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# Successful Interventions: Helping Schools Achieve Academic Success

*A Hearing at Monona Terrace, Multimedia Lecture Hall*

*Madison, Wisconsin*

*June 9, 2006*



The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) requires states to set up a series of interventions for consistently struggling schools. These interventions include initial targeted assistance, free tutoring and public school choice for students attending schools labeled “in need of improvement,” and an escalating list of sanctions for those schools that continue to miss adequate yearly progress (AYP) targets in subsequent years. As Secretary Tommy Thompson, Co-Chairman of the Commission on No Child Left Behind, stated in his opening remarks, “If the current school is not getting the job done, the law contains options to help parents and children as those schools work to improve,” adding, “I like to think of this as having an academic bottom line on behalf of the child.”

Since the adoption of NCLB, these provisions have produced mixed results and thus have brought about widespread disagreement as to their effectiveness. Some have argued that NCLB’s sanctions are punitive and do little to spur academic improvement. Others claim that NCLB interventions have helped focus teachers, principals, school board members, superintendents and others in taking action to turn around the performance of identified schools and to provide immediate help to struggling students. As Governor Roy Barnes, Co-Chairman of the Commission, stated in his opening remarks, “It takes real work to turn around a school that is struggling academically. While we need to hold our schools accountable for achievement, we also need to ensure schools and their teachers have the tools and proven methods to address their difficulties.”

With regard to NCLB’s public school choice and supplemental educational services (SES) options, questions have arisen about low participation rates among eligible children, school district implementation, and oversight of the quality and effectiveness of tutoring providers. In addition, a few high-profile cases of SES providers failing to deliver appropriate services or offering questionable inducements for participation have brought to light the absence of state oversight of SES. Also, significant discussion has started over the need for effective evaluation of student achievement gains resulting from these interventions.

## EMERGING ISSUES FROM TESTIMONY AT THE HEARING

- NCLB accountability provisions generally have brought a much-needed focus on student achievement and fostered a climate of change in schools
- A collaborative approach to school improvement involving systemic intervention and support has had success at the state and local levels
- Current participation among eligible children in SES and public school choice is surprisingly low; competing viewpoints are cited as the cause: poor (in some cases purposefully) implementation by school districts and a lack of resources to properly administer the program
- Monitoring and evaluating the quality and effectiveness of SES and service providers remain a challenge for states, districts and schools
- Teachers and other educators want to first focus on improving identified schools before providing SES or public school choice to students; parents want these provisions implemented if school improvement does not happen quickly

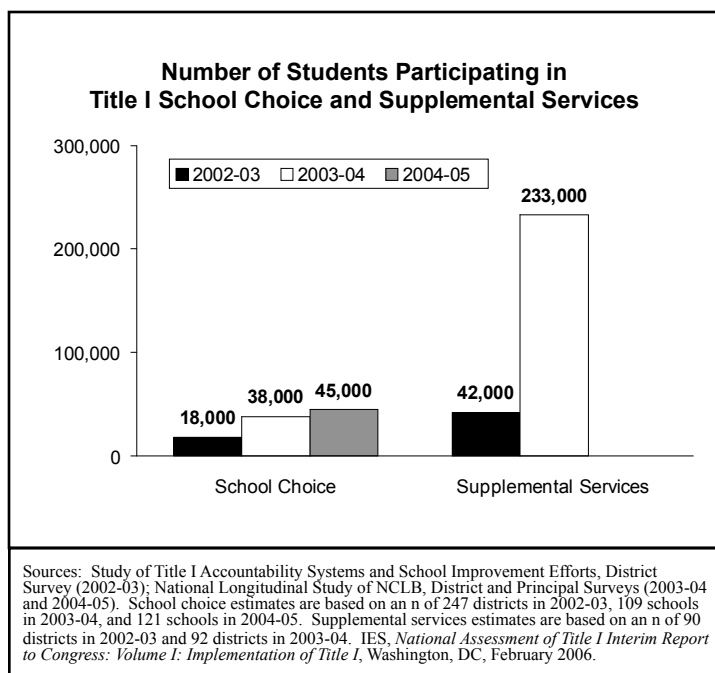
Witnesses at the hearing in Wisconsin expressed strong opinions regarding the school improvement process, public school choice, SES and other NCLB issues. To access the witnesses' testimonies and view a complete webcast of the proceedings, go to [www.nclbcommission.org](http://www.nclbcommission.org). As it develops recommendations on these issues for the upcoming reauthorization of NCLB, the Commission will continue to consider information from a variety of sources, including testimony from witnesses and others at our series of public hearings, written comments sent to the Commission, quality research, and state, district and school performance data.

