consider is that certain students in specific communities have certain advantages and resources at home and in the community. When they step into school, they are already ahead. Teachers and schools become targeted based on these test scores. You may have a teacher who is an ok teacher with mediocre teaching strategies but who has students who enter school prepared to learn and already learning due to socio-economic advantages. Many suburban schools are performing on level, and there is a perception that those teachers are outstanding. However, we are talking about students who may have tutorial services, attend summer institutes, and are surrounded by literacy at home, coming to school well prepared. Their arsenal of knowledge is so much greater, not that a suburban child is more intelligent than their peers who may not have those resources, but they are better prepared. They do well on the test, and the teacher is deemed proficient. On the other hand, you may have a teacher who is burning the midnight oil, teaching students who are already behind and is to blame for the underperformance of students. It's important not to look at proficiency or nonproficiency, but let's look at growth. NCLB didn't really look at growth; it was about proficiency versus non-proficiency. That is where NCLB missed that mark and didn't take into account the preparedness level.

In addition to the conversations about the achievement gap, Larry also gave some insight into the impact of NCLB on communities. NCLB impacted the conversations happening in the community, especially in New Jersey, where school scores directly impact property taxes and the value of a home and community. He pointed to the impact that the scores had in New Jersey. Larry revealed the correlation between test scores, school rankings and property value. "NJ monthly every year comes out with the rankings of the top 100 high schools. That will determine where people live. So the public began to have different conversations; this school is a failing school, but this school is not. It had an impact on public perception. Schools needed to learn how to address this. NCLB started the conversation but needed to give direct guidance."

As an administrator, Larry was more involved with the implementation of initiatives that his district put in place to address the achievement gap of students of color compared with white students. One initiative which focused directly on students was Saturday Academy that identified underachieving students and provided schooling beyond the regular school hours. In addition to Saturday Academy, the district formed partnerships with learning centers for students to attend, paid for by district funds. Other initiatives focused on teacher practice.

Larry's district focused on encouraging teachers to look at how they planned. Larry explained, "I was always a proponent of backwards planning. Let's teach, and let's plan with the end in mind." Backwards planning became a focus. Larry's district also wanted to focus on student centered classrooms where the teachers would no longer be the dominant voice in the classroom. He explained how this shift in practice was difficult for some teachers who were essentially asked to share power and autonomy to students over their learning. Ultimately Larry believed that for his districts NCLB opened up the conversation and forced them to look at the achievement gap as a community and reflect on who they were teaching. Larry stated that many teachers in his school had a one size fits all approach when teaching, especially in high school. He explained that NCLB forced him as a teacher and an administrator to look at who they were teaching and the unique needs of their students.

NCLB mandates in Larry's district also forced more dialogue among teachers, vertical articulation, and a team atmosphere. Academies were implemented where all four teachers taught the same group of students. This allowed teachers to focus on student strengths. For example, if a student needed help with writing in science but not in English, a conversation could be had on teacher practice. Those four teachers would address the approach that was used for student success.

Larry's districts addressed the achievement gap which was highlighted by NCLB mandates by implementing programs to fill in gaps with students, but also addressing teacher practice. Teachers engaged in conversations regularly and began to correlate the achievement gap with teacher practice. NCLB mandates initiated difficult conversations which addressed the achievement gap between students of color and white students in the districts where he worked.

Larry was optimistic about the conversations that NCLB generated regarding the achievement gap but believed that it did not address the causes of the achievement gap. He was also critical of a single assessment used to measure student achievement. "In order to close the achievement gap, there has to be an examination of the curriculum and the cultural relevance of the curriculum. Also, there must be an examination of the professional development of teachers and leaders coming into education and how cultural lenses affect approaches to education as well as knowledge about the community you are teaching." He believed that this approach would be a starting point.

#### NCLB MANDATES FOCUSED ON TEST RESULTS. NOT TEACHER PRACTICE

Katherine was a special education teacher and a reading specialist in a rural district with a district factor group I during the implementation of No Child Left Behind mandates from 2003 through 2010. She explained her experience in the two roles during this time.

As a special education teacher, she recalls her district's decision regarding special education. She indicated there was a push in the district to only classify students in emergencies or if students were in 2nd grade or higher. That was the most significant change she recalls her district implemented during the first few years of NCLB. Katherine indicated that she did not feel the impact of NCLB mandates until 2006 when there was a significant funding change in the school district, and all the teachers took a salary freeze.

Katherine stated that there was no focus on data. She explained that "the data came out. We would look at the data from the previous year for students that we had, and the data would go in a drawer." There was no vertical articulation to inform the teachers of the students they previously had. There was no horizontal articulation or conversations about changing teacher practice except modifying their scope and sequence to ensure they hit all critical concepts covered in their assessments. Katherine surmised that on a district level, NCLB may have impacted policy, but she was not affected as a teacher. She stated that "NCLB was something that was just thrown around. It wasn't a practice-changing initiative."

As a reading specialist, Katherine noted that NCLB had more relevance than it did as a teacher, but not in an impactful way. One of the schools where she served as a reading specialist was a Title I school; therefore, they closely monitored federal funds. Some procedural practices were put in place that included having schedules signed every month. Also, she recalled having

to stamp books indicating that they were bought using allocated funds. Katherine believed the focus was on how the district used funds and ensuring the proper use of funds.

