

Georgia Educational Researcher

Editors: Dr. Megan Adams

Dr. Sheryl Croft

Dr. Jihye Kim

Dr. Sanjuana Rodriguez

Call for special themed issue

“the darkest hour of the night came just before the dawn”

It has often been said that “it’s always darkest just before the day dawneth” or the darkest hour of the night came just before the dawn (Shapiro, 2006). With the advent of NCLB, advocates recognized the possibilities in NCLB and touted it as the dawning of a new day for student achievement for all. This new day of reform initially supported by its high-stakes testing and mandates for 100% proficiency by 2014 promised unparalleled achievement for marginalized populations (Croft, Roberts, & Stenhouse, 2015; Hess & Finn, 2007; Ravitch, 2010). Other scholars hailed it as the both the “most ambitious federal education statute ever enacted” and the “remedy for failing schools” (Gamson, McDermott & Reed, 2015; Hess & Finn, 2007, pp. 1-2) with the dawn of increased student achievement as evidenced in gains in “math and reading across states” (Hanushek, 2009, p. 802).

Yet other scholars of school reform have critiqued NCLB with its institutionalization of accountability as, perhaps, the darkest hour or midnight of school reform, especially for poor and marginalized populations of students (Croft, Stenhouse & Roberts, 2015; Darling-Hammonds, 2010; Noguera, 2009; Ravitch, 2010; Theoharis, 2009). From its inception, evidence and reports of school failure abound. Notwithstanding NCLB, subsequent reforms such as Race To The Top

and the recently approved reauthorization of the ESEA, Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), now promise more gains for underperforming and marginalized populations. Whether these reforms are viewed as panacea to alleviate lingering achievement gaps or exacerbations of persistent, systemically hegemonic inequities, the work of many schools, teachers, students, districts, and school leaders is obscured by pervasive narratives of failure and underperformance propagated by the secretary of education. Rarely do critiques acknowledge the academic gains or achievements in other areas.

Most often, marginalized populations are still characterized as living or lost in the “midnight of education.” However, narratives of students, teachers, school leaders, school districts, superintendents and systems that have persisted in spite of reform challenges to make positive gains bear telling. That counternarratives of success, persistence, perseverance, and sometimes incremental improvement exist in the midnight of school reform is a testimony to resilience and creativity that is often overlooked in the emphasis for improvement based on test scores. That there are few counternarratives of success suggests the need for more research on those who have shown improvement and on those who have worked to help their students move beyond the midnight of their various circumstances toward the dawn of student achievement. Because some students have improved despite - and in spite of - seemingly insurmountable challenges, their stories deserve to be told; their voices deserve to be heard; their successes deserve to be celebrated.

It is in this spirit that the editors of this issue recognize that too often in education, the dominant narratives of deprivation and underachievement are those most exclaimed. On rarer occasions are the counternarratives of success told or exposed. The purpose of this special issue is to provide educators including teachers, principals, district personnel, and researchers a medium

in which to tell your stories of success, a venue and an opportunity to celebrate the dawn—the promise, if not totally realized of new beginnings, new opportunities, new break-throughs.

As editors of GER, we invite articles that reveal the other side of midnight, studies of the counternarratives that portend new dawns and opportunities for marginalized populations. We invite studies of practice, leadership, pedagogical and programmatic innovations that capture the work and the promise for children who have been marginalized by systematic and systemic inequities. We invite case, ethnographic, and phenomenological studies, historiographies, and quantitative analyses that promise a new dawn—that give the readers glimpses of the “other side of midnight.” We encourage contributions that point to teaching and leadership strategies that have the capacity to move educators forward with a promise of dispelling the darkness of accountability, corporatization and privatization of public education. We also invite practitioners to share their experiences of how you are making a difference. In short, we envision this special edition as one that shines a light in the darkness.

Finally, this issue espouses AERA’s long held belief that “schools should change in ways that will enable them to respond to and reflect the cultural strengths of students from diverse ethnic, racial, cultural, and linguistic groups” (Banks, 2016, p. 15).

Submission Deadlines and Instructions

All submissions will go through the [GER](#) policy of the review process. Visit the journal’s [Policies](#) page for more information on the guidelines for submissions.

- Submission: no later than 1 November 2018
- Notification of Acceptance: no later than 21 December 2018
- Publication: January 2019

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If a school misses its AYP target for a fourth consecutive year, the school is labelled as requiring "corrective action," which might involve wholesale replacement of staff, introduction of a new curriculum, or extending the amount of time students spend in class. A fifth year of failure results in planning to restructure the entire school; the plan is implemented if the school unsuccessfully hits its AYP targets for the sixth consecutive year. Supporters of the NCLB claim one of the strong positive points of the bill is the increased accountability that is required of schools and teachers. According to the legislation, schools must pass yearly tests that judge student improvement over the fiscal year. Schools that do not meet strict standards face increasingly stringent consequences, varying from the replacement of school staff to the eventual shutdown of the school. These punishments are the most controversial aspects of NCLB. Even improving schools can be restructured under AYP if progress is not fast enough, potentially punishing good administrators who simply cannot move results forward at a pace consistent with AYP. In urban and rural areas that are historically difficult to reform, these consequences strike school officials as unjust. (Check out DC Metro area school testimonials criti Yet, other scholars of school reform have critiqued NCLB with its institutionalization of accountability as, perhaps, the darkest hour (or midnight) of school reform, especially for poor and marginalized students (Croft, Stenhouse & Roberts, 2015; Darling-Hammonds, 2010; Noguera, 2009; Ravitch, 2010; Theoharis, 2009). From its inception, however, labeling of schools as failures and concomitant sanctions would become the norm (Sunderman, Kim, & Orfield (2005). Notwithstanding the negative ramifications of NCLB, subsequent reforms such as Race To The Top and the recently approved reautho However, there is relatively little evidence on how school accountability reforms and NCLB, in particular, have influenced education policies and practices. This study examines the effects of NCLB on multiple district, school, and teacher traits using district-year financial data and pooled cross sections of teacher and principal surveys. Our results indicate that NCLB increased per-pupil spending by nearly \$600, which was funded primarily through increased state and local revenue. Another study found that 44% of school districts said that they had cut time from other subjects and activities so that students would have more instructional time in math and reading after NCLB (McMurrer, 2007). At its core, NCLB faults schools and curriculum for student failure, but critics claim that other factors are also to blame, including: class size, old and damaged school buildings, hunger and homelessness, and lack of health care. Where It Stands. There's little doubt that the No Child Left Behind Act will be reauthorized by Congress in 2007. More than 100 religious denominations and civil rights, education and disability advocacy groups have signed on to the "Joint Organizational Statement on NCLB", calling for changes to NCLB, and stating that: "We endorse the use of an accountability system