

Testimony of Chancellor Joel Klein
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Good morning. Thank you, Chairman Thompson and Chairman Barnes for inviting me to testify today about No Child Left Behind.

This morning, I will discuss how NCLB's assessment and accountability provisions are affecting New York City public schools. But first, I'd like to step back and put my comments into context. For decades, school reformers have tried and failed to fix education in America, to ensure that American students do not fall behind their international peers and to ensure that all students in this country, no matter what their race or socio-economic status, are receiving the high-quality educations they deserve. The law that we're discussing today, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, might not be perfect, but it is incredibly valuable because it recognizes that the achievement gap—the gap that separates our African American and Latino students from their white and Asian peers—is the chief problem in American schooling. When they passed NCLB, our national leaders finally took responsibility for the fact that white and Asian students are performing four years ahead of African American and Latino student in high school. *Four years.* And this law finally puts muscle behind the attempt to close that gap. It forces us to break down student performance in grades three through eight by race. We can no longer mask the deficiencies of some students with outsized gains by others.

I'm sure you will hear that this law has problems, and I wouldn't argue that it's flawless. But at the same time, it is critical that we all remember that NCLB is not just important. It's fundamental. I've never met a law that couldn't improve. But to criticize the heart of No Child Left Behind is to refuse to take responsibility for the achievement gap—the most serious Civil Rights, social, and economic crisis facing America today. We should, of course, learn from our experiences and make a good thing even better, but we should not dream of watering down or destroying a law that forces us to confront our problem head on. We must not yield to the critics of NCLB because, I believe, their complaints are missing the law's broader significance.

Now to the topic at hand: testing.

Some people get upset when I say this, but testing is not a bad thing. On the contrary, if tests are based on standards, and the standards are high-quality standards, then we *should* be testing children, and testing them routinely, to find out if they are learning the skills and content that we believe they should learn. Urging teachers to “teach to the test” is something else that upsets some people. The anti-testing advocates would have you believe that people like me want our students to run through daily drills on how to properly fill in bubbles with No. 2 pencils. That couldn’t be further from the truth. I believe that if we have created high-quality standards, our teachers should teach students the skills and ideas they must master in order to pass their tests. That’s teaching to the test.

This does not mean that I endorse all tests and all testing. I acknowledge that many tests are not as good as they could be. We must be vigilant to ensure that we are administering good tests that produce accurate and reliable results. If we are testing our students, we need to know that the results are providing us with high-quality information about what our students know.

New York is constantly assessing its tests with an eye for improvement. The statewide tests for grades three through eight include both multiple-choice and writing components, so they measure breadth and depth of content. These are the tests that we use to determine whether schools have made adequate yearly progress under No Child Left Behind. New York City also uses in-class interim assessments, which, as part of our new accountability initiative, will include a writing component.

The accountability initiative we are launching this year goes hand in hand with our empowerment initiative. Together, they have enormous potential to boost student

performance. Here's how they will work: we are giving principals additional decision-making power over curriculum, budgets, and hiring in exchange for holding them responsible for improved student achievement. In other words, more power in exchange for greater accountability.

Our accountability initiative will look at progress from a perspective that goes beyond NCLB. Instead of simply measuring the performance of the fourth grade this year and the fourth grade next year and comparing the two sets of results to see if there was any progress, we're using a "value added" approach—measuring this year's fourth graders against the same kids when they are in the fifth grade next year. That way, we are looking at the same group of students over time. I think this will prove a far more effective way of gauging student achievement, and it will provide us with another data point on top of what we learn from the No Child Left Behind requirements.

You will hear a lot of debate about absolute standards versus value-added measures. I don't think we should have to choose. We need to keep our eyes on the ultimate goal, which is ensuring that every child can read and do math on a high level. But we also need to recognize that schools sometimes succeed in helping kids make progress without accomplishing that ultimate goal. It is wrong to call a school an unqualified success when children aren't reading well, but it is also wrong to call a school an unqualified failure when it is helping its students make progress. Both absolute achievement and growth should both play a role in our judgments of schools.

Our progress measure is also more precise than what is required under No Child Left Behind. We measure all gains and all losses, even those that don't jump students from one proficiency level into another. For example, under the federal law, it does not count as progress if a student moves from a low-level two to a high-level 2. But a jump from a high level 2, what we call approaching standards, to a low level 3, what we call meeting standards, counts a lot. We want to motivate our educators to help all students learn. We don't want them just to focus on moving the students who appear most likely to make the

jump from below standards to above standards. That means boosting a student from a low two to a high two should count for something.

In a single incentive system, we shortchange the vast majority of our students. We are moving to a system that values and motivates all progress, regardless of the starting point.

Our new value-added information will feed into annual school progress reports, which will be completely transparent and available for all of our 1,400 schools. These reports will measure schools on three quantitative factors: School Environment, Performance, and Progress. School Environment is a combination of attendance and safety data, as well as student, teacher, and parent survey results. Performance is what NCLB now relies on—snapshots of student performance in a given year. As I described, Progress measures aggregated individual student performance over time. Based on these three factors, with Progress counting most, our schools will receive grades of A, B, C, D, or F.

These grades will tell parents where their students' schools are—and whether they are making progress. It will be a way for us to take responsibility for our schools, and we will take action to ensure that our children are not in F schools for long.

Starting next year, we are also creating a comprehensive Data Management System, which will include all the information from statewide standardized exams as well as information from periodic in-class formative assessments. Using these systems, teachers will be able to give mini-assessments to find out whether students have grasped what they've been taught. If they have, teachers can move to the next subject. If they haven't—of if certain students are still struggling—teachers can intervene. The Data Management System will allow teachers and principals to look at records for individual students and for entire classes to spot trends and make mid-course corrections.

Some schools in our system are already using data the way I am describing, but too many of our educators are estimating and guessing, even though we're working in an age of technology, an age when educators don't have to guess what the problem is and

experiment until they find the right solution. I want to arm our educators with the information they need to make wise decisions and give them the tools they need to interpret information and put it to use.

Many people consider tests and assessments to be about penalizing children. A couple of years ago when the Mayor and I decided to end social promotion—so that third-graders could not graduate to the fourth grade unless they were at least performing at the basic level on their citywide math and English exams—some critics said we were going to do irreparable harm to eight-year-olds. I respectfully disagree. The tests aren't penalizing the children, they're helping us spot problems and fix them before it's too late. Students don't benefit when they are pushed through school, never learning the basic skills they need to succeed. Students who repeatedly score below basic—at Level 1—have not remotely mastered their work. We need to remedy that deficiency in their education, not push them along where they will only fall further behind. Today, we have students in our high schools who cannot read. How did we allow that to happen?

I want to change the way people think about tests. I want people to see tests as tools for us to find out whether teaching is working and whether what's taught is getting through to students. And, importantly, I believe that we as a system must hold ourselves accountable and take action to correct problems if tests are showing us that we are not making progress.

As you heard me say today, New York is trying out some new testing and data-collection techniques. Let me be clear: We are not substituting our methods for NCLB, but adding to it. Right now we're thinking of our accountability measures as a new data point, which shows us different information than NCLB. I think the two systems will complement one another.

We're still at the early stages of our accountability initiative, and our attempt to change the attitude toward testing is still young—but the work we have been doing in recent years shows, I think, that we are going in the right direction. Not only are scores rising—

both on city and state tests and on the National Assessment of Educational Progress—but we are finally making some headway in closing the achievement gap.

I look forward to making more progress in the coming years, and I am pleased that people in New York and people across the country are finally focusing in on accountability—something I think is crucially important to our future success.

I welcome your questions.