

No Child Left Behind: Trends and Issues

By Frederick M. Hess and Rosemary H. Kendrick

The No Child Left Behind Act is the most ambitious piece of education legislation ever enacted by Congress. Designed to promote accountability and prod states to increase efforts to address educational inequities, NCLB includes significant provisions regarding assessment, sanctions for low-performing schools and districts, teacher quality and standards for educational research.

On Jan. 8, 2002, surrounded by members of both the Democratic and Republican congressional leadership, President George W. Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act—called NCLB—into law. NCLB is the nation’s most significant federal legislation on K-12 schooling since the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, and the most ambitious federal intervention in a domain long regarded as the preserve of state and local governments.¹ Congress approved NCLB by large, bipartisan majorities, with the law passing 87–10 in the U.S. Senate and 381–41 in the House of Representatives.² Emerging from an exhaustive year of negotiations, NCLB refashioned federal education policy in the areas of testing, accountability and teacher quality.

From ESEA to NCLB

The original ESEA was proposed in 1965 as a pillar of President Lyndon Johnson’s “Great Society” and included five titles. The heart of the law, and lion’s share of the funding, was embodied in Title I—a program of aid for the education of disadvantaged children. Over time, critics both left and right expressed concerns about the failure of Title I to improve achievement among low-income students.³

President Bill Clinton’s administration sought to use the 1994 ESEA reauthorization and the companion “Goals 2000” legislation to require every state to establish academic standards and corresponding assessments.⁴ But given the law’s voluntary cast and the federal government’s lack of enforcement authority, most states declined to comply.⁵ The 2001 deliberations over NCLB, which technically was the much-delayed reauthorization of the 1994 ESEA, represented, more than anything else, a demand by Washington, D.C., policymakers that state and local officials do more to improve low-performing schools.

NCLB Standards and Assessment

The heart of NCLB is its language on standards and assessment, which aggressively supersized the tenta-

tive requirements of the 1994 ESEA. Eager to support a Republican president after two terms under a Democratic White House, conservatives on Capitol Hill accepted requirements regarding standards, testing and accountability that they had resisted as federal overreaching in 1994 and 1999.

The NCLB accountability system requires states to develop content standards for what students should know and be able to do, as well as complementary state assessments. It requires states to annually test students to measure competency in the core subjects of reading and math. By the 2013–14 school year, all states are required to have all their students score proficient on state reading and math assessments. The law leaves it to the states to determine the content and rigor of these standards and tests.⁶

NCLB requires states to set academic standards that define three levels of achievement: basic, proficient and advanced. For each assessment, each state must then develop corresponding tests in reading, math and, eventually, science. These assessments are to be administered every year in grades three through eight and at least once in high school. States also are required to design and administer a science assessment by the 2007–08 school year and to test students at least once each in elementary, middle and high school.

Adequate yearly progress (AYP) is the metric used to evaluate school and district performance under NCLB. The expectation is that all schools and districts will make AYP—or, in other words, jump over a ‘bar’ that represents the percentage of children that must score proficient on math and reading assessments. Over time, states must raise the bar so that, by the 2013–14 school year, it is set at 100 percent. For instance, a state could deem a school as making AYP if 50 percent of its students were proficient in reading in 2007, so long as expectations were stepped up to 100 percent by the 2013–14 school year.

Calculating AYP is not as simple as measuring the percentage of students who meet the proficiency standard. In addition to holding schools account-

able for the AYP of the overall student body, NCLB requires states to make progress within particular subpopulations. Each state must calculate the AYP of the following subgroups within each school: major racial/ethnic groups (white, African-American, Latino, Native American and so on); low-income students; students with disabilities; and students with limited English proficiency. Each subgroup must clear the AYP bar in reading and math for schools or districts to make AYP. To protect student confidentiality and heighten statistical reliability, states are allowed to establish a minimum size for subgroups to be counted.