In addition to pragmatic accounting practices and implementing a policy regarding Special Education referrals, Katherine's district adopted a tiered intervention system to address those students who were not proficient. The district started paying paraprofessionals with teaching degrees to come in and provide student interventions. The practice saved her district money because they paid paraprofessionals less than teachers. As the Reading Specialist, Katherine prepared the paraprofessional's lesson plans, which included appropriate interventions for the students they were servicing. Additionally, her district adopted a push-in and a pull-out model. Katherine elaborated on the practice. "The students who were working with paraprofessionals at the time were the students who received the next tier of intervention: Reading Recovery. This [Reading Recovery] was a fantastic intervention for students." Reading Recovery was a reading intervention program adopted by Katherine's district for struggling readers.

In 2009-2010, Katherine's district started introducing the leveled intervention program in one of the schools where she worked as a reading specialist. The district also hired an Interventionist who traveled to the two different schools in the district that were designated Title I schools to give support. In addition to addressing struggling students, Katherine's district also allocated money for students exceeding grade-level expectations. Katherine stated, "There were also funds allocated for those gifted students, but this wasn't a pull-out model. It was a model that was implemented by the classroom teacher and a stipend position who was usually the reading specialist." Katherine was the reading specialist and talented and gifted coordinator for the school. Katherine stated that the impacts felt from NCLB seemed to "impact students for the worst, not the better..." and impacted instructional programs for the worse because of the loss of funding designated for intervention programs for a small population of students. She also stated that she believed that NCLB mandates impacted the culture and climate of the teachers negatively. She recalls how teachers would spend months preparing for the test. Katherine remembers a competition between teachers and schools based on how their students would score on the state assessment. Katherine believed that this competitiveness took the focus off learning and focused on the assessment.

Katherine believed that the emphasis on passing the test and the competition it bred in her district took the focus off those students who needed to meet expectations. She elaborated. "Every student comes to us with a different set of backgrounds. In the literacy world, we call it schema. I believe that every student has the ability to progress, but I think with schools, especially with high transiency, instability in the home, educationally materials that are not culturally responsive to students, and recognizing where they come from and what their background, their interest is I think that we were missing the mark when we start to measure students against one another and not look at student progress."

When asked about the effects of NCLB on student achievement, Katherine believed that NCLB failed to measure student growth. Katherine elaborated, stating that "putting a paper and pencil test in front of a student does not show us how a student learns best." NCLB needed to measure student progress over time, much like Intervention and Referral Services (I&RS). Katherine emphasized her concerns, stating that she believed that NCLB created political roadblocks to education. Katherine commented, "Until we have politicians from all sides and really sit down and figure out what's best for kids and look at the individual child and show growth over time, we're going to have a hard time showing progress in students."

Katherine believes that closing the achievement gap comes down to building capacity in teachers and staff so that they understand where they are and setting realistic goals for students. She also stated that it is essential for students to buy into the process by teaching students how to reflect on where they are and where they want to go. These practices will be a way to engage students. Katherine believed a solution lies in more district control and autonomy. Katherine stated:

It is important for the federal government to provide districts with opportunities for grant funding through programs that have shown authentic progress in students and by providing opportunities for districts through student voice, data, and teacher opportunity. Years ago, the federal government talked about country and state curriculum. That won't work. What will work are districts knowing their students and making decisions that are best for their students. The federal government and state can support that, but it's up to the districts to recognize the needs.

Katherine summarized that NCLB put a spotlight on student performance. It forced schools to look at where students' needs lie and what they need to do to address those needs but, ultimately, focused on one test.

# NCLB MANDATES PLACE A FOCUS ON DATA

Katelyn was a Vice Principal in a county school district from 2003 through 2010 during the implementation of No Child Left Behind mandates. She elaborated on her experience during this period.

Katelyn recalled the effects of NCLB on her role as a Vice Principal. She stated that the mandates under No Child Left Behind resulted in her district focusing on data collection and interpretation. Data was at the center of every decision that her district made. Her school district used data to identify how subgroups were performing and how they were scheduling students for

classes. Katelyn stated, "Everything was based on data. For example, math classes were scheduled based on test scores. We looked at our data and looked at those students who didn't pass the 11th-grade exam. We created a class for those students. It was a regular math class where they would get credit, but the teacher had all the data, where those students fell short on the exam, focused on those skills."

As a Vice Principal, her district began to focus on what teachers were doing in the classrooms, forcing administrators to focus on student academics and whether or not teachers were engaging in best teaching practices. The role of administrators became that of an instructional leader and data analyzer instead of a manager. Katelyn believed that her district's response to NCLB shifted the focus to where students were and what educators needed to do to ensure every student succeeded. Katelyn went on to explain. "I think the only way to find out what is needed to ensure that every student succeeds is to find out where they are, and I think that NCLB forced those conversations. ... I think that the basic philosophy [of] ensuring that every student succeeds is to find out where students are academically. Whether schools gather that information through a state test or district test, there should be some type of assessment that assesses all students to find out where their shortcomings are." Therefore, in Katelyn's district, NCLB had a tremendous impact because the mandates ensured that their school district focused on student achievement.

In addition to forcing teachers to think about their practice and administrators to monitor teacher practice and data-centered decision-making, NCLB mandates ensured that schools focused on teaching and understanding standards. When schools realized that students would be tested in specific grades, it forced schools to focus on teaching the standards. Katelyn believed this was especially true for schools with low-achieving students because schools had to show what they were doing. Teachers in those schools where students were traditionally not succeeding had no choice but to show some improvement. She pointed out the difficulty these mandates presented for teachers with students entering their classroom several years behind their grade levels. Katelyn believed that NCLB mandates in her district forced students to think about how they were performing. Katelyn explained that the focus on individual student data and accountability made students aware of their shortcomings and where they needed to be, mainly because passing the state assessment was tied to graduation requirements. Katelyn explained, "My district focused on student achievement and teaching. Therefore, the majority of our students passed the state assessment, but those students who came in high school on a 3rd and 5th-grade level came very close to passing." The data showed significant improvements, but the scores didn't show that. Unfortunately, schools were not given credit for moving students.

