On January 8 President Bush signed HR1, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act Authorization [No Child Left Behind Act], into law in what has been called “the broadest rewriting of federal education policy in decades.” In this issue of the RAND Child Policy Newsletter we have compiled RAND work that is directly related to the major issues incorporated into HR1.

**HOT TOPICS**

**School Violence—Prevalence, Fears, and Prevention**

HR 1 reauthorizes the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act of 1994, including state grants for drug and violence prevention programs. The bill also requires participating schools to assess drug and violence problems, set measurable goals, use a research-based prevention framework for programs, and conduct evaluations of those programs.

RAND recently published an Issue Paper on school violence prevention programs and has submitted testimony to a California State Assembly Committee on the effects of school bullying. School-based violence prevention programs to improve student safety vary and can range from the use of metal detectors and security guards on campus to profiling potentially violent students. Based on literature regarding several programs already in place, RAND found that only a handful have been evaluated, and even fewer have been deemed effective or even promising. RAND’s testimony focuses on the detrimental effects of school bullying and peer victimization and offers possible solutions for schools.

**New Study on Vouchers and Charter Schools**

The issue of school vouchers was heatedly debated last session. Although the language was dropped from the final bill, it is a debate sure to draw attention again in the coming session.

A new RAND book, *Rhetoric Versus Reality*, examines the evidence on the effects of vouchers and charter schools, considering five key policy goals: academic performance, family choice, equitable access, social integration, and civic socialization. The authors assess the outcomes that vouchers and charter schools may produce on each of these dimensions, indicating pros and cons and providing a guide for the tradeoffs that policymakers must consider.

The authors conclude with recommendations for future policy design, considering how aspects such as targeting, funding, admission policies, and academic assessments can improve outcomes in terms of each of the five policy goals. This exhaustive and critical review of the evidence on vouchers and charter schools will serve as a useful, unbiased primer for all those interested in this controversial topic.


Meeting the mental health needs of adolescents is a repeating theme in HR1 in areas such as reducing drug addition, understanding and preventing school violence, and the overall health of children. RAND recently released a research brief offering a national picture of mental health care for children ages 1–17. It notes that 1 in 10 young people suffer from mental illness severe enough to cause some level of impairment and that fewer than 20 percent of these children receive needed treatment. This brief summarizes findings by a team of RAND researchers on the current national picture of mental health costs and utilization for children ages 1–17.

**RAND PROJECTS UNDERWAY**

**RAND Evaluation of Edison Schools**

RAND Education is conducting a three-year, independent evaluation of Edison Schools, a for-profit company that manages public schools under contracts with school districts. This study will examine student achievement outcomes as well as the implementation of Edison’s academic program in a variety of its schools around the country. Last year, RAND Education staff provided comments and discussion on the data and the text of Edison’s 2001 achievement report. See the RAND Education statement appearing in the Edison annual report.

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