



## Standards, Accountability and Flexibility:

Americans Speak on  
*No Child Left Behind* Reauthorization

# americans speak

Conducted for ETS by  
Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Inc.  
The Winston Group  
June 2007



Dear Colleague in Education,

Since 2001, ETS has commissioned an annual, nationwide public opinion survey to learn what parents, teachers, school leaders and the public think about education in America.

The Americans Speak research focuses on a particular issue related to the broad themes of access, equity and accountability in public education. Past surveys are:

- Keeping Our Edge: Americans Speak on Education and Competitiveness (June 2006)
- Ready for the Real World? Americans Speak on High School Reform (June 2005)
- Equity and Adequacy: Americans Speak on Public Education Funding (June 2004)
- Quality, Affordability and Access: Americans Speak on Higher Education (June 2003)
- A National Priority: Americans Speak on Teacher Quality (June 2002)
- A Measured Response: Americans Speak On Education Reform (May 2001)

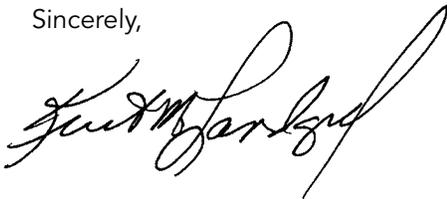
The June 2007 survey, *Standards, Accountability and Flexibility: Americans Speak on No Child Left Behind Reauthorization*, provides important insights into public opinion on educational reform just as Congress is about to consider reauthorizing the landmark legislation.

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For example, Americans said the No Child Left Behind Act should be reauthorized, but also called for greater flexibility in implementation and more funding to fix struggling schools. They also supported high standards of accountability, the idea of tying federal funding to accountability requirements, and the development of a set of national standards and tests to replace current state-specific requirements.

I hope you find this report useful. More information about this year's research and previous Americans Speak surveys can be obtained at [www.ets.org/americansspeak.html](http://www.ets.org/americansspeak.html). You can also obtain information or make a comment on the survey via e-mail at [issues@ets.org](mailto:issues@ets.org).

Sincerely,



Kurt M. Landgraf

## SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS:

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) supporters must reintroduce and explain the law, if they are to gain broad public support for its reauthorization. The public lacks a clear understanding of NCLB, while teachers and school administrators are decidedly negative toward it. Despite that, strong majorities of the public, and teachers and administrators, would rather see the NCLB approach fixed than scrapped altogether. The public is divided about whether the law should be reauthorized with minor changes or only after a major overhaul. But, teachers and administrators clearly say major changes are needed. Only small minorities of the groups surveyed would like to see Congress choose not to reauthorize NCLB. The changes envisioned by those supporting reauthorization would provide greater flexibility in implementation and focus on specific school improvements instead of merely identifying schools struggling to meet NCLB standards.

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**After Six Years of Reform, Schools Still Receive a "C."** Years of debating, passing and implementing No Child Left Behind reforms have done little to sway public opinion of school quality. In fact, "grades" given to schools by the public, parents, teachers and administrators have remained virtually unchanged over the seven years that we have conducted this survey.

Most parents (43%) and the general public (44%) give the nation's schools a C. Only slightly more give them an A or a B (27%) than give them a D or an F (21%). That gives schools a grade point average (GPA), according to our survey, of 2.0 or C. That's the same average they received in 2001, when NCLB was just being considered. In fact, the 2.0 GPA has remained constant over that period. Public school teachers and administrators give schools only a slightly better grade (2.3), and that grade also has remained remarkably constant during the survey period. Not surprisingly, parents of school-age children rate their own child's school (2.8) higher than the nation's schools as a whole. As expected, teachers (3.0) and administrators (3.2) also give their own schools higher grades.

All agree that the most challenging problems facing our schools defy legislative solutions. Parents, teachers and administrators participating in the focus groups described schools as struggling under the burden of increasing societal woes they are asked to shoulder. In the survey, teachers, administrators, the public and even parents say the lack of parental involvement is the biggest challenge facing schools.

