



*Great Public Schools for Every Child*

**REMARKS**

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**BEFORE THE ASPEN INSTITUTE'S  
NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND COMMISSION**

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Thank you for the opportunity today to share with you the views of teachers, education support professionals, and other educators regarding the reauthorization of No Child Left Behind. The National Education Association firmly supports, and our 3.2 million members have been working hard to meet, the stated goals of NCLB.

These goals — to raise student achievement, close achievement gaps, and provide every child with a qualified teacher — are perfectly in sync with our own belief that great public schools are a basic right for every child. But while we are working toward the same goals, we believe the law is fundamentally flawed and must be changed.

Let me summarize three main areas of concern: assessment and accountability, teacher quality, and funding.

First, we need a more workable, accurate, and fair assessment and accountability system. There are better ways to measure school and district performance than NCLB's current "snapshot" model that assesses overall student achievement based on just two tests taken one day a year. We object to the current one-size-fits-all adequate yearly progress system. We believe in measuring student progress over time with multiple measures and methods.

And if we expect educators to make use of the assessment results, they must get them in a timely fashion. Current NCLB regulations do not require that test results be given to teachers in time for them to analyze the results and actually use the data.

As a veteran middle school science teacher, I would welcome the opportunity to use my students' test results to guide my instructional practices. But I seriously question the logic of any system that mandates tests, but does not also mandate that the results of those tests be given in time to make instructional adjustments.

As classroom teachers, we recognize that the world has changed, and we want to be delivering an education that is relevant for our students in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. A rigorous curriculum should build skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, and high level communication and literacy skills, as well as deep understandings of content. Unfortunately, NCLB has too often resulted in narrowing of the curriculum and use of multiple choice tests that fail to measure these skills.

Our second concern is the issue of teacher quality. We support the requirement that every child be taught by a qualified, certified, caring teacher. But the rigid nature of the "highly qualified" teacher requirement is forcing too many teachers to jump through hoops. At the same time, the law has failed to provide teachers with the tools and resources to get the job done. We must expand mentoring programs for new teachers, improve professional development programs for all teachers, and offer financial incentives to attract and retain quality teachers in hard-to-staff schools.

A third concern is that NCLB is seriously underfunded. Congress has failed to deliver on its promise to provide the resources necessary to meet its many mandates and to provide school improvement funds to schools that didn't make adequate yearly progress.

Not only has NCLB never been funded at the authorized levels – with that shortfall likely to exceed \$56 billion - but after an increase in funding in the first year, funding has declined. In this school year, the Congress provided \$1 billion less than it did last year. Most states and school districts are facing unfunded mandates, real cuts in resources, and no federal funds to help turn around low-performing schools.

Our members are inundating us with stories of how the law is playing out in their own classrooms and communities, and they have told us how to overhaul it. In a recent poll:

- 71% strongly favor using multiple measures instead of just standardized tests;
- 70% strongly favor measuring student achievement over time;
- 64% strongly favor fully funding NCLB mandates, and
- 63% strongly favor restoring the class size reduction program.

The public shares many of our concerns. A Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup poll this summer found that nearly 7 in 10 of those polled who were familiar with NCLB felt it was either hurting or not helping their community's schools.

The calls for changes to NCLB are coming from many different groups, not just educators.

- NEA has been joined by 89 other national organizations representing diverse interests in calling for specific changes to the law.
- Both the National Governors Association and the National Conference of State Legislatures have called for substantial changes to NCLB.
- The Partnership for 21st Century Skills says, among other things, that “the assessment and accountability system should be based on multiple measures of students' abilities.”

And the Congress itself seems to recognize that it's time for a change. There are now close to 40 bills pending in Congress — introduced by both Republicans and Democrats — to improve the law and provide the resources for real reform.

Our positive agenda for the 2007 reauthorization focuses on five priorities to ensure every child has access to a great public school:

1. Accountability that rewards success and supports educators to help students learn;
2. Smaller class sizes to improve student achievement;
3. Quality educators in every classroom and school;
4. Students and schools supported by active and engaged parents, families, and communities; and

5. Resources to ensure a great public school for every child.

Our recommendations are laid out in more detail in my written comments and supporting documentation.

As I end my remarks, let me quote one more person—Parker Palmer, an educator and author of the inspiring book, *The Courage to Teach*: "In our rush to reform education, we have forgotten a simple truth: reform will never be achieved by renewing appropriations, restructuring schools, rewriting curricula, and revising texts if we continue to demean and dishearten the human resource called the teacher on whom so much depends."

It is critically important that all of us — educators, the business community, and policymakers — work together to correct the flaws in the law, add positive provisions to help close achievement gaps, and provide schools with the resources they need to get the job done, so every child can have a great public school. Thank you.