NCLB's testing requirements pose a number of challenges and the legislation, and subsequent guidance from the U.S. Department of Education, have sought to address these—with mixed success. The law stipulates schools must test 95 percent of their enrolled students to make AYP. It also includes a “safe harbor” provision that allows schools that miss the AYP bar to still make AYP if they increase the percentage of students who are proficient at a fast enough rate. The provision also permits schools and districts to exclude a small portion of special needs students from AYP calculations. But whether these work as intended has been a subject of much concern.

NCLB Sanctions

The standards and testing provisions themselves constitute only the first two-thirds of the NCLB accountability system. In addition, NCLB links test results to consequences for schools and school districts. Under NCLB, schools that fail to make AYP are subject to a series of cascading remedies, sanctions and interventions that are designed to compel the schools to improve and to grant additional options to children in those schools. These interventions become increasingly intense with each year that the schools fail.

If a school fails to make AYP two years in a row, it enters “in need of improvement” status. Once there, district and school officials must develop a school improvement plan and offer students the option of transferring to a district school that is making AYP. Schools that fail for a third straight year must provide supplemental education services or free tutoring. A fourth year of failure prompts a stage of corrective action, which can entail actions ranging from curriculum reform to the extension of the school day. Finally, if a school fails to make AYP for a fifth year, the district must restructure that school, by converting it to a charter school, replacing the majority of the staff, hiring an educational management company, or

imposing another remedy of the state's choosing. The sanctions for districts are similar in intent to those for schools but different in the particulars. Districts that fail to make AYP for multiple years, for example, are eventually subject to restructuring, including the possibility of state takeover.⁷

Because there is such variation among state tests, the number of schools in each sanction phase varies significantly across the country. California, for instance, has more than 300 schools in the restructuring implementation stage while Florida has none (see Table A).

Highly Qualified Teachers

Beyond its accountability and choice provisions, the other radical development imposed by NCLB was the federal mandate that all children be taught by a “highly qualified teacher.” The rule applied to core academic subjects like mathematics, science and history. Unlike the testing and accountability provisions, the highly qualified teacher language focuses less on outcomes and more on inputs—meaning it seeks to ensure that all schools have quality teachers who are knowledgeable about the content they teach.

To be deemed highly qualified, a teacher must have attained a bachelor's degree, have passed the state teacher licensing examination or obtained a state teaching certification, and have demonstrated subject knowledge. Again, as with state standards and assessments, the law allows states to determine what all this means in practice.⁸ That flexibility has created much concern that states have exploited loopholes to appease current teachers, improve apparent results and reduce implementation headaches. In the 2005–06 school year (the original year NCLB sought to have 100 percent of core classes taught by highly qualified teachers), 48 states reported that at least 70 percent of their core classes were taught by highly qualified teachers, and 36 states reported that the percent of classes with highly qualified teachers was above 90.⁹

Research and Reading First

Despite their importance, NCLB's accountability and teacher quality provisions comprise only a small portion of the sprawling legislation. The law encompasses 10 separate titles authorizing more than 50 federal education programs. Noteworthy in NCLB is the emphasis on scientifically based research, a phrase that appears in reference to everything from reading programs, to teacher training, to school safety. Scientifically based research is defined as “the application of rigorous, systematic, and objective

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procedures to obtain reliable and valid knowledge relevant to education activities and programs.⁷ The focus on scientifically based research has potentially far-reaching consequences for classrooms, policy and research.¹⁰

For good and ill, the importance of scientifically based research is illustrated by the law's Reading First program. Based on the conclusions of the National Reading Panel, convened in 1997 at Congress's request, Reading First requires schools seeking federal funds to implement a classroom-based reading program that includes the elements of scientifically based instruction.

