

9-1-2004

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Citation

McKenzie, S. C., & Ritter, G. W. (2004). No Child Left Behind Act of 2001: An Overview. *Policy Briefs*. Retrieved from <https://scholarworks.uark.edu/oepbrief/134>

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THE NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND ACT OF 2001: AN OVERVIEW

Policy Brief Volume 1, Issue 9: September 2004

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001, the cornerstone of the Bush Administration's plan to reform K-12 education, strengthens significantly the federal role in education through sweeping reforms to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The stated legislative intent of the NCLB Act is "to close the achievement gap with accountability, flexibility, and choice, so that no child is left behind" (PL-107-110 [20 U.S.C. §6301, et seq.], 2001). Key provisions of the measure, for both Title I and non-Title I schools, are as follows:

- accountability for education results through annual standardized testing and through additional standards that determine a school's adequate yearly progress (AYP);
- publication at the state and local levels of an annual report card detailing each school's test scores and movement toward accomplishing AYP standards;
- implementation of a system of rewards and sanctions to promote school improvement; and
- implementation of a plan to recruit and retain highly qualified teachers in every classroom.

This policy brief discusses these key provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act in more detail.

Accountability for Education Results

Central to the intent of NCLB is accountability for education results: holding each school accountable for measuring every student's progress every year beginning in the third grade and for achieving an acceptable level of adequate yearly progress (AYP). Based on compliance with federal education accountability standards, each state has developed its own definition of adequate yearly progress. Each state's AYP definition must delineate expectations for "continuous and substantial

growth" in student achievement, particularly with respect to reading, language arts, mathematics, and science. Specifically, the federal guidelines require each state to develop content standards in each of these subject areas for the intermediate, middle school, and high school levels, and to assess each student every year through standardized testing. Additionally, each school must assess the English language proficiency of all students with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) every year. Further, every school must accommodate the educational needs and assess the educational progress annually of all migrant students, those with disabilities, those with LEP, and those who are members of racial or ethnic minority groups. At least 95 percent of all students in each of these subgroups must be assessed each year for a school to achieve AYP. Also, schools must identify effective supplemental service providers as needed and must meet established standards concerning attendance, promotion, and graduation. Finally, schools must assure student safety by addressing and ameliorating violence in "persistently dangerous" schools in order to achieve AYP.

An Annual State Report Card Detailing Results for Each School

NCLB requires each state to prepare and disseminate an annual state report card that notes the progress of each school in meeting accountability standards (that is, in achieving AYP). For each school, the state will report the aggregate (collective) results of standardized testing by grade level, the disaggregate (specific group) results of students by gender, and of students who are economically disadvantaged, disabled, migrant, LEP, and/or are members of a racial or ethnic

minority group. The scores of some students may be represented more than once in the disaggregated results. For example, an economically disadvantaged Hispanic student with limited English proficiency would be represented in each of these three groups of disaggregated scores. The aggregated and disaggregated test scores of each school and its movement toward achieving AYP must be published not only by each state, but also are provided to local newspapers so that parents, community leaders, and local citizens will be aware of the status of their neighborhood schools.

A System of Rewards and Sanctions to Promote School Improvement

NCLB requires that every state develop its own school improvement program, a system of rewards and sanctions linked to AYP. Each school (or local education agency) that exceeds AYP standards is eligible for rewards including distinguished school designations or other academic or financial rewards. Schools that have made significant gains in closing the achievement gap are rewarded in addition to schools that have demonstrated positive results overall. On the other hand, each state is to identify schools that fail to meet AYP criteria as those “in need of improvement” and offer technical assistance, including corrective action or restructuring programs to help them meet standards. Corrective action may include one or more of the following sanctions: implementing a new curriculum, replacing some school personnel, deferring or reducing school funding, and/or notifying parents and authorizing students to transfer to a higher-performing school. Further, consistently low-performing schools may be subject to major restructuring of their governance and operations, which could include replacing all or most of a school’s administration, faculty, and staff; establishing alternate governance arrangements; appointing a private receiver or trustee in place of the superintendent and school board; restructuring the program into a charter school, or closing the school altogether.

Recruitment and Retention of Highly Qualified Teachers in Every Classroom

Each state must develop and implement a plan to recruit and retain highly qualified teachers in every classroom. NCLB standards require that by the

beginning of the 2002-2003 school year all teachers will meet the following qualification standards:

- all public elementary, middle, and secondary school teachers must be fully licensed or certified; this standard calls for the elimination of emergency, temporary, or provisional teachers;
- new elementary school teachers must have earned at least a bachelor’s degree and pass a state test on elementary curriculum;
- new middle or secondary school teachers must have earned at least a bachelor’s degree and demonstrate competence in each of the academic subjects taught through completing work equivalent to an academic major, a graduate degree, or advanced certification in the area or through other objective measures established by the state;
- existing elementary school teachers must have at least a bachelor’s degree and pass a state test on elementary curriculum or demonstrate competency in all subjects taught; and
- existing middle or secondary school teachers must have at least a bachelor’s degree and demonstrate competency in all subjects taught through completing work equivalent to an academic major, a graduate degree, or advanced certification in the area or through other objective measures established by the state.

In general, the No Child Left Behind Act sets broad standards for accountability, teacher quality, school improvement, and reporting results, and requires that each state develop its own NCLB plan suited to its own particular needs and circumstances.

References

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