

Forum on Educational Accountability

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Ten Important Principles from the Forum on Educational Accountability to Address the Discussion Draft No Child Left Behind Reauthorization Proposal Being Circulated by House Education and Labor Chair, George Miller

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This document is designed to help organizations that have signed the *Joint Organizational Statement on No Child Left Behind* track concepts being debated as Congress considers the scheduled 2007 reauthorization and develop talking points for action.

While the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) sets ambitious goals for educating poor children to the same standards as their affluent counterparts, NCLB's regimen of annual standardized testing and sanctions has not significantly improved either the academic achievement or the classroom experiences of the children it purports to help. The House Education and Labor Committee's discussion draft for the reauthorization of NCLB addresses several of its problems, but it does not go nearly far enough. NCLB would remain too much a test and punish law. To ensure that NCLB genuinely improves public schools and expands meaningful educational opportunity for America's vulnerable children, groups in the Forum on Educational Accountability urge Congress to:

1. Encourage states to lower the stakes attached to standardized tests in reading and math by authorizing states to use multiple measures. These include using multiple forms of assessment such as performance tasks, portfolios and local, teacher-made tests, in addition to standardized exams, as the House draft allows. Encourage schools to focus on more than reading and math test prep by increasing the importance of additional indicators such as assessments of other academic subjects, grade promotion rates, and graduation data. The House draft does allow other indicators to count toward "adequate yearly progress" (AYP), but it requires reading and math to count for at least 85 percent in elementary and 75 percent in high school. This allows minimal weight for other indicators which will give schools little incentive to broaden their curriculum.
2. Adopt a growth model that uses multiple indicators to measure each student's learning over time. This should replace the current system that credits learning only when cohorts of children meet benchmark scores. Collecting data to track each student's learning over time is essential. While we must uphold high expectations for all children, we must also honor every child's accomplishments.
3. Make standardized tests less frequent. There is no need to test students every year for accountability purposes. Children in today's schools spend far too much time taking high-stakes exams and practice tests for them. Too little time is devoted to critical thinking and exploration of a broad, enriched curriculum.
4. Insist that all schools improve achievement according to goals that are realistic. Eliminate the utopian "all children proficient by 2014" deadline that labels too many schools as "failing" and has pressured too many excellent principals and teachers into leaving vulnerable schools that need our best and brightest educators. Instead require schools to match the ambitious goal of the rate of academic improvement actually being achieved in the nation's better Title I schools.
5. Shift the focus of NCLB from sanctioning public schools to strengthening them through interventions that build school capacity by improving the skills of teachers, supporting strong

leadership among principals, and making families more welcome at school. Emphasize school improvement, delay sanctions for schools that demonstrate they are meeting the needs of most students, and allow districts and states more flexibility to develop effective solutions for schools that have not turned around. The current sanctions of NCLB undermine school improvement by driving Title I funds away from the very schools that need the greatest support. Too many of NCLB's sanctions direct public funds into privatized services for which there is little public oversight.

6. Recognize the unique situation of English Language Learners (ELLs). The dual goal for ELLs should be English language acquisition and long-term mastery of the school curriculum. Judge individual students' learning over time, and monitor progress against growth rates established as reasonable and feasible by scientific research on second language learners, not arbitrary AYP benchmarks. Provide federal support to help states develop appropriate curricula for English Language Learners and design and implement valid and reliable assessments for them. Ensure that academic assessments of ELLs are valid and reliable before using them to make judgments about schools.

7. Ensure that all children with disabilities are included in all assessments in a balanced accountability system, including participation in general assessments, assessments with accommodations, or alternate assessments. Ensure that individualized education program teams are empowered and trained to determine which assessments and accommodations are most appropriate for individual students with disabilities to meet NCLB and IDEA requirements, provided that the IEP itself is not used for accountability. The performance on assessments of children with disabilities must have the same impact on the reporting of data as the performance of other children.

8. Ensure that all children are taught by highly qualified teachers. Improving teaching cannot be accomplished through threats and sanctions. An important goal is to attract and keep experienced and qualified teachers in schools where turnover continues to be too high. Professional development should be organic: driven by the needs teachers identify; built on peer collaboration and mentoring; and incorporated into each school's week through allocated time for planning and ongoing program evaluation that identifies obstacles to a school's improvement and creates steps to overcome these obstacles.

9. Strengthen parent involvement provisions by providing for adult literacy and parenting skills programs to help parents nurture their children's learning at home and by developing adult mentoring for children who do not have support from involved families.

10. Fully fund the Title I authorization to dramatically improve teaching and learning. To enable states and localities to carry out necessary systemic improvements in all Title I funded schools, the federal government must substantially underwrite the costs. We are deeply concerned about imposing sanctions and mandates onto a system with vast funding inequities. While Title I is small relative to state and local funding, it is the federal government's primary tool for equalizing educational opportunity. Fully funding Title I would begin to shift the focus of NCLB from punishing struggling schools to improving them, especially in districts with diminishing tax bases and exploding needs that serve populations segregated by race and extreme poverty.

- The Joint Statement and the FEA legislative recommendations are available on the web at <http://www.edcaccountability.org>.
- The Forum on Educational Accountability (FEA) is a working group of the 140 signers of the Joint Statement on NCLB. All signers agree to the goals of the Joint Statement and seek to implement its recommendations. Additional statements made by FEA reflect this commitment but may not reflect all individual positions taken by signatories.