In 2006, the Reading First program became a subject of fierce controversy after a U.S. Department of Education Office of Inspector General report raised concerns about politicized implementation and potentially arbitrary use of scientific standards. The report concluded that the Department of Education, among other things, "intervened to influence a State's selection of reading programs," and "intervened to influence reading programs being used by local educational agencies (LEAs) after the application process was completed."¹¹ In response, Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings stated, "I'd hate to throw the baby out with the bathwater." She explained that while "there's certainly room for improvement," the program had been highly effective in helping improve reading among disadvantaged students.¹²

Debating NCLB

NCLB has been a subject of heated debate, and has drawn critics across the political spectrum. At least three major critiques deserve careful consideration. First, critics claim that NCLB is founded on an unrealistic and misguided accountability system—one with unclear expectations, a muddy identification process, and incentives and sanctions insufficiently tied to individuals. Second, critics suggest that school districts are not equipped to administer the intricate accountability system that NCLB mandates. The law relies on the architecture of ESEA, which was configured for the one-dimensional purpose of distributing funds to needy schools. Third, critics argue that the input measures—in particular the scientifically based research and highly qualified teacher provisions—do not work as intended and actually have encumbered the accountability system.

Another ongoing critique of NCLB implementation has revolved around funding. Though funding for the education programs in NCLB increased after the law's passage, with Title I funding increasing 45

percent from 2001 to 2006,¹³ many states have argued that the actions necessitated by NCLB cost billions more than the law provides.¹⁴ National Education Association President Reg Weaver, for instance, said federal funds have fallen roughly \$40 billion short of the amount promised by the law's authorization.¹⁵

NCLB's defenders dispute these claims and highlight at least three crucial benefits the law has wrought. First and foremost, supporters argue, NCLB has provided an unprecedented wealth of data on school and district performance, which has brought transparency, highlighted the plight of underserved populations, and focused attention on racial and economic disparities in achievement. Second, supporters say the law's looming presence has afforded dynamic school leaders the political cover to push forward worthwhile but unpopular measures. Third, supporters say, NCLB has heightened the focus on academic standards.

NCLB supporters have pointed to continued gains in National Assessment of Educational Progress scores as evidence that NCLB is working. For instance, the percent of fourth graders at or above proficiency rose 2 percentage points (to 33 percent) in reading and 7 percentage points (to 39 percent) in math from 2003 to 2007.¹⁶ President Bush said, "these scores confirm that No Child Left Behind is working and producing positive results."¹⁷ Spellings similarly argued, "Bottom line: No Child Left Behind is empowering parents and students by infusing accountability into education—and the Nation's Report Card shows that it is working."¹⁸ Skeptics have pointed out that the gains have little relation to NCLB and, in any event, constitute no discernible break with achievement trends that predate NCLB. Economic Policy Institute research associate Richard Rothstein argued: "The rate of gain was greater from 1990 to 2003 than from 2003 to 2007. Therefore, any claims that the recent gains are attributable to NCLB are hard to defend."¹⁹

The varied opinions on the law are reflected in polls of public opinion where NCLB elicits mixed reactions. Parents and voters tend to endorse its goals while expressing concerns about its means. The 39th Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools, one of the latest polls released in fall 2007, reported that 54 percent of adults knew "a great deal" or "a fair amount" about NCLB, while 46 percent knew "very little" or "nothing at all." When asked to rate the overall impact of NCLB on "the public schools in your community," 26 percent of respondents thought the effect was positive, and 27 percent thought it was negative.

