

**APPROACHES BETWEEN NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND AND IDEB/BRASIL:  
CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE DEBATE**

***APROXIMAÇÕES ENTRE A NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND E O IDEB/BRASIL:  
CONTRIBUIÇÕES PARA UM DEBATE***

***ACERCAMIENTO ENTRE LA NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND Y EL IDEB/BRASIL:  
CONTRIBUCIONES AL DEBATE***



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**ABSTRACT:** This paper aims to establish approximations between the Basic Education Development Index (Ideb) and the American Law No Child Left Behind, through the theoretical and methodological possibilities of the evidentiary paradigm, proposed by Ginzburg (1989), by the analysis of official, journalistic and academic sources. Bibliographic research and documental analysis have been used which to identify the influences of the law in the construction of Ideb as national public policy for the evaluation of basic education. It is concluded that, although Ideb has its own characteristics to portray the Brazilian educational reality, there is a convergence of concepts adopted by both, as the capacity to produce quantitative results.

**KEYWORDS:** No Child Left Behind. Basic Education Development Index. Evidence paradigm.

**RESUMO:** Este artigo foi desenvolvido com o objetivo de estabelecer aproximações entre o Índice de Desenvolvimento da Educação Básica (Ideb) e a lei estadunidense No Child Left Behind, mediante as possibilidades teóricas e metodológicas do paradigma indiciário, proposto por Ginzburg (1989), na análise de fontes governamentais, jornalísticas e acadêmicas. Por meio da pesquisa qualitativa, essencialmente bibliográfica e documental, identificam-se indícios que sinalizam para as influências da referida lei na construção do Ideb como política pública nacional de avaliação da educação básica. Conclui-se que, embora o indicador possua características próprias para retratar a realidade educacional brasileira, há uma convergência de concepção de qualidade por ambos adotada, que se encontra, majoritariamente, atrelada à capacidade de produzir resultados quantitativos.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** No Child Left Behind. Índice de Desenvolvimento da Educação Básica. Paradigma indiciário.

**RESUMEN:** Este artículo se desarrolló con el objetivo de establecer aproximaciones entre el Índice de Desarrollo de la Educación Básica (Ideb) y la ley estadounidense No Child Left Behind, a través de las posibilidades teóricas y metodológicas del paradigma probatorio propuesto por Ginzburg (1989), en el análisis de fuentes gubernamentales, periodísticas y académicas. A través de una investigación cualitativa, esencialmente bibliográfica y documental, identifica indicios que apuntan las influencias de la citada ley en la construcción del Ideb como política pública nacional para la evaluación de la educación básica. Concluye que, aunque el indicador tiene características propias para retratar la realidad educativa brasileña, hay una convergencia de la concepción de calidad adoptada por ambos, que está mayoritariamente ligada a la capacidad de producir resultados cuantitativos.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** No Child Left Behind. Índice de Desarrollo de la Educación Básica. Paradigma probatorio.

## Introduction

Historically, the evaluation system of basic education in Brazil has developed mostly under North American influence (GATTI, 2012; SOARES, 2012), which helped in the construction of a national political culture (BERSTEIN, 1998; MOTTA, 2009) that considers the development of knowledge focused on results and the practice of evaluating, assumed as the central axis of Brazilian educational policies (FREITAS, 2004; MENDONÇA, 2014).

For Calderón and Borges (2013, p. 270, our translation), this influence occurred "[...] within a process of 'cultural transfer', marked by a vision considered as technicist and positivist, which associated evaluation with measurement". From this perspective, the System for Evaluation of Basic Education (Saeb in the Portuguese acronym), the first initiative aimed at analyzing the Brazilian educational system in depth, emerged in the 1990s, adopting as a model the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)<sup>4</sup> (BONAMINO, 2016; WAISELFISZ; HORTA NETO, 2016). This evaluation system used in the United States is composed of a set of tests that are applied biennially and on a large scale in the country.