Katelyn summarized her experience as an administrator under NCLB. Katelyn stated that NCLB fell short because it didn't give credit to those students who grew, but didn't pass the test. Katelyn commented, "I think that if you have a child that comes in on a 3rd-grade level and tell that child that in two years I expect you to be on an 8th-grade level, you're fooling yourself. You're making children feel bad about themselves... I believe in the growth model. Take a child where they are and grow them."

In addition to the emphasis on passing the state assessment instead of student growth, Katelyn believed that NCLB never considered special education students or students from disadvantaged areas. She stated that special education students are given modifications and accommodations in their Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs). Still, they do not receive the same modifications on the state test and are expected to pass at the same rate as regular education students since their scores are counted towards the school's passing rate. She also pointed to the impact of socio-economics on student success; students in lower socio-economic areas are compared to students who come from two-parent homes and homes where they can afford private tutors.

Although Katelyn shared criticism for NLCB, she also hailed NCLB mandates because she believed the mandates brought attention to teaching all children. She explained, "Too often, students are blamed for not learning. Blame is placed on the traumatic environment, and it became acceptable to write them off as a child that would never learn. That child is still expected to learn, and that teacher is still expected to teach." In her district, the mandates held teachers and administrators accountable for teaching all students, ensured that teachers were teaching all of the standards, and changed the leadership roles of administrators to that of instructional leaders and data analysts.

#### NCLB FOCUSED ON TEACHER PRACTICE

Andrew was a Vice Principal and district-level administrator in an urban county school district, district factor group A, during the implementation of No Child Left Behind mandates from 2003 through 2010. Andrew's district had a history of low student achievement and, at one point, was under state control. He shared his experience during this period.

Andrew's district implemented several strategies to address the achievement gap and comply with NCLB. The first strategy Andrew's district implemented was a comprehensive reading assessment program to assess all students. The district implemented STAR Renaissance to evaluate all students. STAR Renaissance was a comprehensive reading assessment designed to measure a student's reading comprehension. Andrew's district also introduced Read 180 as an intervention to address students reading below their grade level. Read 180 is a reading program for students reading two or more years below grade levels and focuses on providing interventions that target reading comprehension and reading literacy. (WWC/ Find What Works) Lastly, PLATO, an online credit recovery course platform, was introduced at the high school level to address credit recovery and graduation rates.

In addition to implementing strategies to address reading and credit recovery, one significant strategy that Andrew's district implemented was mandatory summer school for all students assessed below grade level. Students who did not attend nor demonstrated significant growth during mandatory summer school were retained. And rew stated that in the first year of implementing this strategy, his district had almost four thousand students who attended summer school. The following summer, the number dropped to around half, and in the third year, that number decreased to approximately sixteen hundred students. Andrew attributed the drop in numbers to several factors. One of those factors was introducing and implementing the Institute for Learning (IFL) in the district. "The Institute for Learning (IFL) was founded in 1995 by Lauren Resnick, a cognitive psychologist and senior scientist at the Learning Research and Development Center at the University of Pittsburgh" (Institute for Learning). Teachers engaged in professional development and coaching centered around teaching practices that IFL calls Principles of Learning. Andrew believed that a common instructional practice was instrumental in decreasing the number of students who had to attend mandatory summer school. Another belief Andrew attributes to student progress is that the students began to take the test seriously, knowing that the consequence meant summer school or retention.

Andrew also spoke about the impact of NCLB mandates on his role as an administrator. The expectations of Andrew's role changed from a managerial leader to an instructional leader, especially with the adoption of IFL. The district expected Administrators to lead the work with teachers. As an administrator, Andrew stated that part of leading the instructional work was attending ongoing professional development which he believed resulted in a common practice. As a result, Andrew saw a change in the culture in his district, primarily as scores increased, but only in some buildings and some staff. There was much skepticism from underperforming schools, which Andrew believed resulted from some schools implementing the strategies with fidelity while others approached the new strategies with doubt. The skepticism, unfortunately, resulted in pushback from teachers and administrators.

Although several schools in Andrew's district failed to implement new district strategies with fidelity and saw limited success, interestingly, Andrew did not believe failure to implement strategies was the only reason the schools did not see significant growth. Andrew elaborated on his perspective and stated, ".... some schools, I'll be honest with you, are always going to be low performing, and the research shows that you can predict student achievement based on their demographics."

In addition to a failure to implement new instructional strategies with fidelity and demographics, Andrew also attributed the reported low performance to how schools and students were assessed under NCLB guidelines. Andrew believed that NCLB fell short in that it did not measure students where they started and where they grew rather than a cut score to measure teacher effectiveness. Andrew elaborated on this point. "There were teachers that took kids....from 130 to 195, 198 with 50 or more points, but guess what, they were considered a non-proficient teacher. There were teachers who worked with good students and took them from 210 to 217, only 7 points, and they were considered great teachers. That teacher who was doing all of the work and moving those kids, they were recognized as a poor performing school or a bad teacher." Andrew referenced the early years of NCLB when student growth did not factor into a

school's evaluation in New Jersey. Although test scores did not impact teacher evaluations

during the early years of NCLB, many districts looked at teacher scores.

Andrew continued his evaluation of NLCB's reliance on a single assessment to measure a school's effectiveness or a student's growth. Andrew believed there is a place for standards and a way to measure those standards, but he does not believe a cut score can effectively measure student growth. Additionally, he advocates for using multiple measures to determine student proficiency and not just one method. Andrew explains.