Table A
NUMBER OF SCHOOLS PER STATE IN EACH SANCTION PHASE, 2006–07

<i>State</i>	<i>School improvement year one</i>	<i>School improvement year two</i>	<i>Corrective action</i>	<i>Planning for restructuring</i>	<i>Restructuring implementation</i>	<i>Total</i>
Alabama	209	54	3	5	18	289
Alaska	12	24	35	30	12	113
Arizona	75	24	36	12	14	161
Arkansas.....	69	63	54	19	4	209
California	719	339	482	343	357	2,240
Colorado.....	36	25	21	16	14	112
Connecticut	23	17	63	1	6	110
Delaware.....	2	1	3	0	1	7
Florida.....	128	302	544	30	0	1,004
Georgia.....	51	34	23	19	48	175
Hawaii.....	38	14	38	3	50	143
Idaho.....	77	9	12	0	0	98
Illinois.....	82	85	93	177	138	575
Indiana.....	99	25	18	6	9	157
Iowa.....	4	3	4	0	0	11
Kansas.....	12	8	3	2	0	25
Kentucky.....	69	27	56	1	5	158
Louisiana.....	32	33	3	4	0	72
Maine.....	9	3	4	0	0	16
Maryland.....	20	13	15	2	46	96
Massachusetts.....	203	73	129	24	26	455
Michigan.....	21	34	46	16	37	154
Minnesota.....	23	27	10	3	0	63
Mississippi.....	23	21	12	0	1	57
Missouri.....	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Montana.....	5	11	4	1	31	52
Nebraska.....	0	0	0	1	0	1
Nevada.....	25	18	18	9	0	70
New Hampshire.....	17	15	2	0	0	34
New Jersey.....	147	112	100	16	49	424
New Mexico.....	106	62	29	17	48	262
New York.....	110	93	67	77	166	513
North Carolina.....	160	65	59	10	2	296
North Dakota.....	0	0	3	2	14	19
Ohio.....	252	92	76	19	33	472
Oklahoma.....	10	12	10	3	2	37
Oregon.....	20	14	9	0	1	44
Pennsylvania.....	45	24	29	15	63	176
Rhode Island.....	1	10	9	2	2	24
South Carolina.....	53	28	69	27	10	187
South Dakota.....	10	14	7	12	2	45
Tennessee.....	17	23	10	1	19	70
Texas.....	186	70	33	2	0	291
Utah.....	5	4	0	0	1	10
Vermont.....	1	12	2	0	0	15
Virginia.....	17	29	12	2	2	62
Washington.....	47	15	26	4	8	100
West Virginia.....	7	9	6	0	1	23
Wisconsin.....	15	6	7	4	2	34
Wyoming.....	3	1	3	0	0	7
District of Columbia.....	17	53	33	0	0	103
Grand Total.....	3,312	2,050	2,330	937	1,242	9,871

Note: The Missouri 2005–06 Consolidated State Performance Report was not completed at the time this table was generated.

Source: United States Department of Education, “Schools Identified for Improvement in 2006–07,” unpublished table based on data from the 2005–06 Consolidated State Performance Reports, www.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/consolidated/sy05-06/index.html.

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Table B
STATE ASSESSMENT SCORES VERSUS NAEP SCORES, 2005

State	Reading (grade 4)		Math (grade 4)	
	Percent meeting state proficiency standard	Percent at or above NAEP proficient level	Percent meeting state proficiency standard	Percent at or above NAEP proficient level
Alabama				(a)
Alaska	79	27	71	34
Arizona				(b)
Arkansas.....	53	30	53	34
California	48	21	51	28
Colorado.....	86	37	90	39
Connecticut	66	38	78	42
Delaware.....				(b)
Florida	71	30	63	37
Georgia	87	26	75	30
Hawaii.....	56	23	30	27
Idaho.....	87	33	91	40
Illinois.....				(b)
Indiana.....	72	30	72	38
Iowa	77	33	80	37
Kansas	(b)	(b)	85	47
Kentucky	67	31	(b)	(b)
Louisiana.....	65	20	63	24
Maine.....				(a)
Maryland.....	82	32	78	38
Massachusetts.....	48	44	39	49
Michigan.....	(c)	(c)	73	38
Minnesota				(a)
Mississippi.....	88	18	79	19
Missouri.....	(b)	(b)	41	31
Montana	81	36	(c)	(c)
Nebraska.....				(a)
Nevada.....	48	21	52	26
New Hampshire.....				(a)
New Jersey.....	81	37	81	45
New Mexico	50	20	39	19
New York	71	33	87	36
North Carolina.....	82	29	91	40
North Dakota.....	76	35	80	40
Ohio	77	34	65	43
Oklahoma	82	25	74	29
Oregon				(b)
Pennsylvania				(b)
Rhode Island				(a)
South Carolina	35	26	39	36
South Dakota.....				(a)
Tennessee.....	88	27	87	28
Texas	81	29	82	40
Utah				(a)
Vermont				(a)
Virginia.....				(a)
Washington.....	80	36	60	42
West Virginia.....	80	26	75	25
Wisconsin.....	83	33	74	40
Wyoming.....	47	34	39	43
District of Columbia				(b)