With the restructuring of the Saeb in the 2000s, with the creation of Prova Brasil, which inaugurated the census assessment in the national context, accountability practices became effective in the country<sup>5</sup>. Through the consolidation of quality goals for all types of education and in all administrative spheres, the school subjects started to account for the results achieved to society, an action that materialized, especially from the creation of the Basic Education Development Index (Ideb), which came to be used as an instrument to follow up and monitor these goals. The Ideb has been recognized as the main indicator of the quality of basic education in Brazil, making it necessary to conduct studies aimed at understanding the process that led to its creation, in order to (re)know the conception of quality in education adopted by it, which motivated the development of this paper.

However, in consultations conducted in the first half of 2011 on the website of the National Institute of Educational Studies and Research Anísio Teixeira, the federal agency

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<sup>4</sup> In an interview with the renowned researcher in the field of Educational Evaluation, João Luiz Horta Neto, Professor Julio Jacobo Waiselfisz, one of the main names associated with the origins of the Saeb, when asked about the references used in the creation of the system, cites the Naep as the closest model to a system desired at that time. This interview was published in 2016 (v. 29, n. 96) at Revista Em Aberto (WAISELFISZ; HORTA NETO, 2016).

<sup>5</sup> According to Vianna (2005), the concept of accountability in education arose under the influence of Robert Kennedy, a politician and one of the main advisors to his brother, John F. Kennedy, former U.S. president. At the time, there was much discussion about the effects of social inequalities in the educational area of the country, generating great concern about the allocation of financial resources to government programs in the area of compensatory education (VIANNA, 2005).

responsible for the Ideb and linked to the Ministry of Education (Inep/MEC), no official document was found that directly associated the conceptions of quality adopted with any international experience. On the other hand, in an interview with journalist Marta Avancini, published in *Revista Educação* on September 10, 2011, the mentor of the methodology adopted by the indicator, Reynaldo Fernandes, who, at the time, was president of Inep/MEC, reported that its development was inspired by international experiences. Fernandes cites the U.S. law known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, 2002) as a successful action to improve the school performance of students in that country (FERNANDES, 2011).

Thus, we assume the goal of establishing approximations between the IDEB and NCLB, looking for clues that help us understand the influences of the American Education Accountability Act in the construction of a national public policy that evaluates the quality of basic education for all educational modalities and in all administrative spheres. To do so, we appropriated the theoretical and methodological aspects that involve the indicative paradigm (GINZBURG, 1989) in the search for "clues" that contribute to the debate about this theme.

We verified that, although the Ideb has its own characteristics to portray the reality of the national education, there is a convergence of conceptions adopted by both, which indicate these influences and are explained throughout the text. We also discuss the results obtained in the first decade of the existence of the Brazilian indicator and point to the need to fight for a quality school, which, without pressure from multilateral institutions, focuses on the teaching of content capable of transforming our students into critical and responsible citizens who can contribute to the improvement of the environment in which they live.

## **Theory and method**

This article was developed under the theoretical and methodological possibilities of the indicia paradigm, indicated by the Italian historian Carlo Ginzburg (1989). It is a proposal of a heuristic method that is centered on the analysis of detailed data, that is, on the details assumed as clues, indications or signs, which can announce a path through which research can be conducted.

Ginzburg (1989, p. 151, our translation) attributes to mankind the function of a hunter who "[...] sniffs, registers, interprets and classifies the clues" left in time. Thus, in this research, we used the process of hunting the object of study in order to investigate and understand the

influences exerted by NCLB in the process of creating and developing the Ideb, through the traces left by the agents who participated in this action and, thus, reveal its aspects for Brazilian basic education.

To do so, we made qualitative research, essentially bibliographic and documental, and we used, as sources, governmental documents produced with the intention of regulating and directing the actions of the Brazilian and American governments in favor of evaluation policies for basic education, and also academic publications related to the theme.

