

About the Commission

The Commission on No Child Left Behind was established to get beyond the rhetoric about NCLB and examine evidence about the law's effects in a dispassionate, bipartisan process. The Commission is made up of 15 leaders in education, representing K–12 and higher education, school and school-system governance, civil rights and business.

During the past year, we traveled across the country, listening to the stories and experiences of students, teachers, principals, parents, administrators, state and district officials, experts and policymakers. We heard from close to 80 witnesses, as well as many audience members, at our six public hearings and during our series of roundtables. We visited schools and met with principals, teachers and students to see firsthand the effects of NCLB in the classroom. We read over 10,000 comments submitted through our Web site, and researched and analyzed extensive amounts of data.

Our report, released February 13, 2007, is the product of all of this data gathering—and our discussions about the findings. We are submitting the report to the President and Congress in the hope that it will inform their deliberations about the upcoming reauthorization of NCLB. But we will not stop with simply delivering a report. We will travel across the country to gain support for our recommendations and to build a constituency for a reauthorized NCLB that we believe will accomplish its ambitious aims—to improve achievement for all students and eliminate achievement gaps.

For a copy of the Commission's full report, go to www.nclbcommission.org

THE COMMISSION ON NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND

BEYOND NCLB



COMMISSION ON
NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND
THE ASPEN INSTITUTE

One Dupont Circle, NW
Suite 700
Washington, DC 20036
202-736-5800 Main
202-736-1070 Fax
www.nclbcommission.org



SCHOOL BOARD GUIDE

Going Beyond

The No Child Left Behind Act

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), which became law in 2002, was a step forward in closing achievement gaps and improving public schools. The law ramped up testing requirements, called for reporting test results separated by key demographic groups of students and required schools to demonstrate “adequate yearly progress” (AYP) on state tests overall and for each group of students. If schools could not demonstrate AYP, they faced interventions followed by increasingly severe sanctions. Further, the law required states to ensure that every teacher was “highly qualified” and to give parents detailed reports on school performance and teacher quality.

These changes, while substantial, have not been enough. The problems that NCLB was intended to address remain today. Achievement gaps between white students and racial and ethnic minorities and children with disabilities are still unconscionably large. Many schools are not educating all students, in all subject areas, to high standards. Expectations for all students are not high enough to ensure that the nation remains competitive in a global economy.

Now is the time for another bold step, one that builds on the foundation of NCLB while addressing the shortcomings we have identified in the law and in its implementation. Having the benefit of hindsight, we can clearly view the consequences of the law, intended and unintended, that its original architects could not. We believe that the task at hand is to protect the goal of this law that all children should meet high standards, while dramatically improving its approaches in ways that are informed by the five years of experience in classrooms, central offices and state houses.

Only with such a careful effort—to keep what works and improve what doesn’t—can we fulfill the promise the architects of NCLB made to America’s children. By creating a high-achieving education system that closes achievement gaps and raises standards for every student, in every school, we can ensure that all of our nation’s children have the opportunity for a fulfilling, productive future.

Major Recommendations

What needs to change to make NCLB more effective?

We strongly believe that the nation is ready to take bold steps to help states, districts, schools and communities by improving NCLB, so we can fulfill the promise of high achievement for all students and ensure that our nation remains competitive internationally. Below is our blueprint for how to accomplish these goals:

- ▶ Assess the quality of our principals and teachers by their effectiveness and ensure they receive the support necessary to succeed. This includes providing high-quality professional development to teachers at risk of not meeting a new standard of effectiveness, ensuring all schools have the financial means to put effective teachers in all classrooms, and requiring districts with high turnover rates to develop recruitment and retention plans.
- ▶ Develop model national standards and tests that are voluntary for states to adopt and will help ensure our students are properly prepared for college and the workplace. We must insist that all children—whether they are from Milwaukee, Memphis or Miami—have access to a high-quality education based on high standards that will prepare them well for life after high school.
To keep the public informed about the level of states’ expectations, the U.S. Department of Education would issue reports comparing each state’s standards to the voluntary national standards.
- ▶ Improve the accuracy and fairness of systems that judge school success by setting rigorous goals and giving schools credit for making significant progress toward those goals.
- ▶ Permit districts to use funds for periodic classroom assessments that help teachers and parents know throughout the year how students are doing. These assessments are not high stakes, and they are not more tests for the sake of testing. These assessments help teachers identify where children need additional help so they can increase the likelihood that children do well on end-of-the-year tests. The Commission recommends requiring the use of classroom assessments in struggling schools.
- ▶ Ensure that high-quality public school choice and supplemental educational services (free tutoring) are accessible for students in struggling schools.
- ▶ Require low-performing schools to implement a group of aggressive and research-proven interventions to improve achievement.
- ▶ Require districts with large concentrations of struggling high schools to develop and implement comprehensive, districtwide high school improvement plans.

Discussion Questions

What does all of this mean for your community?

What do these recommendations mean for your school board? Here are some discussion questions to help begin conversations about how the Commission’s recommendations will affect your school board’s work:

- ❓ What does it mean to be a highly qualified and effective teacher in your school? What supports do these teachers need?
- ❓ Does your school hold high expectations for all students? What supports are in place to help students achieve those expectations? How do these expectations compare to those for students in other districts or states?
- ❓ Would model, voluntary national standards and tests help or hinder your board’s efforts to raise student achievement and prepare students for life in a competitive global economy?
- ❓ How will including growth (progress over time) in student achievement in your school’s AYP calculations affect your school and its students and teachers?
- ❓ What systemic actions can districts take to be most effective in turning around struggling high schools? How can school boards help support these districtwide turnaround efforts?
- ❓ How do you think the Commission’s recommendations will affect your school and community as a whole?
- ❓ What other areas should a reauthorized NCLB address?