



NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND: What does the law mean for our schools and communities?

Passed by Congress in 2001, the Bush Administration's education reform legislation No Child Left Behind (NCLB) mandates that every child be "proficient" in reading, math, and science by 2014. While parents, students, and education advocates agree that many of our schools are failing to adequately educate students, especially low-income students of color, forcing these schools to meet increased standards and suffer increased sanctions *without* increased resources equals certain failure.

Two school districts and 231 Bay Area schools were designated as "failing" in 2004, and many of these schools will ultimately be closed, reorganized, or taken over by the state.

Rather than improving low-performing schools, the impact of NCLB is to replace them with private charters, breaking unions and teachers' hard-fought gains and making our schools even less accountable to the communities they serve.

Key Issues:

NCLB targets low-income communities and communities of color

NCLB imposes unmeetable test-score targets on an already unequal school system. Schools that receive Title I funding serve low-income students – primarily students of color – in the most underfunded schools. It is these schools that face penalties under NCLB. Ironically, the law will ultimately lead to reductions of federal funding to the schools that need it the most.

NCLB confuses testing with quality

Limiting the measure of school success to one test score will actually worsen the quality of our schools. A focus on testing narrows the curriculum and teaching practices and squeezes out non-tested areas such as art, music, and social studies. This "test and punish" strategy will not result in improved quality of education for our children.

NCLB penalizes schools with large numbers of English language learners

NCLB requires that English language learners participate in standardized testing within three years of entering school. This makes it extremely difficult for schools with large numbers of English language learners to achieve NCLB targets, and puts pressure on schools to immerse students in English-only programs rather than provide high-quality bilingual or dual immersion programs that allow students to learn subjects in their own language while learning English.

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NCLB “fails” schools even if they are improving

Most of the nation’s schools will be deemed failing under NCLB, even many that already have high test scores and those that are steadily improving. A new study in California found that failing schools were designated not because test scores had shown a drop in overall achievement levels, but because a single student group – disabled students or Asian students, for example— had fallen short of a target. Indeed, three-quarters of the schools in the Bay Area that are “failing” under NCLB actually improved on the state API. Schools with diverse student populations are most likely to fail, because they have to meet testing targets in more categories.

NCLB does not account for where students start in relation to the proficiency standard, and it does not reward students for making progress towards that standard. If a school fails to have the required percentage of students at the proficient level, sanctions are imposed on the school and, eventually, that school can be taken over by the state.

NCLB is an Unfunded Mandate

NCLB requires underresourced schools and school districts to implement reform without adequate funding. By some estimates, the current request for funding NCLB from the Bush Administration fall as much as \$12 billion short of how much it costs school districts to implement the legislation’s requirements.

NCLB contains many Bush Administration “hidden agendas”

Military Recruitment:

NCLB requires schools to turn over student contact information to the military for recruiting purposes. Using the threat of withdrawing federal money to make underfunded schools and desperate parents send low-income youth off to war is unconscionable and immoral.

Privatization:

If schools fail to meet test score targets within the five year “improvement” period, they can be shut down and reopened as private charter schools. Most often, charter schools hire non-unionized staff. Breaking the teacher’s union by holding teachers accountable for results WITHIN the classroom that are influenced mostly by factors OUTSIDE the classroom is manipulative and exploitive of our children.

Key Opportunities:

Parents, students, and allies can:

- Demand that parents be at the table in developing a plan for school improvement.
- Work with local allies to develop a comprehensive school improvement plan and insist that the District carry it out or come up with a better plan.
- Demand that the state and local district monitor the quality of supplemental service providers, such as tutoring companies, to ensure that they are effective.
- Push your district to apply for all funding available to improve failing schools.

Prepared by the Bay Area Parent Leadership Action Network, May 2005

Sources: Deborah Meier and George Wood, editors, *Many Children Left Behind: How the No Child Left Behind Act is Damaging Our Children and Our Schools*, Beacon Press, 2004; Center for Community Change Briefing Paper, *No Child Left Behind*, January 2003; March 4 Education Fact Sheet, www.march4education.org