The official documents were obtained from the websites of the Ministries of Education of both countries<sup>6</sup>. The academic publications were selected through an expanded consultation of the Capes Periodicals Portal, using the terms "Basic Education Development Index" and "No Child Left Behind" as descriptors, separately. For this selection, we considered the relevance of the studies identified and their potential for analyzing the approximations between these State policies. There was no temporal or linguistic delimitation.

As secondary sources, we consulted interviews with the agents involved in the process and journalistic reports produced in the period, available in full on the Internet. The quantitative data on the results of schools and municipalities in the Ideb were obtained through the virtual platform Observatory of the National Education Plan (OPNE in the Portuguese abbreviation)<sup>7</sup>, coordinated by the *Todos pela Educação* (All for Education) movement and developed with the objective of monitoring the indicators related to the goals established by the plan.

### ***No Child Left Behind: The North American Education Accountability Act***

No Child Left Behind (NCLB), enacted by then-U.S. President George W. Bush on January 8, 2002, governed education in the United States of America (USA) until 2014 and became known as the country's "Education Accountability Act. Among the goals of NCLB was the promotion of standardized tests focusing on English Language Arts and Mathematics to evaluate education in schools. The results obtained were publicized to guarantee the students' parents the right to choose the "best" unit for their children to attend. The law stipulated a period of 12 years to reach the adequate level of proficiency in the evaluated areas. For this, it established annual goals that, when met, raised the status of the school and promoted bonuses for its teachers (DARLING-HAMMOND, 2007; WHEELLOCK, 2003).

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Department of Education, available at: <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/index.html>. Access: 12 Sept. 2021. INEP/MEC, Available at: <http://portal.inep.gov.br/documentos-e-legislacao3>. Access: 12 Sept. 2021.

<sup>7</sup> OPNE's virtual platform, available at: <https://www.observatoriodopne.org.br/>. Access: 12 Sept. 2021.

On the other hand, the non-attainment of these goals would open space for the promotion of significant interventions in the school, which considered everything from changing the management to transforming it into a charter school<sup>8</sup> (DARLING-HAMMOND, 2007; GUISBOND; NEILL; SCHAEFFER, 2012). In general, schools that did not achieve Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), which represented the measure of annual growth expected for each educational unit through results obtained in standardized tests, were initially warned and, if they did not respond, in terms of results, they could suffer corrective sanctions, such as those mentioned above.

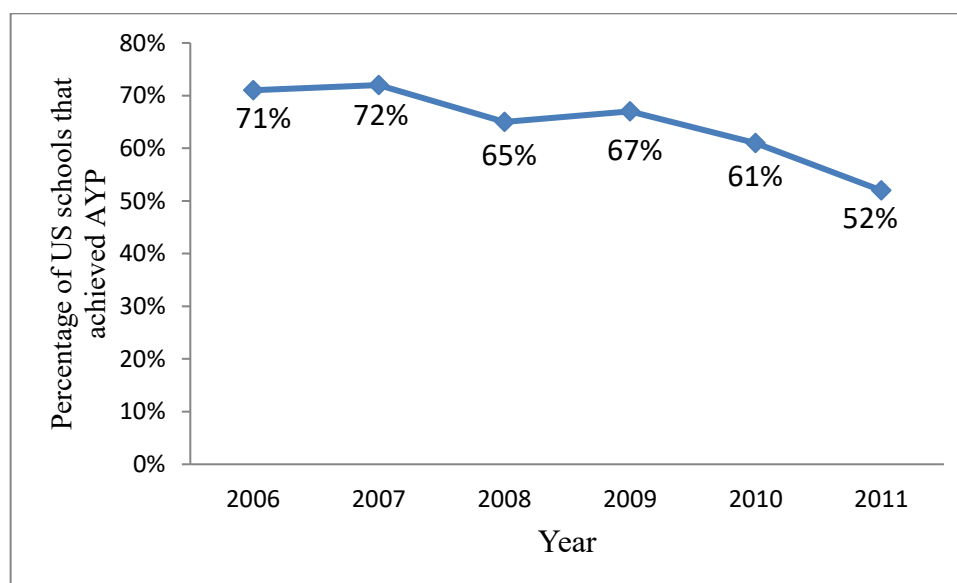
The consequences for the teaching and learning process, over the years, were drastic: teaching focused on excessive tests applied (GUISBOND; NEILL; SCHAEFFER, 2012; ZELLMER; FRONTIER; PHEIFER, 2006); increased retention and dropout rates (WHEELLOCK, 2003); curriculum narrowing (NEILL, 2003; MCMURRER; KOBER, 2007); fraud (MARX; HARRIS, 2006; TIENKEN; ORLICH, 2013); and shortages of qualified teachers in the most disadvantaged schools (CLOTFELTER *et al.*, 2003; DARLING-HAMMOND, 2007). According to Guisbond, Neill, and Schaeffer (2012, p. 408, our translation), NCLB's ten-year report already signaled these points:

NCLB's own indicators of progress reveal the main flaws: growth as measured by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (Naep) has stalled, achievement gaps remain the same, and predictions of widespread school 'failure' are being borne out; the curriculum has narrowed, test preparation has replaced broader schooling, cheating has become rampant, aid for needy schools is more than insufficient, and NCLB has contributed to the growth of a pernicious direct route from school to prison; the narrow focus on punitive accountability and testing has led public decision-makers to ignore the real educational consequences of child poverty, which has grown dramatically these past few years (GUISBOND; NEILL; SCHAEFFER, 2012, p. 408, emphasis added, our translation).

Moreover, the percentage of schools that met the NCLB goals followed a mostly downward trajectory, from 71% in 2006 to 61% in 2010 and reaching 52% in 2011, as illustrated in Chart 1. That year, the state of Florida, located in the Southeastern region of the USA, had 89% of schools that did not meet the quality standard established by law. These facts have mobilized education specialists to debate the multiple shortcomings of the law and also to bring it to discussion in the political, economic and social spheres (AUSTIN, 2017; CHEN, 2018; LEE, 2011; SCOTT, 2011).

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<sup>8</sup> Schools funded by the government but run by private enterprise. More information about charter schools can be found at Davis (2013).

**Graph 1** – Percentage of US schools that achieved AYP (2006 - 2011)

Source: Adapted from The Atlantic Portal (RESNICK, 2011)

In 2014, with a weakened education, reflecting the failure experienced by the adopted policy, the government of then-President Barack Obama began to offer exemptions to US states, which were able to waive the restrictions of NCLB, replaced the following year by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). However, although it offered greater flexibility for states to build their own assessment systems, reducing federal oversight practices, the meritocratic approach and extreme accountability practices remained present in the nation's education system (FOSTER, 2016; HILER; HATALSKY, 2015; MCGUINN, 2016).

### Approximations between NCLB and Ideb

Like NCLB, the Ideb evaluates only the skills and competencies acquired in Vernacular Language and Mathematics, and is developed in a system that provides goals for the quality of national education, which, in turn, have a deadline of 14 years (2007-2021) to be achieved. By the deadline, however, intermediary goals were established, allowing for a more precise follow-up of the evolution of the quality of education in Brazil (FERNANDES, 2007), as is done in the United States, with the difference that there the results are released annually, while here, biennially.

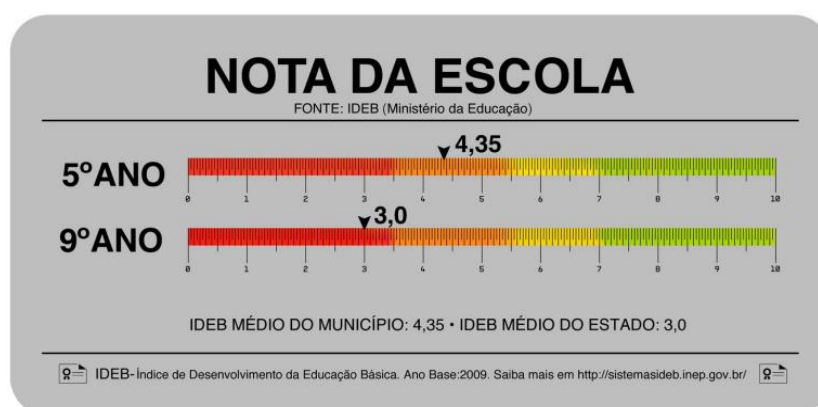
The publicizing of the Ideb results is done by Inep through its official website. It is necessary to consult online in order to get to know the performance of a particular teaching unit