"I would love to have students have a choice. Do you want to take a standardized test or take a performance-based assessment as long as those assessments measure the same standards? Do you want to take a combination of both?" He continues and states that in retrospect, he believed "there were some good parts of ...[NCLB], but at the same time, I just sometimes feel it's a political game, and I sometimes believe there are two systems that are put in place; one for the privileged and one for the nonprivileged... these systems put in place work against ...our struggling communities."

Andrew was referring to the stiff sanctions put in place when schools did not meet Adequate Yearly Progress. Under NCLB mandates, schools that failed to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for two or more consecutive years were subject to harsh sanctions.

School districts labeled failing schools were required to notify parents and give students who attended the failing school options to attend schools in other school districts at the expense of the sending district. Failing school districts were required to develop a two-year improvement plan and allocate a portion of their federal funding toward teacher professional development. Furthermore, if a school did not meet AYP for three consecutive years, outside supplemental services such as tutoring must be provided for students again at the district's expense of the failing school. If schools fail to meet AYP for four consecutive years, the school district, in addition to providing outside services, were required to "take greater action to improve the school, which they [could] do in a number of ways. For example, they may replace relevant school staff, implement new curriculum, decrease management authority at the school itself, appoint an outside expert to advise the school on how to improve, extend the school day or school year, or restructure the school entirely" (No child left behind law demands "Adequate yearly progress" and offers school choice options for parents). If a school fails to meet AYP for five consecutive years, the school may face restructuring, which may result in the replacement of school personnel or the takeover of the school by the state.

Andrew's final words summed up his feelings toward the harsh mandates imposed by NCLB. He reflected that other social factors played a part in students' success. Andrew stated, "I sometimes wonder if that is just part of the plan or do people really don't get that there's a lot more that needs to happen in these communities in order for them to be successful...But the sanctions, I don't think those things work. I really don't."

#### **TRENDS IN THE INTERVIEWS**

No Child Left Behind legislation was mandated to hold states accountable for individual student achievement, especially disenfranchised students. More specifically, NCLB aimed to identify subgroups of traditionally left behind students: socioeconomically disadvantaged, ethnic minority, special education, and English Language Learners. By holding states accountable, mandating more stringent qualifications for teachers, universal state curriculum standards, and a state assessment to test the implementation and achievement of these standards, NCLB believed it would close the achievement gap. Therefore, each state defined how it would close the achievement gap. In the case of New Jersey, where each school district holds a certain amount of autonomy, the model and methods for closing the achievement gap varied. Additionally, the district factor group also influenced the models used to address the mandates in NCLB.

## LOCAL MODELS OF IMPLEMENTATION

District Factor Groups influenced how NCLB mandates were implemented. As a teacher during the NCLB years, in District Factor Group A, emphasis was placed on preparing for the state assessment. The entire schedule would shift, and the emphasis would be on mathematics, reading, and science. Teachers spent hours teaching material from test prep books. This was often at the expense of other content areas and higher order thinking skills that were incorporated in hands-on learning. Months before the test, hours would be spent working in test preparation books. These strategies were utilized to increase the percentage of students who passed the state assessment and not to shrink the achievement gap in learning. Additionally, after-school programs would also focus on more test prep. Drill and kill became the model for training in preparation for the state assessment. Students were taught strategies on how to pass the test.

In the interviews conducted with educators either teaching or working as administrators during the implementation of NCLB, they all acknowledged achievement gaps in test scores. What differed was their district's response in addressing those gaps in learning. In my interview with Katelyn and Andrew, I found that their districts put extensive resources in place to address the achievement gap and comply with NCLB mandates, specifically meeting Annual Yearly Progress. Andrew and Katelyn worked in higher district factor groups; Andrew district factor group A and Katelyn, a county district serving students from high DFGs. Katelyn acknowledged that more attention was focused on student data and identifying students who needed to pass state-mandated assessments. These students were placed in specific classes to address their particular needs. The data helped pinpoint the teacher's focus for each student. In addition to implementing these skills-based classes, more oversight was placed on teacher practice to ensure they were teaching the state standards.

Andrew's district adopted similar policies to address the achievement gap and comply with NCLB mandates. The district addressed the achievement gap twofold: by providing training for teachers and additional instruction to students performing below grade level. Based on data, students were identified and encouraged to enroll in a summer program. Those students who failed to attend summer sessions or did not achieve significant gains in their assessments were retained. Teacher practice was also addressed through an outside agency, ensuring uniformity with instruction.

Larry's districts addressed the achievement gap very differently. Larry worked in two suburban school districts, which historically performed well on state assessments. Once they had disaggregated scores, those districts began discussing the achievement gap between white, black, and Latino students. Teachers and administrators discussed the data and the achievement gap but did not implement any school or district-wide strategies. Larry's district addressed student deficiencies by providing those students with additional instructional time. In one district where Larry worked, students received further instruction on Saturday. Outside agencies also served students for extra support. Larry's district focused on teacher practice and provided space for discussing teacher practices such as *Understanding by Design* and programs to address struggling students. Teachers concentrated on planning and aligning their instruction to support standards on their assessments. The school addressed the structure of scheduling classes by organizing students into academies, where the same students shared the same teachers. This structure allowed for cross-content articulation and conversations among teachers with the same students.

