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Caddo Gap Press

3145 Geary Blvd. PMB 275

San Francisco, CA 94118

415/666-3012

Fax 415/666-3552

caddogap@aol.com

California Council on Teacher Education

December 26, 2006

The Honorable Jack O'Connell
Superintendent of Public Instruction
State of California
1430 N Street
Sacramento, California 95814

Dear Superintendent O'Connell:

The California Council on Teacher Education appreciates your invitation to the California education community to provide commentary related to the reauthorization of the federal No Child Left Behind Act. It is our pleasure to share with you the following:

(1) Joint Organizational Statement on *No Child Left Behind Act*

Following is the text of a Joint Organizational Statement on *No Child Left Behind Act* originally drafted on October 21, 2004 by the Children's Defense Fund and endorsed at that time by 30 other organizations. The California Council on Teacher Education added its endorsement on October 21, 2005, by a unanimous vote of the CCTE Delegate Assembly:

The undersigned education, civil rights, children's disability, and citizen's organizations are committed to the *No Child Left Behind Act's* objectives of strong academic achievement for all children and closing the achievement gap. We believe that the federal government has a critical role to play in attaining these goals. We endorse the use of an accountability system that helps ensure all children, including children of color, from low-income families, with disabilities, and of limited English proficiency, are prepared to be successful, participating members of our democracy.

While we have different positions on various aspects of the law, based on concerns raised during the implementation of *NCLB*, we believe the following significant, constructive corrections are among those necessary to make the *Act* fair and effective. Among these concerns are: over-emphasizing standardized testing, narrowing curriculum and instruction to focus on test preparation rather than richer academic learning; over-identifying schools in need of improvement; using sanctions that do not help improve schools; inappropriately excluding low-scoring children in order to boost test results; and inadequate funding. *Overall, the law's emphasis needs to shift from applying sanctions for failing to raise test scores to holding states and localities accountable for making the systemic changes that improve student achievement.*

Recommended Changes in *NCLB*

Progress Measurement

1. Replace the law's arbitrary proficiency targets with ambitious achievement targets based on rates of success actually achieved by the most effective public schools.
2. Allow states to measure progress by using students' growth in achievement as well as their performance in relation to pre-determined levels of academic proficiency.
3. Ensure that states and school districts regularly report to the government and the public their progress in implementing systemic changes to enhance educator, family, and community capacity to improve student learning.
4. Provide a comprehensive picture of students' and schools' performance by moving from an overwhelming reliance on standardized tests to using multiple indicators of student achievement in addition to these tests.

5. Fund research and development of more effective accountability systems that better meet the goal of high academic achievement for all children.

Assessments

6. Help states develop assessment systems that include district and school-based measures in order to provide better, more timely information about student learning.

7. Strengthen enforcement of NCLB provisions requiring that assessments must:

Be aligned with state content and achievement standards;

Be used for purposes for which they are valid and reliable;

Be consistent with nationally recognized professional and technical standards;

Be of adequate technical quality for each purpose required under the Act;

Provide multiple, up-to-date measures of student performance including measures that assess higher order thinking skills and understanding;

Provide useful diagnostic information to improve teaching and learning.

8. Decrease the testing burden on states, schools, and districts by allowing states to assess students annually in selected grades in elementary, middle schools, and high schools.

Building Capacity

9. Ensure changes in teacher and administrator preparation and continued professional development that research evidence and experience indicate improve educational quality and student achievement.

10. Enhance state and local capacity to effectively implement the comprehensive changes required to increase the knowledge and skills of administrators, teachers, families, and communities to support high student achievement.

Sanctions

11. Ensure that improvement plans are allowed sufficient time to take hold before applying sanctions; sanctions should not be applied if they undermine existing effective reform efforts.

12. Replace sanctions that do not have a consistent record of success with interventions that enable schools to make changes that result in improved student achievement.

Funding

13. Raise authorized levels of NCLB funding to cover a substantial percentage of the costs that states and districts will incur to carry out these recommendations, and fully fund the law at those levels without reducing expenditures for other educational programs.

14. Fully fund Title I to ensure that 100 percent of eligible children are served.

We, the undersigned, will work for the adoption of these recommendations as central structural changes needed to NCLB at the same time that we advance our individual organization's proposals.

