**Policy Evaluation: A Benchmark**

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# Abstract

This work aims to outline the key points of educational policy as it relates to federal and state legislation with examples of its intersectionality among k-12 and higher education institutions. The comparisons to federal versus state legislation and current issues and educational policy are referenced with biblical viewpoints as there are relationships found in policy, authoritative expectations, and future policy development.

*Keywords*: policy, Virginia, legislation

**Policy Evaluation: A Benchmark**

 Educational policy is a keystone in forming the course that educational systems travel while it impacts pedagogical methods and outcomes in all levels of classrooms. Fowler (2013) defined educational policy as a complex set of principles, guidelines, and decisions formed by educational leaders on policymakers to address the multitudes of challenges and aspirations of the education sector. In his work, “Policy Studies for Educational Leaders: An Introduction” (4th ed.), Fowler gives an exhaustive account of the intriguing realm of educational policy, highlighting its subtle distinctions and inferences for those in leadership roles (Fowler, 2013). A precursory look into educational policy attempts to iterate its crucial role in governing curricular frameworks, allocation of resources, and the caliber of educational experiences to be had. This work will examine the effects of educational policy on k-12 and higher education terrains as they originate in federal, state, and local governments and guide comprehension of the significance of policy within education and the biblical inferences to be perceived.

**Introduction to Key Federal Educational Policies**

**Higher Education Act of 1965**

The Higher Education Act of 1965 (HEA) is a landmark legislation that shaped the landscape of higher learning in the United States. Watson (2019) passionately explores the intricacies of the HEA in the article “Federal Financing of Higher Education at Crossroads” published in the Michigan State Law Review (Watson, 2019). Watson’s details how the Higher Education Act has been instrumental in providing federal assistance for students, contributing to educational opportunities, and speaking on issues of education affordability.

 Enacted in 1965 by President Lyndon B. Johnson, the Higher Education Act of 1965 was part of his Great Society agenda. Its premise was to broaden the accessibility to higher education for students who demonstrated financial need. Key components of the HEA include financial assistance programs such as federal financial aid which administered the Pell Grant, a need-based grant to low-income, undergraduate students that don’t require repayment. Another component is loan programs like the Stafford Loan which provides low-interest loans to eligible students and parents with reasonable repayment terms. Finally, quality assurance and accountability structures help monitor and maintain the quality of academic programs offered by higher education institutions. Accreditation processes and measuring standards help institutions maintain their eligibility to receive federal funding.

**No Child Left Behind Act**

The No Child Left behind Act (NCLB) is a substantial breakthrough in the realm of United States education policy as it aims to bring attention to educational disparities and establish academic proficiency for students. Ydesen and Dorn (2022) focus attention on the NCLB’s historical direction and its position in the broad structure of educational accountability, providing invaluable insight into the origin of the act and its implications (Ydesen & Dorn, 2022).

 The year 2001 marked the enactment of the NCLB Act. This act was the renewal of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) which was initially designed to escort a new wave of accountability and clarity into American education. The main focus of the No Child Left Behind Act was to make a difference in achievement disparities particularly among marginalized and underprivileged student populations across the country. The act introduced a meticulous system of assessments and standards which placed emphasis on data-backed accountability to assess and improve learning outcomes. These assessments included standardized testing, Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) requirements, and singled out interventions for institutions who did not meet the criteria. NCLB made it mandatory for schools to report academic progress of all of its students paying specific attention to its subgroups so no group of students would be missed. Additionally, NCLB initiated sanctions for schools that continually failed to meet requirements which could potentially include state intervention.

The No Child Left Behind Act established a precedence and allowed a platform for discussion of contemporary educational policy, equity, and accountability to take place in the United States.

**Convergence of K-12 and Higher Education Policies**

Convergence is a concept proposed by Loss and McGuinn (2018) that serves as a framework in comprehension of the ever-changing and evolving landscape of educational policies; particularly k-12 and higher education initiative intersectionality. “Convergence of K-12 and Higher Education Policies and Programs in a Changing Era” (Loss & McGuinn, 2018) examines the morphing dynamics of educational policies that have resulted in the combining of policy and programs within the educational sector.

 According to Loss and McGuinn (2018), convergence signals the growing interdependence and alignment of k-12 and higher education policies. This dependence has expressed a retreat from historical methods of governance and regulation. It is reflective of the

consistent educational path of students and their needs for an integrated, cohesive approach to addressing their educational difficulties. However, Loss and McGuinn (2018) outline how education outcomes can be enhanced by streamlining educational pathways from secondary to post-secondary schooling, thus increasing the likelihood of students’ goal achievement.

**Influence on K-12 and Higher Education**

The No Child Left Behind Act has remarkably expanded emphasis on standardized testing in secondary education because it made testing annually mandatory for gauging acuity in mathematics and reading comprehension for certain grade levels. This legislation formed an accountability framework for monitoring academic progress by introducing Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and implementing sanctions for less than satisfactory performance in schools. However, federal funding for education was increased and educational disparities were addressed.

 The Higher Education Act of 1965 component of the Pell Grant was based not on standardized testing as in secondary education, but rather eligibility could be determined by tests such as the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) or the American College Test (ACT). Accountability and accreditation must be met for an institution of higher education to receive or continue to receive federal funding from the government. The closer colleges and universities adhered to the quality measures; the more funding availability can be accessed by financially dependent students.

