



*A Union of Professionals*

# NCLB:

Let's Get It Right



“Where provisions work against—not for—students and schools, the AFT is working to change them. We will continue working with Congress, the U.S. Department of Education and others to ensure that NCLB’s promised benefits reach every child.”

**EDWARD J. McELROY**

*AFT President*

# NCLB:

## Let's Get It Right

**THE AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS** has long been a leader in promoting high standards of learning and teaching and is working actively to close the achievement gap. When the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) became law in 2002, the AFT hoped that the law would be implemented in a way that would strengthen public education while raising the academic achievement of all students.

Unfortunately, flaws in the law are undercutting its original promise. Guidance for states has often been unclear, and late, and the U.S. Department of Education's attempts to make the law more flexible have brought about only minimal improvements without addressing NCLB's larger flaws. Complicating all these issues is the pervasive problem of underfunding. The stakes are too high for our children to wait until the upcoming reauthorization before we begin talking about how to make positive improvements to NCLB.

The AFT is working with Congress and the administration to support constructive changes to the law that reflect our members' views about what works best for the children they serve.

AFT's recommendations to improve NCLB focus on four areas:

- Adequate Yearly Progress
- Highly Qualified Staff
- School Improvement and Services for Students
- Funding

# Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)

## Let's Get It Right

**NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND** (NCLB) appropriately seeks to hold schools accountable for their effectiveness in making academic progress with their students and for overcoming achievement gaps. The law's mechanism for doing so is the adequate yearly progress (AYP) formula.

But although the P in AYP stands for progress, AYP does not measure the yearly progress of the same students over time. Not surprisingly, the evidence shows that whether or not a school makes AYP does not necessarily depend on its effectiveness or achievement gaps that may be present.

Moreover, although the A in AYP stands for adequate, the evidence shows that AYP targets are not merely challenging, they are unrealistic. By 2014, almost all schools, very many of them high performing, will have failed AYP. Indeed, no nation has been or is close to meeting the kind of standard that has been set by NCLB.

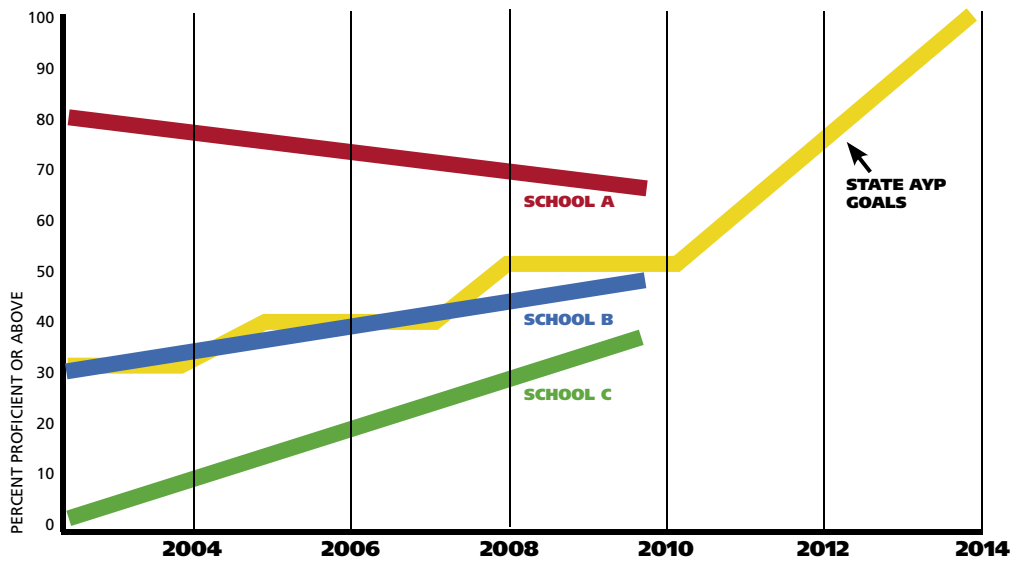
Therefore, for the sake of preserving the legitimacy of accountability—and, above all, in order to achieve the legitimate goals of NCLB—AYP must be fundamentally overhauled into a system that:

- Sets challenging but demonstrably attainable student progress goals;
- Judges school effectiveness—the only valid and fair basis for accountability—by measuring the progress that schools achieve with the same students over time;
- Truly “leaves no child behind” by producing accurate accountability decisions without excluding certain groups of students and by holding large and small schools and diverse and homogeneous schools equally accountable for their performance;
- Maintains reporting on student achievement by subgroup—chief among them, low-income students as compared to their more advantaged peers—without giving schools dozens of ways of being declared “failures” and only one way to make AYP; and
- Enables states to meet—and ensures federal enforcement of—the current NCLB requirement that states' implementation of AYP meet professional standards for validity and reliability by ensuring that NCLB's own AYP requirements and regulations also meet such scientifically based standards.



# Which One is the Failing School?

## ADEQUATE YEARLY PROGRESS IN NCLB



SOURCE: Robert Linn, University of Colorado at Boulder, National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards and Student Testing (CREST), presentation made at the ETS 2003 Invitational Conference, New York City, October 3, 2003.

**Q.** Which of these schools will NCLB label as failing?

- A. School A
- B. School B
- C. School C
- D. All of the above

**A. D. All of the above**

Sooner or later, all these schools will fail to meet the state's annual target for adequate yearly progress (AYP)—and that's even before the performance of different subgroups of students is considered.

Under NCLB's formula, schools whose students are way behind from the start get sanctioned quickly, even if they're making impressive gains. In fact, to hit AYP targets, most of these schools would have to increase test scores at a rate that's never been attained by even the "best" schools.

Is it fair to stigmatize schools that are behind from the start, even when they're making real progress? Shouldn't improvement be recognized and rewarded? And shouldn't the high goals we set for students and schools be attainable rather than impossibly challenging?



# Highly Qualified Staff

## Let's Get It Right

**RESEARCH HAS DEMONSTRATED** that excellent teachers are the most important in-school factor contributing to student achievement. The AFT believes that all children should be taught by staff who are well-prepared and highly qualified—teachers who know their subject matter and how to teach it, supported by trained paraprofessionals.

NCLB defines several routes for teachers and paraprofessionals to become highly qualified. In particular, veteran teachers may demonstrate their qualifications by taking a test or by meeting a “high, objective uniform state standard of evaluation” (HOUSSE). The U.S. Department of Education has not required that all states offer this option, however, and many states have delayed the development of their HOUSSE plans, making it more difficult for teachers to meet the deadline set in the law to be “highly qualified.” For paraprofessionals, the response by states to develop alternative routes to demonstrate excellence has been haphazard.

To address these issues, the AFT is pressing the U.S. Department of Education and Congress to require that all states create a rigorous HOUSSE and extend the deadline for teachers and paraprofessionals to demonstrate their qualifications in states that have not developed the HOUSSE or timely procedures for paraprofessionals.

Furthermore, to ensure a high-quality workforce, more must be done. The AFT will continue to urge the Congress and the U.S. Department of Education to address staff quality issues in NCLB by:

- Requiring states to develop high-caliber teacher induction systems to ensure that new teachers receive the support they need to provide effective instruction during their beginning years;
- Requiring that all districts provide ongoing, job-specific professional development for paraprofessionals to ensure that they maintain the skills necessary to work with students;
- Providing incentive grants to districts to develop peer assistance programs that focus on the improvement of staff knowledge and skills;
- Providing incentives for local districts to develop compensation systems for teachers and paraprofessionals that have a competitive base pay and benefits for all and, when supported by both management and staff, provide opportunities for staff to improve their salary through the performance of additional responsibilities; and
- Requiring states to develop an accountability index for schools to ensure that high-need schools have the proper teaching and learning conditions and financial incentives in place to attract and retain high-quality staff.