**The Public Lacks a Clear Understanding of NCLB, While Teachers and School Administrators Are Decidedly Negative Toward It.** When asked for their opinion of No Child Left Behind, without being given a definition of the term, the public is divided, with 41% feeling favorable and 43% unfavorable. Teachers (77%) and administrators (63%), on the other hand, have a staunchly negative view of NCLB.

The survey findings reveal that at least half the public is basing their opinion on very limited knowledge. Fewer than half (45%) feel they know either a great deal or a fair amount about NCLB. About the same number (47%) are able to identify the law's principal components. After hearing a brief description of the law's key provisions, support rises to 56% and opposition drops to 39%.

Throughout the survey, the American public expresses support for the law's key requirement, specifically that federal funding be tied to increased accountability. By 57% to 34%, the public rejects the suggestion that states should be allowed to opt out of the law's requirements for them to set education standards and test students against the standards and still receive federal education dollars. In one clear departure from the current law's provisions, by 59% to 35% the public would replace NCLB's state-based standards and testing with one set of national standards.

**Strong Support for NCLB Reauthorization with Changes.** Despite the American public's definite lack of knowledge about No Child Left Behind and despite teachers' and school administrators' strong misgivings about the legislation, the public and public school teachers and administrators strongly support reauthorization. Only 16% of the public

and 13% of parents of school-age children oppose reauthorization. Despite their strongly negative views of NCLB, it is somewhat surprising to see that relatively few teachers (25%) and administrators (22%) believe that Congress should not reauthorize the law. While the public is divided over whether Congress should make minor or major changes to the law, teachers and administrators clearly believe major changes are needed before it is reauthorized.

**Flexibility and More Funding to Fix Struggling Schools.** The public, parents, teachers and administrators share a common vision when it comes to changing the law. They favor more flexibility in how NCLB is implemented and support policies that find solutions for poorly performing schools instead of punishing them. A 57% majority of the public believes funding should be increased in all or most cases for schools that perform poorly on state assessments. A 71% majority of teachers and 61% of administrators also support additional funding for struggling schools.

The public, however, does not embrace blanket provisions for all schools that fall short on NCLB tests, and is especially opposed to sanctions that appear to punish school administrators or teachers for the poor performance. Only 25% of the public believes new administrators should take over poorly performing schools in all or most cases. Only 12% would replace the teachers in schools that perform poorly on state tests.

Educators also are seeking greater flexibility when it comes to English-language learners. Most teachers (66%) would give English-language learners up to two years before their scores are included in NCLB calculations. Even more administrators (77%) support that change. But, less than a third (32%) of the general public agrees. And, only 28% of those who took the survey in Spanish would exempt English-language learners for as many as two years.

## RESEARCH METHODS

On May 4–15, 2007, Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Inc., and The Winston Group conducted a national survey of 1,878 people. The sample included a base of 1,000 adults nationwide who are over age 18. At the 95% confidence interval, the statistical margin of sampling error\* associated with the base sample is  $\pm 3.1$  percentage points.

Over the same period, Hart Research and The Winston Group also conducted several oversample and additional sample interviews:

- Oversample interviews were conducted with 226 California residents to reach a total of 470 California residents for a statistical margin of sampling error of  $\pm 4.5$  percentage points.
- We conducted 100 additional interviews nationally among parents of children in grades kindergarten through 12, to reach 626 parents of K-12 students.
- Oversample interviews also were completed among 200 Hispanic or Latino adults who took the survey in Spanish (100 in California, 100 nationwide). As with each of the other adult oversamples, the Spanish-language samples were weighted to their proper proportion of the population in the main sample.

The research team also contacted 101 public school administrators (superintendents, school board members, principals and vice principals) and 251

public school teachers. The statistical margin of sampling error for the public school administrators is  $\pm 9.7$  percentage points and  $\pm 6.2$  percentage points for public school teachers.

Before conducting the surveys, the researchers convened six focus groups: two in Indianapolis, Ind.; two in San Jose, Calif.; and two in Alexandria, Va. One group contained public school administrators, and one was made up of voters who are not parents. Two groups had public school teachers as members, and two were for parents of public school students. In addition, we conducted seven in-depth interviews with leading education experts.