## A National Look at School Improvement

According to a report released in March 2006 by the Center on Education Policy (CEP), the number and percentage of schools identified for improvement have remained fairly steady over the past four years. In *From the Capital to the Classroom: Year 4 of the No Child Left Behind Act*, CEP found that about 10 percent of all schools nationwide (8,646 schools) are in various stages of improvement (improvement, corrective action, restructuring) for the 2005-2006 school year. Of this group, 6,748 schools are Title I schools, accounting for 14 percent of all Title I schools. CEP further found that approximately 13 percent of school districts are in improvement in 2005-2006.

An interim report, *National Assessment of Title I* by the Independent Review Panel (IRP), released in February 2006, held that the most common improvement strategies implemented by identified schools included developing a school improvement plan, using assessment data to inform instruction and providing additional instruction to low-achieving students.

As for public school choice and SES (free tutoring), the IRP found that while the number of students being served by these provisions is rising, overall participation remains low. Of more than 3.9 million students eligible for the public school transfer option in 2004-2005, only 45,000 participated (1 percent participation).



Of the 1.4 million students eligible for the tutoring option in 2003-2004, only 233,000 were served (17 percent participation). The IRP highlighted that while more students were eligible for public school choice, six times as many students participated in the SES option than in the public school choice option.

According to CEP, the biggest challenges for districts in implementing the public school choice provision are:

- Identifying schools for improvement early enough to notify parents of their options (rated as a serious or moderate challenge by 42 percent of districts surveyed by CEP)
- Having enough schools at the right grade spans to receive transfers (39 percent of districts)

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- Finding space in receiving schools (38 percent)
  - Having receiving schools that were not also identified for improvement (38 percent)

The IRP report also found that often parents were notified of the school's improvement status and the choice provision too late to allow them to choose to send their children to a new school before the start of the next school year. According to the IRP, almost half (49 percent) of districts notified parents five weeks (on average) after the school year had started.

Regarding SES, the IRP reported that the number of state-approved supplemental service providers has tripled over the past two years, rising from 997 in May 2003 to 2,734 in May 2005. While states report that they are working to develop and implement systems for monitoring and evaluating these providers, the IRP found that as of early 2005, 15 states had not established a monitoring process and 21 states had not finalized their monitoring processes. In addition, 25 states had not yet established standards for evaluating provider effectiveness, and no state had finalized its evaluation standards, according to the IRP.

## **What Does NCLB Currently Require?**

### **NCLB Choice and Tutoring Options**

NCLB requires states to impose a series of interventions for consistently struggling schools. Specifically, students in schools that do not make AYP for two consecutive years are given the opportunity to transfer to another public school. If a school does not meet AYP for a third year, students are given the option of receiving free tutoring (SES) from state-approved providers; these providers can include districts, non-profit organizations and for-profit companies.

### **School Restructuring and Other Interventions**

For schools that continue to miss AYP for four and more consecutive years, NCLB requires additional steps to be taken. Schools that have not made AYP for four consecutive years fall into "corrective action" status. Under corrective action, schools must implement any of a number of interventions, such as using an outside expert to analyze the school plan, implementing a new curriculum or decreasing the school's decision-making authority.

Schools that do not make AYP for five consecutive years are required to begin the restructuring process. Under this process, schools develop and implement school restructuring plans that include actions such as: replacing all or most of the school's academic staff, contracting with an outside organization to operate the school, reopening the school as a charter school and restructuring the school's governance. These plans are implemented if a school misses AYP for the 6th consecutive year.