or locality. However, the media and some schools have produced and published unofficial rankings, emphasizing the best and worst performances in the indicator, assuming a mistaken idea that, in Brazil, the educational system is standardized and unified (DAMETTO; ESQUINSANI, 2015).

Furthermore, in the legislative sphere, five Bills (PL) were found with the aim of forcing elementary school in the country to disclose the Ideb results on signs to be displayed on their facades. The first of them, PL no. 1.530/2011 (BRAZIL, 2011a), was authored by the then federal deputy Ronaldo Caiado (DEM/GO), and suggests that, in addition to the score obtained by the establishment, the municipal and state average achieved in the indicator should be disclosed (§1). To this end, he stipulates a minimum area of 1m<sup>2</sup> (§2) for these signs. In the justification of the proposal, the deputy credits the idea to economist and article writer Gustavo Ioschpe, based on a column published on June 8, 2011 in *Veja* magazine, whose title is "For poor illiterate ... tae kwon do!" (IOSCHPE, 2011).

Figure 1 illustrates one of the layouts proposed by Ioschpe (2011) and developed by Nizan Guanaes' team, from ABC Group, for making these signs "[...] designed to be as simple and direct as possible, so that it can communicate to all parents the situation of their child's school in a visually efficient and attractive way" (BRAZIL, 2011b, p. 6, our translation).

**Figure 1** – Layout developed for the installation of the boards containing the schools' Ideb<sup>9</sup>



Source: Brazil (2011b, p. 8).

Appended to the PL referred to above are PL no. 1.536/2011 (BRAZIL, 2011c), authored by Mr. Edmar Arruda (PSC/PR), PL no. 1.600/2011 (BRAZIL, 2011d), authored by Mr. Fernando Torres (DEM/GO), PL no. 5.325/2013 (BRAZIL, 2013), authored by Mr. Félix Mendonça Júnior (PDT/BA), and PL no. 5.325/2013 (BRAZIL, 2013), authored by Mr. Félix

<sup>9</sup> NOTA DA ESCOLA: SCHOOL'S INDEX GRADE



Mendonça Júnior (PDT/BA). Fernando Torres (DEM/GO), PL n°. 5.325/2013 (BRAZIL, 2013), authored by Mr. Félix Mendonça Júnior (PDT/BA), and PL n°. 7.378/2017 (BRAZIL, 2017), authored by Mr. Áureo (SOLIDARIEDADE/RJ).

Although until the time this research was conducted these projects have not become law at the national level, the proposal has gained supporters throughout Brazil. In the state of Minas Gerais, for example, at the initiative of the State Department of Education (SEE/MG), thousands of plaques with Ideb results were made to be installed in all state elementary schools in the state (VEJA, 2012). This action was initiated in the state of Goiás, whose Secretary of Education even stated that, in case of failure to reach the goal, a process of inquiry would be opened in which, if management or leadership failures were proven, this could even lead to the dismissal of the school principal (G1, 2011). This practice initiated a debate about the violation of the rights guaranteed by the Statute of the Child and Adolescent (ECA in the Portuguese acronym) and the Federal Constitution (FC) (BRAZIL, 1988), since it exposed some students to embarrassment and vexation (IG, 2011).

In educational analyses made from these projects, some researchers associated the action with a movement advocating the de-stateization of education in Brazil <sup>10</sup>, following a logic that ranges from outsourcing schools to privatization through vouchers, as occurred in the U.S., post-NCLB (FREITAS, 2014, 2018; THIESEN, 2014; MOURA, 2016). In short, it is advocated that schools that fail to achieve the stipulated goals be transferred to private administration, with popular support generated by the dissatisfaction of the results stamped on their facades. In fact, the mentor of the IDEB methodology, Reynaldo Fernandes, has demonstrated, in some academic publications, his sympathy for charter schools (FERNANDES; MENEZES FILHO, 2013, 2020).