Unlike interviewees who worked in failing school districts, Larry's district focused on teacher practice, not test preparation. Larry's district was not labeled a failing school, providing

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them the luxury of not focusing on test preparation as a quick solution but instead providing professional development on best teacher practices. Research by Dr. Roberta Levitt and Lisa Guisbond, Monty Neil, and Bob Schaeffer found that with the emphasis on high-stakes testing, teachers and administrators spent more time focusing on test preparation instead of a wide range of content areas and "Instead of inquiring or innovating, students are spending valuable classroom time preparing for the test" (Levitt 2). The focus of what is being tested becomes the emphasis of what is being taught because "With so much riding on the results, many schools turned to preparing students for these tests, ignoring other aspects of education" (Guisbond et al. 9). This is unfortunate, because, "In many cases the tests do not promote the development of students who can think critically. Rather, they encourage reductive teaching that focuses more on test scores than actual learning" (Turner 140).

Katherine, who worked in a rural district with a DFG of I, experienced the least amount of changes in instruction in response to NCLB mandates. As a special education teacher and reading specialist, Katherine recalled looking at the data at the beginning of the year "and putting it in a drawer." There was no emphasis on using the data to drive and change instruction or implement supplemental programs for students. Unlike my experience, Katherine stated that "NCLB was something that was just thrown around, and it wasn't a practice-changing initiative." As a Reading Specialist, Katherine's district geared its response to NCLB toward students scoring below proficiency by adopting a tiered intervention system. Students received targeted instruction, which consisted of a push-in and pull-out model and reading recovery. Unlike the other districts interviewed, Katherine's district also developed programs for students who scored advanced through a gifted and talented program. Many of the districts spent months preparing for the assessment, which, in Katherine's district, was at the expense of teaching other content. Under NCLB mandates, schools faced financial and social consequences if they were labeled a failing school. Therefore, schools relied on a quick fix to prepare students for the test instead of focusing on the best teacher practices seen in Larry's district. Failing schools needed to have the luxury of long-term investment in teacher practice as a strategy to increase student scores. Failing schools did not have the luxury of investing in shifts that would change the climate and culture of the school and district, investments that take three to five years to have an impact. Unfortunately, districts that were labeled failing focused on test-taking strategies instead of strategies that impacted critical thinking and deeper learning.

The state Department of Education's absence of guidance led to different ways districts implemented strategies to close the achievement gap. Some districts created various opportunities for student support, while others focused on improving teacher practice. In Andrew's, Katelyn's, and my district, the solution was to address students' deficiencies by providing more instruction. Students who did not meet the benchmark received additional instruction: Saturday Academy, PLATO credit recovery, summer schools, and specialized courses. Unlike Andrew, Larry, and Katelyn's districts, Katherine's district provided instructional support to students by providing more specialized support through a reading specialist. The district designed this strategy to address the deficiencies and not provide more instruction for students. These strategies focused on the student as the "problem" that needed addressing.

Unlike the other districts identified in the interviews, Larry's and Andrew's districts focused on the student but also focused on the curriculum and instruction. Andrew's district implemented strategies to address the level of instruction students received. They implemented a research-based, 'scripted instruction' to address the achievement gap. Larry's district brought in an outside consulting organization to provide instructional guidance. In addition to the outside instructional strategies, Andrew's district implemented a mandatory summer program for students who still needed to meet the benchmark. They chose to focus on the teachers by equipping them with an instructional framework but also focused on providing students with additional instruction. Larry's district provided additional education for students who still needed to meet benchmarks and focused on teacher practice. Larry's district focused on teacher collaboration and best teacher practices. Teachers collaborated and discussed student success and teacher strategies. Teachers worked in teams to address student deficiencies.

Larry's and Katherine's districts had the luxury of engaging in research-based teacher practices to address learning deficiencies in students. Their districts were not failing districts and, therefore, could focus on teacher practice instead of test preparation and outside research-based organizations to improve teacher practice. In Larry's district, the administration gave teachers the autonomy to implement several strategies. Teachers were able to engage in instructional conversations regarding practice. Research-based practices and implementation of those practices take time to develop. They require a paradigm shift, such as student-centered and not teacher-centered classrooms. Numerous research studies have supported the positive effects of student-centered classrooms on student learning. Student-centered classrooms "orient themselves continually toward what individual learners need given their backgrounds and abilities" (Brown et al. 2). A focus on test preparation negates this model.

All five districts implemented different strategies to address the achievement gap. They range from minimal change, where teachers looked at data superficially of struggling students, to significant changes to curriculum and instruction. Some districts chose to focus on the students,

providing students with additional instruction as a strategy to close the achievement gap. Other districts focused on the teachers, providing structured instruction for them to follow. This range of methods by different districts resulted from the need for more specific guidance in the NCLB legislation. This lack of clear direction left it up to the particular districts which strategy to use, often resulting in mixed results. The ability of individual school districts to make educational decisions for their students has always been a hallmark in New Jersey, which has led to variance in instruction. As indicated in the chart below, limited guidance from NCLB mandates further supported this variance, as evidenced by the various strategies implemented by these five districts. Districts implemented minimal change, as with Larry's district, or several interventions like those seen in Andrew's district. (Table 17)

Larry -Disaggregated data -Data conversations on achievement gaps - No clear	Larry -schedule changes -cross- content articulation	Katherine - intervention s for struggling students	My Experience -focus on test prep - implementati on of instructional programs	Katelyn -focus on standards -focus on data; - homogene ous schedules -Teacher practices monitored	Andrew - implementat on of instructional programs
teaching strategies					-PD for teachers -mandatory additional instruction -student retention