Identified schools that make AYP for one year are frozen in their current status. For instance, if a school is in corrective action but makes AYP, they do not proceed with developing a restructuring plan. Schools exit out of the school improvement process if they make AYP for two consecutive years.

A school that does not make AYP must continue to offer public school choice and SES throughout the corrective action and restructuring processes, until the school exits the school improvement process. Children who have

transferred to another school under the public school choice requirements are permitted to stay in that school, even if their original school exits the school improvement process.

NCLB School Improvement, Corrective Action and Restructuring Timeline

Year 1	Children take assessments, school does not make AYP
Year 2	Children take assessments, school does not make AYP, school identified for “school improvement”
Year 3	School is in “ <b>School Improvement</b> ” Status—Year 1 Public school choice is provided for students in school, consistent with state law, transportation costs are required, and local educational agencies (LEAs) must spend up to 20 percent of their Title I allocations on this cost (coupled with costs of supplemental services—see below) Only technical assistance is provided during this year, LEA is not authorized to take corrective actions Children take assessments, school does not make AYP, school identified for “corrective action”
Year 4	School is in “ <b>School Improvement</b> ” Status—Year 2 LEAs must provide supplemental services to low-income children in school and continue public school choice. Coupled with public school choice expenses, LEA must spend up to 20 percent of its Title I allocation on costs associated with supplemental services
Year 5	School subject to “ <b>Corrective Action</b> ,” which requires the LEA to do one of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use an outside expert to analyze the school plan;</li> <li>• Implement a new curriculum;</li> <li>• Decrease the school’s decision-making;</li> <li>• Replace staff relevant to failure; <b>or</b></li> <li>• Modify the school schedule</li> </ul> Public school choice continues, LEA must continue technical assistance, supplemental services continue Children take assessments, school does not make AYP
Year 6	School identified for “ <b>Restructuring</b> ” Public school choice continues LEA must continue to provide supplemental services to low-income children in the school LEA must <i>begin planning</i> for restructuring actions (see below) for following year Children take assessments, school does not make AYP
Year 7	LEA institutes a <b>Restructuring</b> action, which includes one of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School reopens as a charter;</li> <li>• Principal and all or most staff are replaced;</li> <li>• Management of the public school is assumed by another entity, e.g., a private company; <b>or</b></li> <li>• State assumes management of school</li> </ul>

## Some Observations From Witnesses

The importance of collaboration during the school improvement process was a common theme among witnesses at the Commission’s fourth hearing. Elizabeth Burmaster, State Superintendent of the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, stated that Wisconsin’s management style is one of collaborative decision-making, involving numerous stakeholder groups and representatives of business, labor and community-based organizations, and PK-16 education. “Our greatest educational asset rests in our shared responsibility and commitment at the local level to provide a quality public education,” Burmaster asserted. While the principles of NCLB are sound, Burmaster said, “the prescriptive nature in which those principles are delineated in the federal law has taken the sovereignty

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of public education from state and local school districts.” She warned that the federal law’s accountability and school improvement provisions will be effective only if they have credibility at the local level.

Some panelists criticized SES, questioning the quality of services provided and citing the lack of providers in rural areas and the need to use SES funds for other services (such as to extend the school day). But Eugene Hickok, Senior Policy Director at Dutko Worldwide and former U.S. Deputy Secretary of Education, remained hopeful about SES. “SES represents a potentially valuable educational opportunity not fully realized under No Child Left Behind,” he said. Hickok attributed low participation rates not to inadequate resources, but rather to the effectiveness with which states and school districts have implemented SES, which he characterized as “spotty, at best.” “There are those who are responsible for administering SES who do not think it is good policy, who feel

the money would be spent better under their direction and who go out of their way to undermine the effective implementation of SES,” Hickok stated. The tutoring provision is new, Hickok stressed, and therefore its results must be measured and examined over time.