\* Most of the interviews for the base survey of 1,000 were conducted using a random-digit-dialing system (RDD), designed to give each person in the contiguous 48 states an equal chance of being included in the survey. To achieve a properly balanced sample with respect to age and ethnicity, roughly 10% of the base survey (107 interviews) was completed using a compiled list of people who are likely to be younger and nonwhite — two groups that are underrepresented in many other random surveys. All California interviews were conducted by RDD. The parent, Hispanic, teacher and school administrator interviews were conducted using compiled lists.

# FINDINGS

## After Six Years of Reform, Schools Still Receive a "C"

Although political leaders in Washington, D.C. and state capitals nationwide have been at work discussing public school reform, writing, debating, and passing legislation; and designing systems and implementing reforms for at least seven years, public opinion about the quality of public schools remains virtually unchanged. In each of the *American Speaks* surveys conducted since 2001, we have asked respondents to give an overall grade to the nation's public schools as a whole and to grade the schools they know best: the schools where they work as teachers and administrators, send their children, or support with their tax dollars in the case of nonparents. No matter how the questions are posed, the answers don't change. Grades for the nation's schools overall averaged out to a C (2.0 GPA) in 2001, just as they do in the current survey. Grades given by the public, parents and teachers and administrators to the schools they know best also have not changed over the seven-year span of this survey.

### Grades for Nation's Schools Remain at "C"

Spring 2007

The Public's Report Card							
The Nation's Schools							
General Public							
	2007	2006	2005	2004	2003	2002	2001
A	4%	5%	3%	2%	2%	2%	2%
B	23%	26%	23%	20%	29%	14%	18%
C	<b>44%</b>	<b>44%</b>	<b>46%</b>	<b>47%</b>	<b>47%</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>51%</b>
D	16%	15%	15%	15%	13%	21%	16%
F	5%	5%	4%	4%	2%	4%	3%
GPA	2.0	2.1	2.1	2.0	2.2	1.9	2.0

- The largest proportion of the general public (44%) give the nation's schools a C. Only slightly more give them an A or a B (27%) than give them a D or an F (21%). The dispersion has increased because fewer participants gave schools a C in 2007 than in 2001. But the shift has gone equally to the higher and lower grades, so the GPA has remained constant since 2001, fluctuating between a low of 1.9 and a high of 2.2.

- In a pattern that is seen throughout the survey, African Americans and Hispanics give public schools somewhat higher grades. Hispanics (2.4) — especially those who took the survey in Spanish (2.7) — give schools particularly high ratings.
- Those who oppose NCLB reauthorization (just 17% of respondents), have a more negative view of the American education system. Just 20% give schools an A or a B (as opposed to 27% of the public in general), and 32% give the system a D or an F, compared with just 15% of the general public.

Spring 2007

Education Stakeholders' Report Card							
The Nation's Schools							
	K-12 Parents					Public school teachers	Public school administrators
	2007	2006	2005	2004	2001	2007	2007
A	4%	5%	4%	2%	8%	4%	1%
B	25%	26%	27%	20%	<b>35%</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>41%</b>
C	<b>43%</b>	<b>45%</b>	<b>46%</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>42%</b>
D	16%	14%	12%	14%	13%	10%	4%
F	4%	4%	2%	3%	4%	1%	0%
GPA	2.1	2.1	2.2	2.0	2.3	2.3	2.4

- Parents' views largely mirror the public at large, with 43% giving schools a C, 29% giving an A or a B, and 20% grading them D or F. Parents' views also have stayed largely the same for the past six years, with only small fluctuations.
- Public school teachers and administrators give schools only a slightly better grade (2.3) than parents and the general public. This also has remained remarkably constant over the survey period.

