

Forum on Educational Accountability

<http://www.edaccountability.org>

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ASSESSMENT REFORMERS SEEK DEEPER “NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND” CHANGES; HOUSE EDUCATION COMMITTEE DRAFT PRAISED FOR “VALUABLE INITIATIVES” BUT REMAINS TOO MUCH “A TEST-AND-PUNISH LAW”

The Forum on Educational Accountability (FEA) today called on the U.S. House Education Committee to make “more significant changes” in its rewrite of the federal “No Child Left Behind” (NCLB) law so that it can “fulfill its goal of ensuring all children succeed in high-quality schools.” FEA seeks to implement the Joint Organizational Statement on NCLB, now signed by 139 national education, civil rights, religious, disability, parent, civic and labor groups with more than 50 million members.

In a letter delivered to all members of the House of Representatives, FEA applauded the decision to circulate a discussion copy of proposed revisions and announced its support for several key provisions of the committee’s draft, including:

- authorizing states to use valid and reliable local assessments as part of their state assessment systems and a pilot project to help states develop such assessments;
- allowing states to use indicators other than only reading and math scores in determining school and district progress; and
- reforming the school improvement process to provide more assistance and give schools more time to implement necessary changes once they adopt an improvement plan.

But FEA cited the recent Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup poll demonstrating that the U.S. public seeks fundamental reforms in NCLB, concluding, “The Committee draft falls short of that goal by:

- overemphasizing testing at the expense of improving teaching and learning;
- continuing to rely on sanctions that have no evidence they will be successful; and
- paying too little attention to correcting NCLB’s perverse incentives, which narrow curriculum and reduce education to test-prep, especially for the “left behind” groups.”

The FEA letter continued, “The law, while improved, would remain too much a test-and-punish law” and recommended a number of additional changes including:

- Replacing the goal that nearly all students score “proficient” by 2014 and the Adequate Year Progress mandate based on it - targets that nearly all experts agree are impossible to attain - with an accountability approach based on implementing systemic changes that will improve teaching and learning while holding schools accountable for improving at a strong but reasonable rate;
- Increasing the weight given to indicators other than reading and math tests, so that schools will be supported in providing a comprehensive curriculum to educate the whole child.
- Giving schools sufficient time to implement improvement plans before more drastic steps are taken.
- Allowing districts and states more flexibility to develop effective solutions for schools that have not turned around since there is no strong evidence to support any of the required options for “redesign;” and
- Ensuring that sufficient funds are authorized so include all eligible children in Title I and to support the many improvement proposals in the law.

FEA will submit detailed proposals to implement these changes as well as improvements in provisions dealing with the assessment of students with disabilities and English language learners.

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* the letter to House Education Committee members, the Joint Statement on NCLB, a list of signers and other Forum on Educational Accountability documents are available online at www.edaccountability.org