The need for collaboration and systemic intervention also pervaded the testimony of Sam Stringfield, Acting Chair of the College of Education and Human Development, University of Louisville. According to Stringfield, there is no one-size-fits-all approach when it comes to school improvement. He said we must recognize that the type of intervention needed for schools in West Baltimore, MD, is different from the type of intervention needed for those in Palo Alto, CA. He urged an increased focus on improving schools through systemic interventions, constructive partnerships and additional professional development for principals. Stringfield cited an effective principal as one of the most important elements to turning around a struggling school or school system.

School boards want to be involved in these school improvement partnerships but are overlooked by NCLB, said John Ashley, Executive Director of the Wisconsin Association of School Boards, Inc. Ashley explained that public education in America generally is provided by school districts under the direction and control of an elected school board. “Recognizing this existing governing structure is a key element that is currently missing from the intervention and sanctions framework of No Child Left Behind,” Ashley said.

On the local level, community approaches to school improvement can be seen working in Kosciuszko Middle School in Milwaukee, WI. After several years of not making AYP, the school raised student achievement and made AYP last year.

WITNESSES WHO  
TESTIFIED AT THE  
HEARING

*Full witness testimony can be found by going to [www.nclbcommission.org](http://www.nclbcommission.org)*

- Elizabeth Burmaster  
State Superintendent  
Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction  
Madison, WI
- Eugene Hickok  
Senior Policy Director  
Dutko Worldwide  
Washington, DC
- John Ashley  
Executive Director  
Wisconsin Association of School Boards, Inc.  
Madison, WI
- Yvonne Caamal Canul  
Director  
Office of School Improvement  
Michigan Department of Education  
Lansing, MI
- Sam Stringfield  
Acting Chair  
College of Education and Human Development  
University of Louisville  
Louisville, KY
- Cheryl Clancy  
Principal  
Kosciuszko Middle School  
Milwaukee, WI

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Kosciuszko Principal Cheryl Clancy attributes the school’s recent success in part to a “consistent, concerted and cohesiveness of purpose” resulting from NCLB’s accountability provisions: “The sanctions process forced our school to adopt a comprehensive school reform effort based on the seven correlates of effective schools research. This action has enabled us to commit to a unified approach to raising the achievement level of all students in our school,” she said. Clancy praised the technical support system offered by the district and state, and added that this support, along with data-driven decision-making, frequent monitoring of student achievement, high-quality teachers and a rigorous, systematic curriculum, will be critical to achieving higher levels of student learning in the future.

Meanwhile, at the state level, Michigan chose to embrace a systemic focus on school improvement and student achievement with the passage of NCLB, explained Yvonne Caamal Canul, Director of the Office of School Improvement in Michigan's Department of Education. Canul called the federal law a “catalyst for reform” and said that it helped create a “climate of change for historic reforms in Michigan,” a climate in which 85 percent of the state’s schools in restructuring had improved test scores enough to make AYP (113 schools out of 133) in the 2004-2005 school year. She added, however, that while NCLB’s goal of raising student achievement has invigorated Michigan’s educational community, the federal law has also posed certain challenges. “Without question, the single most difficult sanction option to implement has been the provision of supplemental educational services. It’s an expensive, time-consuming and administrative-heavy option,” Canul asserted. “In Michigan’s successful experience, clear learning expectations, improved classroom instruction and effective school leadership have had a much greater impact in turning around achievement than SES or choice.”

### **Some Witnesses’ Recommendations for Improving NCLB**

- Allow states to develop their own accountability models based on federal guidelines and their own sets of consequences/opportunities for schools and districts that are consistent with local control
- Offer SES (tutoring) and public school choice at the same time (after the second consecutive year of missing AYP) to give districts and parents more flexibility in meeting the needs of eligible children in struggling schools
- Make SES available as soon as a school is identified as “in need of improvement”
- Include language in NCLB to ensure parents receive timely, accurate and helpful information about SES and public school choice opportunities and realistic timelines for enrolling students
- Require additional research on systemic interventions in school improvement, as well as additional case studies of schools that are not improving or are getting worse
- Support continuous professional development for principals, to identify and improve effective principals
- Allow the use of growth model data in the evaluation of schools
- Provide a greater role for school boards in NCLB
- Reduce the punitive nature of NCLB in favor of increased supports and time to allow struggling schools to turn around

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## How Is NCLB Working in Your School? Highlights From a Principals Roundtable Discussion

After the hearing, the commissioners participated in a roundtable discussion with several Wisconsin principals and a representative from the Milwaukee Public Schools. The discussion focused on the impact NCLB has had on schools, with specific topics ranging from assessments to SES to teacher quality.