Table 17

Research supports that implementing best teaching practices, including student-centered learning, differentiation, and scaffolding, dramatically affects student learning. Research by Muhammad Asoodeh and Kimberly Overby emphasizes the impact of student-centered instruction on student learning. Implementing these strategies is supported because "Researchers suggest that [the] best learning [occurs] when students achieve a concept" (Asoodeh et al. 1). Student-centered learning "attempts to engender active learning by using methods such as cooperative learning, open ended assignments, critical thinking exercises, simulation and problem solving activities" (Asoodeh et al. 1), which leads to "The ultimate outcome [which] is a higher understanding of a topic, higher level reading, and more motivation to learn" (Overby 110). Focusing on test preparation and concepts on standardized tests diminishes higher understanding. The educators who worked in districts identified as failing, test prep, Saturday Academy, and Summer School were strategies the schools implemented to ultimately pass the test instead of focusing on learning. Additionally, test prep from published test booklets negates the learner's individuality. Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) tells us that students learn at different rates depending on where they are academically with the information. Vygotsky defined the ZPD as "the distance between the actual developmental level (of the learner) as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Billings et al 1). These strategies are highly effective but take time for teachers to master. Schools that are labeled failing or in danger of being labeled as failing relied on strategies that would prepare students to pass the test and did not focus on student learning. The decision to implement strategies to ensure that students pass the test instead of strategies that focus on

authentic learning resulted from the consequences that schools and school districts received if they did not meet state benchmarks under NCLB.

# **CONCLUDING REFLECTION**

The United States Department of Education implemented No Child Left Behind legislation to shrink the achievement gap between disenfranchised communities, which traditionally consisted of students of color and better-performing students who were historically white. The mandate had several requirements, two of which required states to ensure that all teachers were certified in the content area in which they taught and required states to test students every year to evaluate student achievement. New Jersey changed state standards to reflect the expectations in the mandate. NCLB mandates amended the Teacher Certification process. NCLB mandates required that all teachers be highly qualified by 2007 in the content areas they taught. Teachers hired before 2002-2003 in Title 1 schools were allowed to use the House Matrix to meet the highly qualified teachers' requirement. (Directions for Completing NCLB Highly Qualified Teachers) By 2007, "99 percent of New Jersey teachers meet the "highly qualified" designation while 1.2 percent do not meet the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) definition of "highly qualified" in every core subject that they teach" (Forsyth and Vespucci). Ninety-three point fifty-four percent of teachers in all New Jersey school districts met the NCLB definition of a "highly qualified" teacher for every subject taught. Highly qualified teachers taught 96.45% of the state's English/language arts/reading classes, 90.62% of mathematics classes, and 98.92% of general elementary classes in the district.

In 2007, teachers hired prior to the beginning of the 2002-2003 school year in Title I schools were permitted to use the NJ HOUSE Matrix (High Objective Uniform State Evaluation) to meet the highly qualified teachers requirements. Newly hired teachers in Title I schools hired

after the 2002-2003 school year were required to use the federal criteria to meet the highly qualified which consisted of holding a Bachelor's degree and holding the correct certification. School districts that did not meet these requirements would have to develop and implement a plan to ensure that all teachers were highly qualified and teaching according to their certification.

In addition to changes in certification requirements, New Jersey allocated funding to school districts that, in the past, had underperformed. As a result, the gap between school funding for the poorest districts and the wealthiest districts in New Jersey improved between 2003 and 2014. The following represent the per pupil spending in the three poorest and wealthiest cities in New Jersey with a K-12 school district.

City	2003-2004	2005-2006	2010-2011	2013-2014
	Total	Total Cost/pupil	Total	Total
	Cost/pupil		Cost/pupil	Cost/pupil
Atlantic City	11,221	13,291	25,490	27,411
Camden	13,476	16,904	22,306	26,998
Newark	15,312	17,502	21,706	22,267
Millburn	11,370	12,403	17,392	19,086
Montgomery	8,273	9,596	15,818	18,726
Township				
Westfield	9,899	10,434	14,981	16,923

Cost per pupil (Taxpayers' Guide to Education Spending)

City	2003-2004 Total Cost Classroom Instruction	2005-2006 Total Cost Classroom Instruction	2010-2011 Total Cost Classroom Instruction	2013-2014 Total Cost Classroom Instruction
Atlantic City	6,853	7,662	11,152	12,280
Camden	7,657	8,997	9,629	11,733
Newark	8,056	9,080	8,242	8,438
Millburn	6,512	7,203	8,631	8,886
Montgomery	4,811	5,494	7,011	8,072
Township				
Westfield	6,026	6,204	7,016	8,091

(Taxpayers' Guide to Education Spending)

Districts in the poorest cities in the state spent considerably more on per-pupil spending than the three most affluent districts, and they also spent more on classroom instruction per pupil. In addition to the three poorest districts spending more per pupil than the three most affluent districts, these three districts also had a lower teacher-student ratio.

City	2003-2004 Student/Teacher Ratio	2005-2006 Student/Teacher Ratio	2010-2011 Student/Teacher Ratio	2013-2014 Student/Teacher Ratio
Atlantic City	12.2	12.2	9.7	11.1
Camden	10.9	10.6	9.3	16.6
Newark	12.3	11.8	14.7	13.1
Millburn	12.6	12.5	13.1	12
Montgomery Township	14.2	13.2	13.3	11.3
Westfield	13	13.3	13.6	12.7

(Taxpayers' Guide to Education Spending)

One goal of NCLB was to level the playing field between traditionally low-performing students, students of color, and students who traditionally performed well, white students. Based on the data, this achievement gap only slightly narrowed in New Jersey under NCLB. New Jersey implemented teacher qualifications to meet NCLB qualifications of highly qualified teachers. In addition, New Jersey put more funding into the schools. In the six sample school districts from the most affluent towns and poorest cities, funding for per pupil students was equivalent, and in some of these low-performing districts, per pupil spending was greater. Lastly, the student-teacher ratio also improved. In the three examples of the poorest and most affluent districts, the student-teacher ratio was less in the traditionally lower-performing school districts

than in the more affluent towns. The gap barely narrowed with all these modifications implemented to level the playing field. So, there must be something else attributing to the poor performance of students in these traditionally low-performing school districts versus those in the more historically well-performing school districts. During my interviews, it was apparent that each district applied its approach to addressing student deficiencies in math and reading. In some districts, teachers were given more autonomy; in others, the emphasis was on test preparation.