Organizations endorsing Joint Statement: Advancement Project, American Association of School Administrators, American Association of University Women, ASPIRA, Association of School Business Officials International (ASBO), California Council on Teacher Education, Campaign for Fiscal Equity/ACCESS, Children's Defense Fund, Citizens for Effective Schools, Council for Children with Behavioral Disorders, Council for Exceptional Children, Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform, Division for Learning Disabilities of the Council for Exceptional Children (DLD/CEC), FairTest: The National Center for Fair & Open Testing, Forum for Education and Democracy, International Reading Association, International Technology Education Association, Learning Disabilities Association of America, League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), National Association for Bilingual Education (NABE), National Alliance of Black School Educators, National Association of School Psychologists, National Association of Social Workers, National Council of Teachers of English, National Down Syndrome Congress, National Education Association, National Urban League, Service Employees International Union, School Social Work Association of America, Stand for Children

(2) Additional Commentary from Members and Delegates of the California Council on Teacher Education

The following comments were recorded as the result of a discussion of reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act at the Second Policy Session of the Fall 2006 Conference of the California Council on Teacher Education on October 20, 2006:

Accountability

- California developed standards prior to NCLB. Thus it has rigorous standards focused on mastery while many other states focus on competency. Do we want to be comparable? Isn't that a movement toward a "national" curriculum?
- The NCLB system doesn't recognize the diversity of learners. Thus the current assessment system is heavily focused on linguistic/verbal assessment. The lack of alternative ways to demonstrate proficiency has a negative impact on student instruction and learning, and the methods schools implement in an attempt to meet these goals. To address this a rigorous alternative assessment system needs to be developed and implemented that allows all students to demonstrate what they know.
- More specific language needs to be written for Response to Intervention (RtI) that provides support for modeling child centered practices. There should be more federal money supporting RtI.
- Students with Disabilities (SWD) should continue to be designated as SWD for NCLB purposes for three years after they are redesignated as they usually continue to need added support for some time.
- NCLB does not clearly articulate the priorities for working with students with disabilities and IDEA is a work in progress.
- It is statistically impossible to have 100% of students achieving at the proficient level by 2013-2014. A realistic goal would be for continual improvement using multiple measures.
- It is not reasonable for a school to fail AYP if one subgroup misses the 95% participation requirement. This has happened in our experience due to circumstances beyond the school's control such as parent opt out and high school students refusing to take the test as a protest to so many tests being given.
- A more useful way to compare student progress is to look at the same group of students over time, otherwise it is like comparing apples to oranges. Each group of students comes with skills and knowledge unique to their group.
- There should be "credit" for moving up all students, especially those with the most needs.
- The 95% participation rate should not trigger a school or district into PI. There should be a requirement for a plan to improve participation. If that does not improve participation over a number of years, then the consequence should be PI.
- California should implement an individual student growth model or a "value added" model. This model, linked with a rigorous alternative assessment would provide a more accurate and realistic understanding of student knowledge and areas of needed support.

Questions/Areas to Explore:

- What does "proficiency" mean?
- We should draw on the Civil Rights work being done at Harvard and the impact of NCLB.
- The unintended "fall-out" related to Prompt 7: the "blaming" of a sub-group for a school not meeting a goal – whether due to the participation rate or lower scores. The sub-group often seen as the problem is special education, as these students are seen as "pulling the scores down" for a school or a district. This becomes divisive and also perpetuates stereotypes and biases.

Interventions and Corrective Actions

- PI schools should be allowed to offer Supplemental Educational Services for at least a year.
- Public school choice is not necessarily a good idea. The barriers to implementation of public school choice are: (1) there are no schools in the area that are not PI, and (2) parents want their children to attend schools in their immediate neighborhood.
- Modifications of the accountability system are needed. Schools or districts should not have to make progress for two years to get out of PI status and should not move in to PI status after only two years of difficulty.

- More money, not less, should be given to schools in PI status. Pay for representatives from PI schools to visit exemplary schools with the same demographics (and making AYP) to watch models of good practice. Representatives from successful schools could be paid to visit PI schools to share ideas, support, observe, and help with action plans. Schools should be given more time; improvement takes more than one year.
- Make sure there is adequate money for early intervention for the students and the school. Schools and teachers need more teaching time and less testing. More counselors and more community outreach are needed for these schools. Strength-based assistance and more services at the school are also needed (for example, health clinics). LEAs should be encouraged to form formal partnerships with IHEs in the area.
- It takes as long or longer for districts to improve than schools. The schools within a district have to make improvement for the district to improve. Districts need more time within the accountability system.
- Instructors in Supplemental Education Services (SES) need to be as highly qualified as public school teachers (HQT). It is appalling that these providers are not required to have qualified teachers to teach the students that need the most help. In addition, only students with the most needs should qualify for SES.
- The accountability system is defective and needs to be fully reworked, not just a token attempt to fix. The process is undermining public schools and diverting public money to private enterprises. Once the model is properly reworked, the federal government should fully fund NCLB.