Overall, the participants agreed that NCLB testing requirements have brought a new focus on student data to schools. However, they questioned the type of data gained from annual assessments, saying that annual tests provide only a general overview of student performance (basic, advanced, proficient); they do not yield specific information about each student. Participants also raised concerns about the timing of annual tests and questioned

### PRINCIPALS ATTENDING THE ROUNDTABLE:

- Cheryl Clancy  
Kosciuszko Middle School  
Milwaukee, WI
- Cynthia Ellwood  
Hartford University School  
Milwaukee, WI
- Renee Tennant  
Cottage Grove Elementary School  
Cottage Grove, WI
- Connie Haessly  
Maywood Elementary School  
Monona, WI

### ALSO ATTENDING:

- Shannon Gordon  
ESEA Implementation and  
Compliance Manager  
Milwaukee Public Schools  
Milwaukee, WI

the utility of assessments that are administered in November but whose results do not arrive until May. They recommended more overall flexibility in the federal law, such as allowing the use of formative testing and growth targets when assessing student achievement.

Roundtable participants expressed a desire for more flexibility in the timing of SES. For instance, one principal suggested delivering tutoring services in the school throughout the school day, rather than just after school. Concerns over the quality and effectiveness of SES also arose; as one participant noted, some SES providers do more for the students than regular teachers, while others simply spend the time “babysitting.”

There was also some discussion of teacher quality issues, including the challenge of recruiting highly qualified teachers to serve in low-performing schools. Currently, many schools in Wisconsin labeled “in need of improvement” have teaching vacancies in core subjects and are having tremendous difficulty filling these openings. These are the very schools most in need of the best teachers, the principals agreed. Yet according to participants, late applicants, inexperienced teachers, or teachers who have opted out of other schools (due to “incompatibility”) will, in all likelihood, fill these positions.

*No Child Left Behind has forced us to finally have conversations about the right stuff.*

*—Shannon Gordon, ESEA Implementation and Compliance Manager,  
Milwaukee Public Schools*

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## For Further Discussion

The Commission is seeking further comments from interested individuals on these topics:

- What successful strategies has your state or community used to implement NCLB's school improvement interventions?
- How have NCLB school improvement interventions, including SES and public school choice, affected student achievement in your school or community? How is your state or community measuring this impact?
- In what ways do you think NCLB could be improved that would help states, districts and schools better address school improvement?

Comments can be submitted to the Commission via email at [nclbfeedback@aspeninstitute.org](mailto:nclbfeedback@aspeninstitute.org)

### About the Commission

The bipartisan, independent Commission on No Child Left Behind is examining the strengths and weaknesses of the No Child Left Behind Act and will make concrete and realistic recommendations to Congress, the Administration, state and local stakeholders, parents and the general public to ensure the law is an effective tool in spurring academic achievement and closing the achievement gap.

In seeking to accomplish its mission, the Commission is guided by these principles:

1. All children can learn and should be expected to reach high standards.
2. Accountability for public education systems in the United States must improve to enable students to excel.
3. The achievement gap between disadvantaged students and their non disadvantaged peers must be eliminated to ensure that all children have the opportunity to succeed.
4. Education results for all students must improve in order for the United States to remain competitive in the global marketplace.
5. Parents have a right to expect their children to be taught by a highly qualified teacher. Teachers have the right to be treated like professionals, including access to sound working conditions and high quality preparation and ongoing professional development opportunities.
6. Education reform must be coupled with additional resources, but federal, state, and local resources must be used more efficiently and effectively to ensure results in return for the increased investment.

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