Source: United States Department of Education, NAEP Research e-Center, "Percentages of Fourth- and Eighth-Grade Students in Reading and Mathematics Meeting State Proficiency Standards and Performing at or above the NAEP Proficient Level, by State: 2005," http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/researchcenter/statemapping_11.asp.

Key:

(a) State assessment files were not available for Alabama, Maine, Minnesota, Nebraska, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Utah, Vermont,

and Virginia. Nebraska state results were based on assessments developed by each local education agency. For more information about missing states, exclusion rates and standard errors of NAEP score equivalents in each state, see "A Profile of State Assessment Standards."

(b) Data not available in the state data file. NAEP data not reported when state data are missing.

(c) Reporting standards not met (discrepancies between state assessment data and state document).

Furthermore, the poll concluded, “It seems fair to say that, as the public knowledge of NCLB grows, the public’s view of NCLB is becoming less and less favorable.”²⁰

Emerging Trends and NCLB Reauthorization

One widely discussed revision to NCLB is to focus less on the level at which a school’s students are performing and more on the rate at which they are improving.²¹ State interest in such value-added accountability—also known as growth models—is motivated by the concern that many schools serving disadvantaged populations will otherwise be deemed “in need of improvement,” even though students are making respectable achievement gains. Since 2005, the Department of Education has allowed a handful of states to experiment with growth models; by the end of the 2006–07 school year, seven states had received approval for using value-added systems.²² Support for employing value-added measurements has come from both sides of the aisle, including California Congressman George Miller, the Democratic chairman of the committee on education and labor. “Growth models will give us fairer, better and more accurate information,” Miller said.²³

Concern about the degree to which the law gives states an incentive to “game” the NCLB accountability system by setting lax standards continues. The varied rigor of state tests is evident in Table B. For instance, while Mississippi state assessments deemed 88 percent of fourth graders proficient in reading, the federal National Assessment of Educational Progress data calculated the proficiency level at 18 percent. This phenomenon has fueled interest in establishing national standards or in replacing the 50 different state assessments with a national test. As two former U.S. secretaries of education—Republicans William Bennett and Rod Paige—argued in September 2006, “We can now see that [NCLB] gives states entirely too much discretion over standards and tests while giving federal bureaucrats too much control over how schools operate. The remedy? ... Washington should set sound national academic standards and administer a high-quality national test.”²⁴

The act’s pending reauthorization has provoked intense debate on Capitol Hill, with both parties splintering internally. Republican opponents of the law, wary of federal overreach, are advocating for a bill termed the A-Plus Act, in place of NCLB. The A-Plus Act would allow states to opt out of many of the uniform federal program requirements and instead enter into individualized performance con-

tracts with the Department of Education to receive federal funding. Meanwhile, the National Education Association, skeptical of the prescriptive metrics and testing provisions of NCLB, called for a radical overhaul of the statute and contributed \$5.4 million to favored candidates in the 2006 elections in hope that its allies in a Democratic Congress would revoke the law altogether.²⁵