As expected, the overvaluation of the Ideb in some states and municipalities, the pressures coming from higher bodies to reach the stipulated goals and the increasingly accentuated accountability practices on the national scene have led to policies that have provided a revolution in the daily life of schools and teaching. Like the calamitous US post-NCLB scenario, in Brazil, studies have pointed to the excessive number of tests (CASASSUS, 2009; FREITAS *et al*, 2011; HORTA NETO, 2014), curriculum narrowing (FREITAS, 2007; BROOKE, 2013; BAUER; ALAVARSE; OLIVEIRA, 2015), besides the evidence of some fraud practices (CAPOCCHI, 2017, 2018; FREITAS, L., 2018), already denounced in several

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<sup>10</sup> This movement, Freitas (2018, p. 45) calls "Corporate Reform of Education," based on the "tradition of American resistance".

journalistic stories (VILLAS-BÔAS, 2017, FREITAS, C., 2018; SEMIS; 2018; LIMA, 2018; TAKE, 2019). In both scenarios (Brazilian and US), these practices can be explained by Campbell's Law (1976, p. 49, our translation):

The more any quantitative social indicator is adopted for public policy decision making, the greater the corruption pressures and the more the indicator will be used to distort and corrupt the social processes it is supposed to monitor.

In addition, some studies associate them with bonus policies for results (DAVIER, 2011; HOUT; ELLIOTT, 2011), which have become increasingly frequent in the states of the Federation, especially São Paulo (OSHIRO, 2012; BAUER, 2012; OSHIRO; SCORZAFAVE, 2015), Pernambuco (SILVA; SILVA, 2014; FURTADO; SOARES, 2018; SANTOS, 2019), Espírito Santo (OLIVEIRA; LIRIO, 2017; ALCÂNTARA; MATOS; COSTA, 2020), and Ceará (ARAÚJO; LEITE; ANDRIOLA, 2019; VIEIRA; PLANK; VIDAL, 2019; COSTA; VIDAL, 2020).

Regarding these bonus policies, no explicit mention was found regarding federal legislation. However, the National Education Plan (PNE) in force (2014-2024), approved by Law no. 13.005, of June 25, 2014, provides, through strategy 7.36, that there are established "[...] policies to encourage schools that improve their performance in the Ideb, in order to enhance the merit of the teaching staff, the direction and the school community" (BRAZIL, 2014, p. 11).

As an example of the effectiveness of these policies, at the national level, we highlight the "*Destaques da Educação Fundamental*" (Elementary Education Highlights) award, organized by MEC (Ministry of Education). In this case, the schools with the highest Ideb and highest increase in Ideb are awarded, by region and in the current edition (MENEZES, 2019), without considering the infrastructure and socioeconomic conditions, copiously discussed in scientific research as a preponderant factor for school performance (SOARES NETO *et al.*, 2013; ALVES; GOUVÊA; VIANA, 2014; PALERMO; SILVA; NOVELLINO, 2014; SOARES, D.; SOARES, T.; SANTOS, 2020).

At the state level, we highlight the "School Award", in the state of Goiás; the "Mais Ideb Award", in Maranhão; the "Educator Elpídio Barbosa Award", in Santa Catarina; and the "Escola de Valor Award", in Amazonas. These awards consider the results achieved by schools in the Ideb and are based on the practices of meritocracy, competitiveness and accountability.

