

Authors Frederick M. Hess and Andrew J. Rotherham, exhibit the supposed conflict between global competitiveness and equity in the article, “NCLB and the Competitiveness Agenda: Happy Collaboration or a Collision Course?” According to the article, the United States will not be able to focus on two agendas. The first agenda is equalizing the education of all students by bridging the educational gap between privileged children and those that are underprivileged (i.e. minorities and poor children). The second agenda is to prepare and foster success among high achievers in the STEM fields (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) in an endeavor to ensure global competitiveness. The authors refer to history as confirming that a movement toward one agenda dissipates the other, or at least pushes it to the back burner. The authors predict a conflict between the 2001 “No Child Left Behind” (NCLB) law, which addresses equity, and the American Competitiveness Initiative (ACI) of 2006, which addresses global competitiveness.

According to the authors, the conflict of the two agendas is said to likely be over priorities and resources (Hess and Rotherham 2007). In particular, the authors seem to stress the conflict as being a result of the distribution of resources to different populations. According to the article, movements for the equity agenda tend to focus on minority students, urban students, poor students, low-achieving students, with an emphasis on elementary and middle school students. However, the movements for competitiveness are said to focus on high-achieving students, those interested in the STEM fields, students from families with a high-income, with an emphasis on high school students. This viewpoint does not take into account the fact that these populations, more specifically these two agendas can overlap. A focus on high-achievers

with the hope of increasing national competitiveness can include students from low-income areas and minorities. Author John O. Harney suggests that the problem lies in where the bridging of the gap takes place. Emphasis is normally placed on increasing the performance of minority and low-income students that do not perform well. Harney suggests bridging the gap from the top by motivating high-potential minority students.ⁱ This would not only promote equity, but it would also foster global competitiveness.

However, author Judy Willis claims that NCLB has made it harder to address the needs of gifted middle level students due to the increased emphasis placed on standardized tests. According to Willis, “If gifted students are bored by the pace [of instruction] or become impatient with classmates who don't perform at their high levels, the resulting overconfidence or frustration can have a negative effect on their success (Willis 2007).”ⁱⁱ This article may seemingly attest to Hess and Rotherham’s claim that the equity agenda and movements for global competitiveness conflict. To be sure, it more specifically attests to the fact that NCLB will conflict with ACI and the global competitiveness agenda.

In conclusion, as Hess and Rotherham highlight, there will be a clash between the global competitiveness and equity agendas, as implemented by NCLB and ACI. However, this does not necessarily mean that one of the agendas needs to be obliterated or put on the hold. Instead, it may attest to the need for amendments to NCLB and the methods used in bridging the educational gap. Moreover, this may also evidence a need to find alternative means for addressing global competitiveness.

ⁱ Harney, John O. “Helping Smart Kids Get Smarter,” *Diverse: Issues in Higher Education*, v24, June 2007, p. 16-18,.

ⁱⁱ Willis, Judy. “Challenging Gifted Middle School Students.” *Principal Leadership*, v8, December 2007, p. 38-42.