Despite all these efforts, NCLB has retained support from its original proponents, the Bush administration and two immensely influential Democrats—Congressman Miller and Massachusetts Sen. Edward Kennedy. These supporters have nonetheless adopted different tacks in the course of the reauthorization effort. Secretary Spellings has said “we have been immovable on the ‘bright line’ goals of the law, including annual testing, disaggregated test score data and full grade level proficiency in reading and math by 2013–14,”²⁶ and U.S. Deputy Education Secretary Raymond Simon has urged, “we need to stay the course. The mission is doable, and we don’t need to back off that right now.”²⁷ Meanwhile, Miller, perhaps the leading Democratic voice on education, said in a major July 2007 NCLB speech at the National Press Club: “I have always said that I am proud to be one of the original co-authors of the No Child Left Behind Act. But what I really want is to be the proud co-author of a law that works.”²⁸ Shortly thereafter, Miller circulated a draft bill, co-authored by Rep. Howard “Buck” McKeon (R-Calif.), with recommendations including incorporating growth model assessments, enabling schools to use a variety of data in addition to standardized tests in calculating AYP, and instituting differentiated consequences for schools failing all subgroups versus schools failing one or two.²⁹

NCLB has altered the American education landscape. It has focused attention on achievement and on racial and economic achievement gaps while nationalizing the education debate to an unprecedented degree. In the process, it has upended traditional education politics and created new federal-state tensions. With public opinion mixed, the law’s scheduled reauthorization postponed to at least 2008, and its most ambitious demands still ahead, the long-term impact of NCLB is still very much up in the air.

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Notes

¹Frederick M. Hess and Michael J. Petrilli, *No Child Left Behind Primer* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), 3–26.

²Andrew Rudalevige, “No Child Left Behind: Forging a Congressional Compromise,” in Paul E. Peterson and Martin R. West, eds., *No Child Left Behind? The Politics and Practice of School Accountability* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2003), 23–54.

³Diane Ravitch, “A Historical Perspective on a Historic Piece of Legislation,” in John Chubb, ed., *Within Our Reach: How America Can Educate Every Child* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 35–51.

⁴Frederick M. Hess and Michael J. Petrilli, *No Child Left Behind Primer* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), 3–26.

⁵See former U.S. Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley’s statement before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Education and the Workforce on the Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, February 11, 1999.

⁶Detailed information on the mechanics of No Child Left Behind is available at the U.S. Department of Education Web site, www.ed.gov/nclb.

⁷See U.S. Department of Education, “National Assessment of Title I: Interim Report, Volume I,” February 2006, NCEE 2006-4001, www.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/disadv/title1interimreport/vol1.pdf.

⁸Terry M. Moe, “A Highly Qualified Teacher in Every Classroom,” in John E. Chubb, ed., *Within Our Reach: How America Can Educate Every Child* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 173–99.

⁹Letter and enclosure from Secretary Margaret Spellings to Chief State School Officers, July 23, 2007, www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/secletter/070723.html; Nebraska data from Nebraska’s Consolidated State Performance Report, School Year 2005-2006, www.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/consolidated/sy05-06/ne.pdf, 30.

¹⁰Detailed information on what the scientifically based research language entails is available at the U.S. Department of Education Web site, www.ed.gov/nclb.

¹¹U.S. Department of Education Office of Inspector General, “The Reading First Program’s Grant Application Process: Final Inspection Report,” September 2006, ED-OIG/I13-F0017, 2.

¹²Diana Jean Schemo, “Oversight Is Set for Beleaguered U.S. Reading Program,” *New York Times*, March 15, 2007, A1.

¹³White House News Release, “Fact Sheet: No Child Left Behind—Strengthening America’s Education System,” January 9, 2006, www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2006/01/20060109-3.html.

¹⁴William J. Mathis, “The Cost of Implementing the Federal No Child Left Behind Act: Different Assumptions, Different Answers,” *Peabody Journal of Education* 80, no. 2 (2005): 90–119.

¹⁵National Education Association News Release, “Schools Lack Funding to Comply with No Child Left Behind, According to New Report from Center on Education Policy,” March 29, 2006, www.nea.org/newsreleases/2006/nr060329.html.

¹⁶U.S. Department of Education, “The Nation’s Report Card: Reading 2007,” September 2007, www.nationsreportcard.gov/reading_2007, 9; and “The Nation’s Report Card: Mathematics 2007,” September 2007, www.nationsreportcard.gov/math_2007, 9.

¹⁷White House press release, “Statement by the President on 2007 Nation’s Report Card,” September 25, 2007, www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/09/20070925-1.html.