The discrepancies tended to be in more urban communities, like the district where I worked, emphasizing test preparation. In *The Testing Trap*, George Hillocks Jr. also observed the differences in how suburban and urban schools prepared for standardized state tests. Hillocks observed that in one school in Texas, where "[it] is the policy that subjects such as science and social studies, which are not tested, may not be taught until late Spring when the year's assessments in reading, writing and math are completed" (Hillocks 95). Subjects like science and social studies, which stimulate curiosity and analysis, are not deemed as necessary as the subjects that are on standardized tests. In the district where I taught, other urban districts where I interviewed teachers, as well as the urban communities in The Testing Trap, "....countless hours are spent on preparing for these tests....that do more harm than good" (Hillocks 206-207). The considerable pressure that teachers are under for students to perform well on these tests contributes to districts, especially in urban communities, having teachers teach to the test.

The emphasis on testing stems from the fact that "We believe [as a society] that tests indicate achievement, intelligence, aptitude or all of these. Test scores become predictions about people and their futures. We assume further that if scores go up, the schools are doing a better job of educating the students because we believe that test scores reflect education" (Hillocks 14). Thus, the emphasis on test scores as a benchmark for achievement in NCLB. Furthermore, "when students do poorly on a test, it must be that the teachers are not teaching well" (Hillocks 103). Hillocks suggests that "if states want teaching to improve, they will have to intervene at the level of teaching" (Hillocks 204). The fact that New Jersey had no systematic approach for all districts to close the achievement gap may have impacted varying levels of improvement in various districts.

Although NCLB set guidelines that New Jersey implemented with much latitude, the pedagogical approach was not uniform. It varied from district to district. Could this lack of uniformity have impacted why the achievement gap only slightly narrowed? What kind of professional development did teachers receive from district to district? Could the emphasis on test preparation instead of a holistic approach to teaching have impacted the achievement gap?

### CHAPTER 5

#### CONCLUSION

The United States Department of Education enacted NCLB legislation in the spirit of equity. The intent was to address educational disparities among disenfranchised students, with the ultimate goal of closing the achievement gap between black, brown, and white students. The law sought to hold schools accountable for individual student achievement, focusing on standardized test results as a barometer for student success. The research in this study indicates that in New Jersey, the legislation did not have the impact it sought. New Jersey state assessment scores from 2002 through 2010 indicate that although there were gains in the percentage of black students who demonstrated proficiency/advanced proficiency on the assessment, the gap between black and white students remained. Even more so, when comparing the percentage of black students who demonstrated proficiency/advanced proficiency on the NAEP assessment, although there was slight growth (less than the percentage of growth on the New Jersey State assessments), the gap between black and white students remained.

Several factors limited the effectiveness of NCLB in closing the achievement gap between black and white students. The sole reliance on one measure of achievement was the first problem with NCLB. While standardized, multiple-choice assessments are easy to use for schools and states, and the results give a numerical representation to stakeholders, they do not show the whole picture of students' learning nor the growth a student has achieved during a school year. Research by Christy Guilfoyle in her article, "NCLB: Is There Life Beyond Testing", illustrated several flaws with the reliance on one assessment to measure student growth. Teachers articulated several of these criticisms in their interviews. Guilfoyle argues that with such high-stakes testing, teachers will focus on whatever material is on the test, and

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students will learn the material superficially to achieve a passing grade. Therefore, students are not learning and growing in their understanding of the material or skill set.

In the interview with Katherine, she articulated that the different schools in her district would compete to see who could do better on the test, not which school demonstrated learning. This was also my experience as a teacher during the NCLB era. The unintended consequences of focusing on passing the test and prioritizing test preparation over rich, diverse, and authentic learning opportunities resulted in many districts. The result was a focus on the content that students would be tested on and spending hours on test preparation instead of comprehensive learning. Instead of exposing my students to a rich curriculum, they were subject to a narrow scope of test prep. The focus was on math and Reading, but only those types of questions focused on the state assessment.

Research done by Lisa Guisbond also supported the focus on a narrowed curriculum. In her research on "NCLB's Lost Decade for Educational Progress", Guisbond found that instead of creating opportunities for a well-rounded curriculum, many schools focused on teaching materials found on the test and materials that would increase their school's test scores. Additionally, assessments under NCLB offered only one kind of assessment, which did not provide a comprehensive view of student learning. Guilfoyle in her article, "NCLB: Is There Life After Testing?", that instead of focusing on one type of assessment, educators implement a method of assessment that looks at student learning over time, such as portfolios or capstone projects. These multi-layered assessments allow students to demonstrate authentic learning and inform teachers of student progress, strengths, and weaknesses. Focusing on these types of assessments, which require multiple areas of measure and promote higher level thinking, greater cognitive lift, problem-solving, and critical thinking skills, would be an accurate measurement of student learning and possibly lead to closing the achievement gap.