# School Improvement

## Let's Get It Right

**THE NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND** school improvement process is seriously flawed.

**1.** The first problem is the AYP (adequate yearly progress) measure used to identify schools for improvement (see page 4), which causes effective schools to be identified as “in need of improvement.” This misidentification of schools drains resources from schools that truly need assistance and causes parents and communities to lose confidence in their school staffs and the accountability process.

**2.** The second problem is the initial remedies for improving schools—choice and supplemental services—are not research-based and lack appropriate accountability.

**3.** The third problem is the timing of interventions. NCLB directs district resources to supplemental service providers and transporting students to other schools before an adequate school improvement plan can be developed and implemented. The ensuing declining enrollment and decreasing resources further cripple these schools that actually need additional supports.

**4.** The fourth problem is that the prescribed NCLB process does not provide adequate time and necessary resources for a thorough and early analysis of the problems leading to low performance and for the development and implementation of a comprehensive plan to address these issues.

AFT is lobbying Congress to amend NCLB to ensure that the school improvement process:

- Is based on credible data for identifying struggling schools that need additional resources.
- Has adequate support for an intensive planning year, when a school is first identified as “in need of improvement,” so that the school can develop an improvement plan that addresses the needs of the school and is based on research-based, proven programs.
- Provides the necessary resources to implement the plan and see results within three years.
- Requires schools to implement choice and supplemental services only if the school improvement plan has been demonstrated to be ineffective after three years.
- Requires the school to undertake more drastic restructuring if the school does not show measurable improvement.



# Funding

## Let's Get It Right

**ENSURING THAT ALL CHILDREN** have highly qualified teachers and that struggling schools have the tools to make improvements can't be done on the cheap. Research indicates that recruiting highly qualified teachers for hard-to-staff schools requires improving the physical plant, providing up-to-date textbooks and other learning resources, implementing proven curricula, attracting and retaining exemplary administrative staff, and providing professional development and financial resources for teachers.

Congress knew that the goals of NCLB could not be achieved without accountability and additional resources, and it set a funding authorization for Title I and other programs for each year. For Title I, the cornerstone of NCLB, the authorization for 2006 is \$22.75 billion. But President Bush has requested only \$13.3 billion of that total for this vital program. This continues a pattern of underfunding for NCLB. It is clear that the increases in funding are far short of what is necessary to get the job done, and what the Congress anticipated would be required.

These funds are crucial. For example, AFT research estimates that adding the \$9 billion to fund NCLB at the authorized 2006 level would provide enough money to improve the more than 1,700 secondary schools that are struggling the most to meet standards by creating smaller school settings and provide other supports.



### TITLE I FUNDING (IN BILLIONS OF DOLLARS)

YEAR	FULL FUNDING	FUNDING RECEIVED	GAP
2002	26.4	22.2	4.2
2003	29.2	23.8	5.4
2004	32	24.5	7.5
2005	34.3	24.5	9.8

**TOTAL**

**\$27 BILLION**

## Let's Make NCLB Work!

- Lower class size.
- Hire specialists in reading and math instruction to provide teachers with model lessons and in-class training in research-based instructional techniques.
- Create faculty workrooms with high-speed Internet connections so that teachers can make use of the broadest array of resources when planning lessons.

Fully funding NCLB could mean providing these kinds of services to almost 5 million students who are currently being left behind.

# It's clear to see. Three letters are making a shambles of the *No Child Left Behind* law.



Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) is supposed to gauge a school's effectiveness. Yet many schools are incorrectly labeled failures when they're actually making real academic progress. Teachers and other school staff work hard every day to help students achieve high standards. But AYP and other provisions of the *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) law are seriously flawed and hinder efforts to reach that goal.

It's time to fix NCLB and make sure schools are recognized for the progress their students make. We can do that by having a fair and accurate system of accountability and holding President Bush to his promise to provide the necessary funding so that schools can continue to improve.

To learn more about NCLB, visit us today at [www.aft.org](http://www.aft.org).



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AFT PUBLIC EMPLOYEES ■ AFT HEALTHCARE

## NCLB. Let's Get It Right.

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