**Scriptural References to Government’s Role in Education**

Proverbs 31:8-9 says, “Open thy mouth for the dumb in the cause of all such as are appointed to destruction”, and “Open thy mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy” (*King James Bible 1769/2023*). This verse translates to speaking up for those who may not be able to speak up for themselves and to defend the poor and needy. This what leaders and Christians in positions of leadership, power, and influence have been charged with from scripture. The duty of those in authority is to do unto each other as God, the Father, has done unto each of us. In education, a conscious effort should be made to create a safe haven for students, faculty, and staff to have equal access to quality education and learn to be leaders in communities and caring citizens who honor the law. As love and kindness are shown these traits ingrained in our spirits may easily be passed along throughout generations.

**Introduction to State-Level Policies**

**Code of Virginia and System of Public Schools**

The Code of Virginia is a living, legal document that gives direction when navigating the educational landscape of the Commonwealth of Virginia. Chapter 1 of the Code of Virginia speaks to the “System of Public Schools; General Provisions” (*Code of Virginia Code - Chapter 1. System of Public Schools; General Provisions*, 2022). This jurisdiction framework details provisions and principles that shape Virginia's public education system. These key principles and provisions cover a continuum of educational aspects that reach from school board governance to student and educator rights and responsibilities. The state of Virginia is committed to providing quality education and providing an equitable environment for learning (*Code of Virginia Code - Chapter 1. System of Public Schools; General Provisions*, 2022).

 Section 22.1-2 System of free public elementary and secondary schools to be maintained; states “There shall be a system of free public elementary and secondary schools established and maintained as provided in this title and administered by the Board of Education, the Superintendent of public instruction, division superintendents and school boards” (*Code of Virginia Code - Chapter 1. System of Public Schools; General Provisions*, 2022). This is the first and most important state governed provision that establishes the precedence for education throughout the state of Virginia. This section of the code is a crucial building block for policy to extend to all levels of education across the state. Another section, 22.1-289.032 Certification of preschool or nursery school programs operated by accredited private schools; provisional certification; annual statement and documentary evidence required; enforcement; injunctive relief is a portion of the code that defines the ages and timelines for preschool and eligibility for kindergarten. The code also establishes a safe student-teacher ratio for the classroom (*Code of Virginia Code - Chapter 1. System of Public Schools; General Provisions*, 2022).

**Comparison with Federal Policies**

In comparing the state-level policies of the Code of Virginia to the federal policies previously discussed in the preceding pages, it is apparent that both levels, state and federal, intend to provide the most extensive framework for its educational systems. The Code of Virginia founded frameworks that for public schools across the Commonwealth which covers aspects such as organizational structure, student rights and responsibilities, and governance. In a similar fashion, the federal government’s educational policies contribute to a comprehensive framework by enacting the No Child Left Behind Act and the Higher Education Act of 1965 which concentrated on standardized tests, accountability measures, and financial aid. However, in contrast, as the Code of Virginia legislation was written to govern schools throughout the state, the federal government wrote policies which applied to a wider range across states and could possibly lead to a difference in implementation on each level. Disagreements may arise if federal policy and legislation doesn’t properly align with state policy and legislation, thus spawning the need for policymakers to make revisions and restore cohesion.

**Biblical Principles to State Education Policy**

Micah 6:8 says, “He hath shewed thee, O man, what *is* good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” (*King James Bible 1769/2023*). Essentially, this verse is saying that God has shown you what is good and what is just, then follows up with commandments to act justly and humbly walk with God. If we apply this be able to call view to the landscape of education, it's evident that justice, equality, and authoritative responsibility are the focal points of God's expectation for us. Biblical principles align with the Code of Virginia by urging state government to commit to fairness and equal educational opportunities for everyone. Leadership should strive to provide support services to ethnically diverse student populations and answer the bible’s commandment to be merciful.

**Current Issues in Educational Policy**

At this time, there is a major debt crisis regarding federal policy on repayment of student loans to the government. There are 44.7 million Americans holding student loan debt collectively totaling over $1.5 trillion (Watson, 2019). President Joseph Biden and secretary of education, Miguel Cardona, have been charged with finding equitable solutions to lessen the debt of students across the country. There have been changes to legislation regarding repayment of student loans to public service workers including teachers, nurses, and doctors. many have had their debts completely canceled by the federal government if they qualify while others are scheduled for repayment. students who fell victim to institutions of higher education with unethical, predatory lending practices, may expect to see relief with cancellation of debts, though some students have already received cancellation and relief as others wait. The government is in a position of trying to make everyone happy by executing legislation that is inclusive and consider it of all debt owed by students. However, one ruling cannot satisfy every student and make everyone happy. The Biden administration is currently working on ways to alleviate student debt, but it is not hopeful that resolution will be seen by the administration's end of term in office.

 A biblical perspective on the current issue with student loan debt can be seen in Philippians 4:11-12 which states, “Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.” and “I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need” (*King James Bible 1769/2023*). This scripture may be interpreted as being grateful for the education that you have received and trusting in God to fight your battles for you regarding debt and student loan issues.

**Conclusion**

 Educational policy is the basis of the educational landscape in the United States. Without rules, regulations, and governance at federal state and local levels, education may not be as inclusive or equitable as it is. There are acts and legislation that have been enacted such as the No Child Left Behind Act and the Higher Education Act of 1965, but with the changing social and political climate, so must legislation change to accommodate students and their rights to receive quality education and experience relief from financial burden. When educational policy is written, a Bible verse that may help policymakers that they be of sound mind and character to be as inclusive as possible and write justly is, Philippians 4:13, “I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me” (*King James Bible 1769/2023*). The future of educational policy may be built upon from a biblical perspective to include the word of God because it is suitable for sound doctrine.

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