

# The Alliance for Quality Education 2008 Advocacy Brief

## NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND

### Issues

The *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001 (NCLB) was signed into law on January 8, 2002. It is the current name for the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) passed in 1965. NCLB is up for reauthorization in 2007, but passage of reauthorizing legislation will probably not occur until sometime in 2008. Despite calls by some to eliminate the law, it is clear that Congress's intent is to reauthorize a modified law.

NCLB is a means of holding states, school districts and schools more accountable for improving the academic performance of each student regardless of economic status, race, ethnicity, proficiency in English or disability. The law requires states to:

- Establish rigorous academic standards;
- Conduct annual assessments at specific grade levels with at least a 95% participation rate;
- Implement a comprehensive accountability system that includes extensive data collection and public reporting on student and school performance;
- Direct formal sanctions against Title I schools and their school districts for failing to meet proficiency targets in reading and math; and
- Establish new qualification requirements for teachers and paraprofessionals beyond the standards previously established by many states.

In establishing this federal framework for accountability, NCLB provides states discretion to 1) establish content and performance standards; 2) select and operate assessment programs; and 3) establish requirements to monitor and report academic performance of groups of students who have traditionally not been performing at the desired levels.

From the experience of states and school districts in implementing NCLB, many areas of concern have been identified. Among these concerns are:

- Over-emphasizing standardized testing, narrowing curriculum and instruction to focus on test preparation rather than richer academic learning;
- Over-identifying schools in need of improvement; using sanctions that do not help improve schools;
- Inappropriately excluding low-scoring children in order to boost test results; and
- Inadequate funding.

Overall, the law's emphasis needs to shift from applying sanctions for failing to raise test scores to holding states and localities accountable for making the systemic changes that improve student achievement.

### Position

#### Progress Measurement

- Replace arbitrary proficiency targets with achievement targets based on rates of success actually achieved by the most effective public schools.
- Allow states to measure progress by using students' growth in achievement as well as their performance in relation to pre-determined levels of academic proficiency.

- Ensure that states and school districts regularly report to the public their progress in implementing systemic changes to enhance educator, family, and community capacity to improve student learning.
- Provide a comprehensive picture of students' and schools' performance by moving from a reliance on standardized tests to using multiple indicators of student achievement in addition to these tests.

### Assessments

- Move toward a common testing system for all states to eliminate the large discrepancy in state definitions of “proficient.” Under the current system, states with high achievement standards for proficiency (like South Carolina) are penalized and look much worse than states where the “proficiency” bar is set much lower.
- Require assessment systems that
  - Provide useful and timely diagnostic information to improve teaching and learning.
  - Provide multiple, up-to-date measures of student performance including measures that assess higher order thinking skills and understanding;
  - Decrease the testing burden on states, schools and districts by allowing states to assess students annually in selected grades in elementary, middle schools, and high schools.

### Building Capacity

- Ensure that changes in teacher and administrator preparation and continuing professional development are based on research and experience proven to improve educational quality and student achievement.
- Enhance state and local capacity to effectively implement the changes required to increase the knowledge and skills of administrators, teachers, families, and communities to support high student achievement.

### Sanctions

- Ensure that improvement plans are allowed sufficient time to take hold before applying sanctions; sanctions should not be applied if they undermine existing effective reform efforts.
- Replace sanctions that do not have a consistent record of success with interventions that enable schools to make changes that result in improved student achievement.

### Funding

- Increase authorized levels of NCLB funding to cover a substantial percentage of the costs that states and districts incur to carry out the law and fully fund the law at those levels without reducing expenditures for other education programs.
- Fully fund Title I to ensure that 100 percent of eligible children are served.

*Primary sources:” “Joint Organizational Statement on No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act,” Public Education Network (PEN) website: ([www.publiceducation.org](http://www.publiceducation.org)); “Improve the No Child Left Behind Act,” National School Boards Association (NSBA) website: ([www.nsba.org](http://www.nsba.org)).*