Guilfoyle also points out other flaws in the manner in which NCLB calculates student growth and cites research by Laitsch, Lewallen, and McClosky in 2005, who illustrate how school districts can make superficial changes at the state and school levels to demonstrate in their data that student growth is happening. For example, states have lowered cut scores to increase the percentage of students passing. Schools have also discouraged students who they believe will not pass not to take the test, while other schools have focused on tutoring students who were close to passing and focused on increasing their proficiency to pass the test. If NCLB intended to shrink the achievement gap and guarantee that one hundred percent of students were meeting proficiency by 2014, these flaws would make that impossible precisely because "Standardized tests as a sole measure are not effective at measuring school performance. They fail to evaluate skills that are necessary for success in society as students leave public schools" (Maleyko 320).

The punitive nature of NCLB may have also had an impact on the failure to close the achievement gap between black and white students in New Jersey. Research by Rivkin, Hanushek, and Kain, 2005 in "Teachers, Schools and Academic Achievement", and Raj Chetty, John N. Friedman, and Jonah E. Rockoff, 2014 in "Measuring the Impacts of Teachers II: Teacher Value-Added and Student Outcomes in Adulthood" indicate that teacher effectiveness has a direct impact on student achievement. Schools that did not meet AYP were scrutinized, including being labeled a failing school. These labels and the potential for the school to be restricted may have impacted these schools attracting and retaining quality teachers, which is essential for maintaining instructional consistency and implementing effective teaching strategies.

The most compelling reason why NCLB failed to close the achievement gap between black and white students in New Jersey is that the NCLB mandates failed to address the opportunity gap that exists, which manifests itself in achievement gaps. In the article, *Rethinking the Achievement Gap*, Andy Porter asserts that the achievement gap between black and white students begins before students even enter school. Porter also asserts that "by the time children are three or four [the gap] is already a standard deviation." (Porter par. 10) Porter believes that although the achievement gap does not increase when black students enter school, it does not decrease. As such, "A report from the Council for Basic Education found evidence that narrowing was most severe in schools with higher numbers of minority and low-income students" (Guilfoyle 7). Consequently, black students are not presented with the same opportunities on average as white students.

Although NCLB mandates failed to close the achievement gap between black and white students in New Jersey, there was some growth. When looking at NCLB through the lens of student achievement through student data, there were notable achievements in math proficiency/advanced proficiency rates for black and white students in New Jersey across the three grade levels. However, there remains a persistent achievement gap in Reading. Data across all three grade levels indicated consistent growth in black students' proficiency/advanced proficiency rates. The same trends were also evident on the NAEP assessment. Despite advancements, the achievement gap persists in Reading, especially on the grade four assessments, where the performance gap between black and white students increased. The data raises questions regarding the effectiveness of NCLB in addressing the educational disparities the legislation was established to address. While gains were made, shrinking the Reading and mathematics education gap requires further efforts. The data exemplifies the importance of examining other factors that affect the performance gaps and the effectiveness of educational policy in addressing these factors.

Twenty years after the implementation of NCLB, states still use test scores from a single assessment to evaluate schools and student learning. Very little attention is paid to the causes of the achievement gap, which, by all accounts, is an opportunity gap. Data from ten years of New Jersey's assessments indicate that the achievement gap between black and white students still exists despite the implementation of NCLB mandates. Individual districts implemented strategies from minimal changes to significant changes. There was no uniformity. This opportunity gap was exasperated during COVID. However, New Jersey still focuses on a single assessment to measure student growth.

Although the research shows that all students experienced learning gaps during virtual instruction, students from low-income areas experienced more significant learning gaps. Research by Emma Dorn et al., in her article, "COVID-19 and Learning Loss-Disparities Grow and Students Need Help", found that learning loss "was especially acute in schools that predominantly serve students of color..." (Dorn et al. 2). Multiple factors contribute to the disparity in learning loss. For many communities that serve low socioeconomic neighborhoods, school serves many purposes. Often, the school provides food, social and mental health support, and technology access. During the pandemic, many students from underserved communities lacked access to technology, including internet access, food, and a quiet, dedicated place for virtual classes and study. Furthermore, students in low socioeconomic communities that serve predominantly students of color were remote for more extended periods of time, exasperating learning loss.

The results of this research highlight the need for a more comprehensive approach to addressing the achievement gap. This approach must first address disparities in opportunities and implement diverse assessment methods. As Andy Porter asserts, the achievement gap between black and white students originates even before students enter school. Education policymakers must consider a more comprehensive and balanced approach beyond standardized testing to ensure students receive a holistic, enriching educational experience.

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# Appendix A

Each participant was asked the following questions:

Tell me about your experience teaching under NCLB mandates.

What impact, if any, did they have on your teaching?

What impact do you believe NLB had on the teaching profession? School environments and the perception of the profession?

What were your perceptions on NCLB measuring performance and holding schools with higher poverty rates accountable to the same standards as schools with medium and high socio economic standards?

Many supporters of NCLB claim that the mandate shined a light on students who historically were lost by disaggregating data. What are your thoughts on that statement?

Tell me how your school's curriculum was impacted by NCLB. Critics of NCLB state that NCLB mandates furthered inequalities in education because the focus on tested subjects limited time spent on other content. Did you find that was the case in your school?

NCLB mandates required all states to have a measurement of student achievement as a measurement of student learning. Tell me about the assessments that New Jersey adopted. What learning did these assessments measure?

One of the provisions of NCLB required schools to provide remediation for students who did not meet state designated benchmarks. Tell me about how your school addressed these students and the outcome.

As an educator, how would you close the achievement gap? Where has NCLB gotten it right? Where could the law be improved?

Is there anything I haven't asked you that you would like to add regarding NCLB legislation?