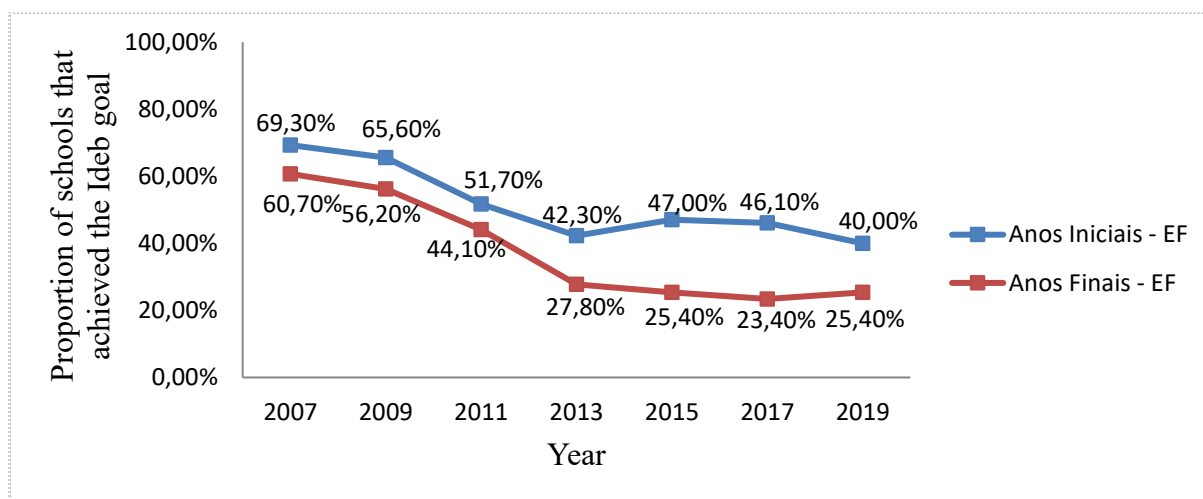
All these behaviors, which bring the Ideb closer to an idea already tried and failed in the US, should have been further discussed in the school and academic environment, in order to avoid (or at least reduce) the impacts of a verticalized, extreme and authoritarian accountability, which makes teachers and managers solely responsible for the school performance of students, without considering their basic characteristics and the extra-school factors demonstrably associated with school performance. As a result, as happened in the United States, an increasing number of schools and municipalities have not achieved the quality goal set by the indicator, which will be discussed in the next section.

### **Analysis of Ideb results (2007 - 2019)**

The long-term results of NCLB demonstrated the failure of such a policy for the quality of American education. In a decade of implementation, about half of the public schools in the country did not reach the pre-established goals (LEE, 2011; RESNICK, 2011; CHEN, 2018). Here the situation is no different, especially for the final years of elementary school.

As shown in Graph 2, for this cycle, the percentage of public schools that had an Ideb score and reached the target set for 2019 is only 25.40%. For the initial years of the cycle, although the situation is milder, the decrease in this percentage over the years is also considerable. This information was extracted from the PNE Observatory portal, managed by the *Todos pela Educação* movement.

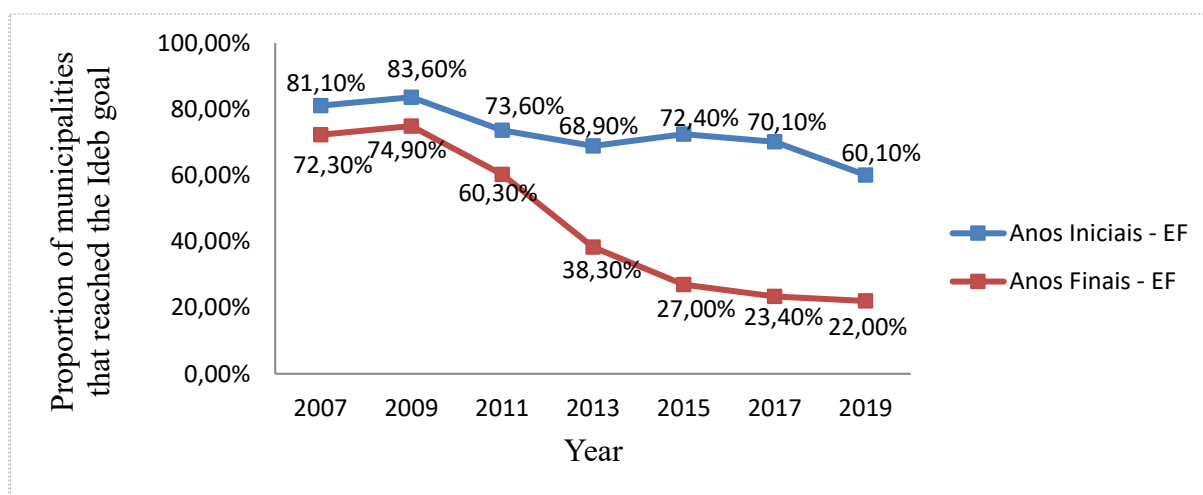
**Graph 2 – Proportion of schools that achieved the Ideb goal (2007 - 2017)**