¹⁸U.S. Department of Education press release, “Secretary Spellings Highlights Gains Made on the Nation’s Report Card under No Child Left Behind,” September 25, 2007, www.ed.gov/news/pressreleases/2007/09/09252007.html.

¹⁹Sean Cavanagh and Kathleen Kennedy Manzo, “NAEP Gains: Experts Mull Significance,” *Education Week*, October 3, 2007, 1, 16-17.

²⁰Lowell C. Rose and Alec M. Gallup, “The 39th Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll Of the Public’s Attitudes Toward the Public Schools” (Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup, September 2007), 34.

²¹John Chubb et al., “Do We Need to Repair the Monument? Debating the Future of No Child Left Behind,” *Education Next* 4, no. 2 (Spring 2005): 8–19.

²²U.S. Department of Education, “Growth Models: Ensuring Grade-Level Proficiency for All Students by 2014,” July 2007, www.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/growthmodel/proficiency.html.

²³U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Education and Labor press release, “Chairman Miller Remarks on the Future of the No Child Left Behind Education Law,” July 30, 2007, www.house.gov/apps/list/speech/edlabor_dem/RelJul30NCLBSpeech.html.

²⁴William J. Bennett and Rod Paige, “Why We Need a National School Test,” *Washington Post*, September 21, 2006, sec. A, 25.

²⁵Peter Baker, “An Unlikely Partnership Left Behind,” *Washington Post*, November 5, 2007, A01.

²⁶Secretary Margaret Spellings, letter to the editor, *Wall Street Journal*, April 5, 2006.

²⁷Amit R. Paley, “No Child’ Target Is Called Out of Reach,” *Washington Post*, March 14, 2007, A01.

²⁸U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Education and Labor press release, “Chairman Miller Remarks on the Future of the No Child Left Behind Education Law,” July 30, 2007, www.house.gov/apps/list/speech/edlabor_dem/RelJul30NCLBSpeech.html.

²⁹“Draft Bill: Changes to AYP,” *Education Week*, September 5, 2007, 21.

About the Authors

Frederick M. Hess is director of education policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute and executive editor of *Education Next*. His many books include *No Remedy Left Behind: Lessons from a Half-Decade of NCLB*, *Common Sense School Reform*, and *No Child Left Behind: A Primer*. A former high school teacher, he holds a Ph.D. in government from Harvard University.

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No Child Left Behind (NCLB), U.S. federal law aimed at improving public primary and secondary schools, and thus student performance, via increased accountability for schools, school districts, and states. The act was passed by Congress with bipartisan support in December 2001 and signed into law by. Alternative Titles: NCLB, No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. No Child Left Behind (NCLB), in full No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, U.S. federal law aimed at improving public primary and secondary schools, and thus student performance, via increased accountability for schools, school districts, and states. The act was passed by Congress with bipartisan support in December 2001 and signed into law by Pres. George W. Bush in January 2002. Deborah White is a political journalist specializing in progressive political issues and perspectives. She is a three-time delegate to the California Democratic Party and a former federal elections official. our editorial process. Deborah White. Updated January 30, 2019. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 (NCLB) was initially legislated for 5 years, and has been since temporarily extended, but not officially reauthorized. Senate Democrats were divided on reauthorization, while most Senate Republicans heartily despise NCLB. The primary positives of the No Child Left Behind Act include: Accountability standards are set and measured annually by each state to foster educational growth and achievement. All results are also annually reported to parents. The law didn't care if a child had begun the year three grades behind in reading and a teacher helped her make two years' worth of progress by May. According to NCLB's strict proficiency guidelines, that student was still a year below grade-level. The law also required schools to break down their student data into lots of little subgroups, including race, disability and socioeconomic status. And here begins the other great lesson of No Child Left Behind. Lesson No. 2: The Lobotomy. For schools stuck in the quicksand, Ahn says, "these sanctions start stacking up, and at the end of the day, they don't help the schools to improve."