## Grades for One's Own Schools Better — Still Not Great

*Spring 2007*

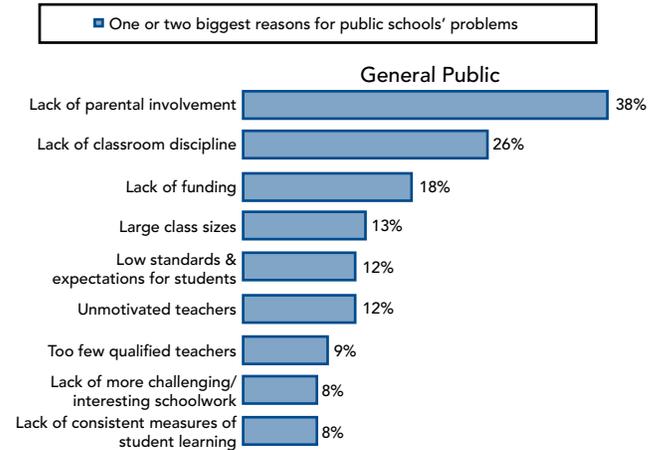
Public School Stakeholders' Report Card			
<i>My Children's School/My School(s)</i>			
	Public school parents	Public school teachers	Public school administrators
A	26%	27%	32%
B	<b>41%</b>	<b>52%</b>	<b>57%</b>
C	21%	17%	8%
D	8%	2%	1%
F	3%	1%	0%
GPA	2.8	3.0	3.2

- Parents of school-age children rate their children's schools higher (2.8) than the nation's schools as a whole.
- As expected, teachers (3.0) and administrators (3.2) also give the schools where they work much higher grades than the nation's schools as a whole.

## Where Are the Parents? Schools May Be Taking On Too Many Societal Responsibilities

There is broad agreement that the most significant challenges facing our schools may defy legislative solutions. Parents, teachers and administrators participating in the focus groups describe schools as struggling with an increasing number of societal burdens they are asked to shoulder. The survey reveals that teachers, administrators, the public and even parents themselves agree that a lack of parental involvement is the greatest challenge facing schools. The public and parents say lack of discipline in the classroom comes next.

## Public Schools' Problems



- Asked to select the top one or two problems facing schools, 39% of the public and 38% of K-12 parents say lack of parental involvement. The numbers are dramatically higher for teachers (61%) and administrators (53%).
- The public (26%) and K-12 parents (26%) cite lack of discipline in the classroom as the second greatest problem facing schools. But, teachers (19%) and administrators (6%) are much less likely to cite classroom discipline as a serious concern.
- The second-most-mentioned problem among teachers (31%) and administrators (50%) is a lack of adequate funding.
- Southerners are much more likely to cite classroom discipline as a major issue, with 32% citing it as a problem, compared to just 16% of those in Western states.
- Urban adults are more likely to mention class size than other respondents, with 17% saying class sizes are too large, compared to just 13% of the general public.

"I THINK RATHER THAN GRADING THE SCHOOL SYSTEM, WE SHOULD BE GRADING WHAT'S GOING ON AT HOME. I THINK WE WOULD HAVE FABULOUS STUDENTS AND SCORES AND EVERYTHING IF ALL THE PARENTS WERE BACKING US AND MAKING SURE THE KIDS HAD SUPPLIES AND THEIR HOMEWORK DONE."

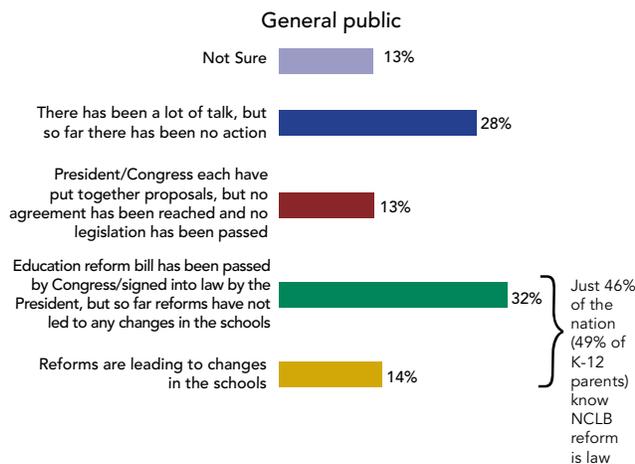
– CALIFORNIA MIDDLE-SCHOOL TEACHER

## The Public Largely Is Uninformed About NCLB

A majority of the public (54%) remains unaware that Congress passed and the President signed into law a major education bill. Of the 46% who do know it, only 14% believe that major changes are under way as a result. This information is critical to understanding how the public approaches education reform.

