

Control, Persuasion, and Educational Accountability: Implementing the No Child Left Behind Act

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Purpose: The author's goal was to show the manner in which control and persuasion have been key components of how the federal government has attempted to keep the No Child Left Behind Act on track in the first four years of its implementation.

Focus: State Departments of Education's No Child Left Behind Accountability Elements

Research Questions: How has the federal government uses control and persuasion to enforce the No Child Left Behind Act?

Research Methods: The researcher takes a theoretical approach to the ways in which control and persuasion can work and can fail for the groups using those methods to get a desired result. Subsequently, he traces the language handed down from the federal government over the first four years since announcing No Child Left Behind, and shows the manner in which the government has used these tactics to gain the outcome for which it searches. In addition, the author traces how many of No Child Left Behind's Accountability Elements each state had put into place at various points since states began working on implementing the new act. This is meant to show the impact that the control and persuasion methods of the federal government had on the states in terms of getting those elements put into place.

Findings: While the federal government attempted to use what the author calls "principal-agent theory," in addition to high-stakes accountability rules, those methods have not been as effective as theory might suggest they should be. Rather, due to the federal government's lack of enforcement when states act against the wishes of the government, the government struggled to have states fall fully into line. Thus, the researcher found that the attempts by the federal government to use control and persuasion tactics on states was not effective.

Implications: The researcher suggests a shift in mindset for the federal government. Rather than critiquing these methods entirely, the researcher argues that it isn't so much about the methods that the federal government is using, but the way that they see themselves in relation to the states. When implementing such a large new set of standards and expectations on states, the federal government must be content with the idea that implementation will look different, with different pacing at the onset and action at the end of the process.