

Forum on Educational Accountability

www.edaccountability.org

July 9, 2007

Member
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act/No Child Left Behind Act

Dear Representative:

In the coming days, Chairman George Miller and Ranking Member Howard “Buck” McKeon of the House Education and Labor Committee will formally begin the reauthorization process for the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), last reauthorized as the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001. In preparation for the reauthorization, the Forum on Educational Accountability (FEA) urges you to talk with the Committee leadership and your colleagues on the Committee about the importance of making significant improvements to this law.

Positively, NCLB refocused national discussion about public education and fostered increased emphasis on the need to ensure that each child receives a quality education. The goals of this law remain as important now as on January 8, 2002, when President Bush signed the bill into law.

However, as you are aware from your own constituents, during five years of implementation many unintended consequences have been identified. These include the flawed accountability system, lack of sufficient federal funding for reliable and valid assessments for each student, ineffective yet mandated sanctions for schools and school districts not meeting targets, and the failure to provide adequate support to improve the capacity of teachers, administrators and parents to promote high level student learning. These problems make clear the need for significant improvements to the law. Many of your constituents have been very vocal in pointing out the needed changes.

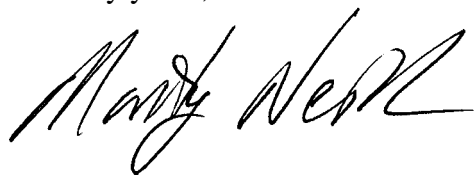
As you may be aware, FEA is one of only a few organizations that represent a truly broad range of constituents. The FEA bases its work on the *Joint Organizational Statement on NCLB*, signed by 137 education, civil rights, religious, disability, parent, civic and labor organizations representing 50 million Americans. Yet, we are unified in our position on the key changes that need to be made during this reauthorization process. Our basic premise is that *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*. Therefore, FEA urges you to contact your colleagues on the House Education and Labor Committee and ask them to ensure that the following recommendations are fully addressed in the final Committee mark-up:

- 1) Replace the current accountability model with ambitious achievement targets based on rates of success actually achieved by the most effective Title I schools.
- 2) Hold states accountable for using multiple, up-to-date, sources of evidence of student learning, including test scores, in determining school progress. Provide targeted federal funding to help states and school districts implement high-quality assessment systems, including local and classroom assessments, that support learning as well as provide accountability data.
- 3) Ensure that growth models are not limited by arbitrary target dates and that they incorporate multiple sources of evidence, not just standardized test scores.
- 4) Reduce the testing burden on states, schools and school districts by allowing states to assess students annually in selected grades in elementary, middle schools, and high schools.
- 5) Require all Title I schools to implement high quality professional development, parental involvement and family support. These should be locally-controlled, within reasonable federal guidelines.
- 6) Create a balanced accountability system based on enacting the systemic changes that improve learning *and* making a reasonable rate of improvement.
- 7) Remove the current sanctions steps and the mandated changes in school or district governance. Require tailored and focused assistance for schools and districts that have not been able to meet the requirements of the balanced accountability system after a reasonable period of time and sufficient support.
- 8) Provide adequate funding to support the improvements and program changes called for by FEA. Fully fund Title I to ensure that 100 percent of eligible children are served.

The full FEA legislative recommendations and two reports published by FEA provide substantial detail on these changes. They, and the Statement, can be found at www.edaccountability.org.

We would be pleased to discuss the Joint Statement and the FEA recommendations with you.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Monty Neill". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Monty" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Neill".

Monty Neill, Ed.D.

Chair

monty@fairtest.org