Benchmarking in U.S. Education
The Genesis and Implementation of No Child Left Behind

Arnold F. Shober
Lawrence University
Roots of NCLB

- **Policy problem:** Racial disparities in educational performance
- **Initial solution:** Increase funding to provide equal educational materials
- **Benchmarks:** National Assessment of Educational Progress
Achievement Gap Persists

ESEA did not meet expectations
New Theory of Action
IASA (1994) and NCLB (2001)

- Low academic standards → Poor academic results
- States are to set academic content standards and benchmarks
NCLB Basics

• Continues IASA requirement for state academic standards...

• ...but requires annual testing for math and reading

• ...and reporting of results in four levels: Below basic, basic, proficient, and advanced

• Requires 100% “proficiency” by 2013–14
Comparable Benchmarks?
Are these really so different?
Conclusion: Course Correction?

- Common curriculum standards
- Federal pressure, but no official federal direction
- Maintains NCLB’s original focus but without formal linkage to results
- Others have pushed for new theory of action: teacher quality → academic results!