Source: Prepared by the authors, based on information from OPNE (TODOS PELA EDUCAÇÃO, 2020)

As for the municipalities with Ideb scores that reached the expected target, the analysis of the results referring to the final years of elementary education is even more worrisome. In 2019, less than a quarter of Brazilian municipalities reached the target. This situation is depicted in the Graph 3.

**Graph 3 – Proportion of municipalities that reached the Ideb goal (2007 - 2017)<sup>11</sup>**



Fonte: Elaboração dos autores, a partir de informações oriundas do OPNE (TODOS PELA EDUCAÇÃO, 2020)

<sup>11</sup> Anos iniciais – EF = Early Years of Elementary School

Anos Finais – EF = Final Years of Elementary School

It is also necessary to emphasize that in the initial editions of the IDEB, which present more enthusiastic results, the goals were softened in order to help educational units face the difficulties encountered in adjusting the indicator proposal (SOARES, D.; SOARES, T.; SANTOS, 2022).

Moreover, we emphasize that the absence of a historical series with the Ideb results for secondary education was due to the fact that the Saeb occurred with a sample design for this group, making it impossible to calculate the indicator by school and municipality until 2017. From that year on, however, with the publication of Ordinance No. 564, of April 19, 2017 (BRASIL, 2017b), the assessment became census-based for the 3rd grade of high school, enabling public schools that offer this cycle to also have results in the Saeb and, consequently, in the Ideb, making it possible to monitor their educational results.

## **Final remarks**

This article aimed to analyze the approximations between the No Child Left Behind Act, known as the American Education Accountability Act, and the Ideb, which has been consolidated as the main indicator of educational quality in Brazil. This movement was carried out in order to evaluate the influences of this law for the construction of a national public policy that evaluates the quality of education for all educational modalities and in all administrative spheres.

In fact, although the Ideb has its own characteristics to portray the reality of national education, we notice that there is a convergence of conceptions adopted by both, which indicate these influences. Among them, we highlight: the adoption of an evaluation centered in Vernacular Language and Mathematics; the methodology based on goals for the quality of education and on deadlines for achieving them; and the accountability practices. In summary, we observe that for both NCLB and Ideb, the quality of education is related to the ability to produce quantitative results.

We also observed that the same negative consequences experienced in the United States have been experienced here: excessive number of tests and hours of class to prepare for the exams; narrowing of the curriculum and adoption of specific syllabus to be evaluated; evidence of some fraudulent practices; among others. Furthermore, we note that the number of Brazilian schools and municipalities that have met the established goals has followed a mostly downward

trend over the years, especially for the second cycle of basic education, which has also occurred in the United States.

We believe that tests with the purpose of evaluating student learning are necessary, provided that their use occurs without excesses and in a healthy way for the students and all agents involved in the process. However, there are multiple processes that take place at school, which cannot be observed by indicators, which configure practices and subjectivities that can only be understood by diving into the school routine. Thus, we point to the importance of knowing the educational contexts and the tensions that shape the school reality to corroborate a more systemic analysis of the indicator results. Finally, we indicate that it is important to rethink the effectiveness of the Ideb as a national policy for evaluating basic education.

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