Teacher Quality

- The federal and state government can implement an initiative to inspire talented and diverse students at junior high, high school, community college, and upper division colleges to become teachers. These students can be recruited via mentors.
- Teachers should be paid at the level of their value, that is, what they would be paid with their level of education and experience in the private sector.
- Eliminate the Social Security Offset so that "career changers" do not have a disincentive to go into teaching.
- Teachers should get signing bonuses to teach special education, mathematics, and science in low-performing schools.
- Schools should be cast as positive, empowering learning environments. They should be funded appropriately, with the lowest-performing schools getting the most support.
- Schools should have good working conditions, including a clean and safe site, a supportive principal, and quality professional development.
- Teaching should be viewed as value added, the best of the best goes into teaching.
- Reduce the complexity of NCLB, do not make it more cumbersome.
- Teachers face a roadblock, as they have testing costs on top of teacher preparation program costs. Federal funds need to be used to defray these costs to students.
- Waiver programs need to be allowed again; tests like CSET should not be the only avenue for demonstrating subject matter competency for teaching K-6.
- Allow multiple entry points to teaching.
- Teachers can prove proficiency in authentic teaching situations and they can demonstrate their ability to communicate content area information.
- There should be a commitment to life long-learning for teachers and students.
- There should be an incentive structure at pre-service level and the point of induction.
- There should be incentives to support Professional Development Schools.
- Money should be available to support teachers taking classes to become highly qualified or school districts providing professional development for the same.

English Learners


- Maintain English learners as a subgroup.
- Require that ELL students be exempted from English assessments, except CELDT, for three years and that they be tested in their primary language for those three years, but only if they have been instructed in their primary language.
- Include scores of primary language assessments and CELDT in determining AYP and API.
- Require uniform implementation of the NCLB provisions regarding ELLs and enforcement by USOE, which includes (1) 3-year exemption for new immigrants, (2) modified EL assessments in English, and 3) assessment in the primary language for only those who have had instruction in the primary language.
- Require persons providing services to school improvement schools (as required by NCLB) to possess knowledge and experience with regards to the instructional methodologies and pedagogy used for English learners.
- Teachers providing instruction to ELL students should possess the credentials/certificates required by states to do so.
- A singular approach to teaching reading, such as Open Court and Reading First does not address the needs of ELLs. Research-based curriculum and instruction should be considered.
- Identify Title III "best practices" and research and disseminate information nationally.
- Remove the provision for military recruiters to recruit on high school campuses.

(3) Summary and Conclusions

The No Child Left Behind Act as originally written and enacted contains significant flaws, the most serious of which are an over-reliance on testing and assessment, a failure to recognize the importance of offering encouragement and incentives rather than censure and punishment, and serving as a vehicle for creating and developing alternatives to America's public schools rather than focusing on strengthening the public school system. The California Council on Teacher Education (CCTE) urges Congress to correct these misorientations in NCLB. If such corrections are made, then CCTE favors reauthorization of NCLB with full funding. If such corrections are not made, then CCTE opposes reauthorization of NCLB and most specifically opposes any funding of NCLB without first correcting these major flaws. CCTE hopes that Congress will make the necessary corrections, so that NCLB can take its place as a worthy successor to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act as a stimulus to the improvement of public education in all states and for all children.

The communication was unanimously approved by an e-mail vote of the officers and members of the Board of Directors of the California Council on Teacher Education on December 22, 2006.

Signed for the California Council on Teacher Education by Alan H. Jones, CCTE Executive Secretary:


_____ December 26, 2006

For further information on the California Council on Teacher Education and its position on the No Child Left Behind Act please contact:

Reyes Quezada, CCTE President, rquezada@sandiego.edu
Alan H. Jones, CCTE Executive Secretary, caddogap@aol.com
Martha Zaragoza-Diaz, CCTE Legislative and Educational Policy Analyst, madiaz@earthlink.net