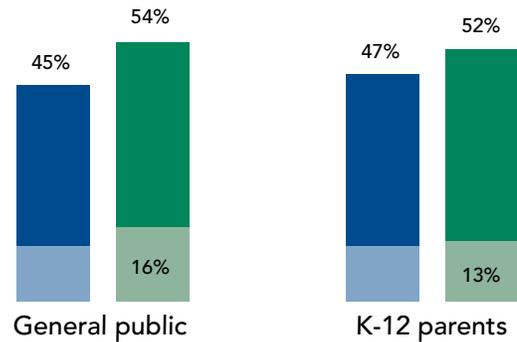
### Many Are Unaware of National Education Reform Efforts

Where do things stand today in terms of education reform at the national level in Washington, D.C.?



- College graduates are more aware of NCLB than those without a college diploma. A majority (53%) is aware that reforms have been passed, and 21% believe these reforms are leading to real changes in schools. Although still a small percentage, it's significantly larger than the 14% of the general public that shares this opinion. It indicates the reform message is not getting through to those with less education.

## Public's Knowledge of No Child Left Behind

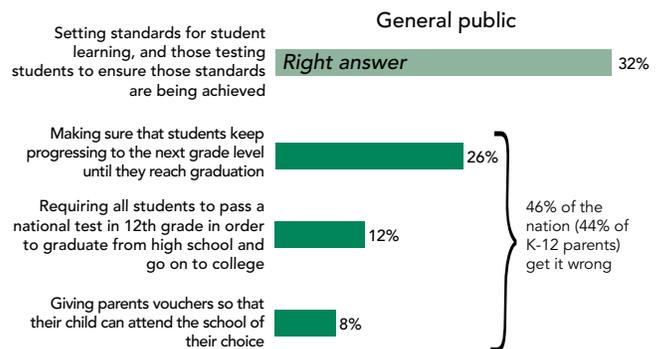


- Only 12% of the public claim to know a great deal about NCLB. An additional 33% say they know a fair amount. That means about half of the American public admits to knowing little (38%) or nothing at all (16%) about this legislative initiative.
- Once again, education plays a role when it comes to how much people think they know about No Child Left Behind. Those with a high school degree or less are relatively uninformed, with 65% knowing nothing at all or just some, and only 32% knowing a fair amount or a great deal. College graduates are more knowledgeable, with 56% claiming to know a great deal or a fair amount, and 43% knowing just some or nothing at all.
- Independent voters also are significantly less informed and engaged on the issue of No Child Left Behind. Only 37% claim to know either a great deal or a fair amount about the law, compared with 48% of Democrats and 50% of Republicans.

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### Only Half Can Pick NCLB Out of a Lineup

What does "No Child Left Behind" really mean to you?



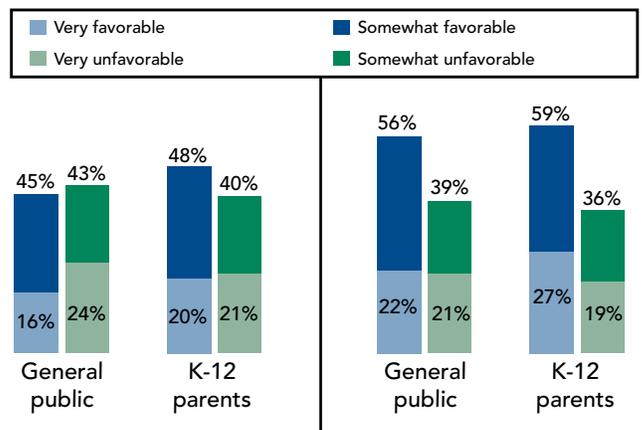
- When presented with four possible NCLB descriptions, fewer than half (47%) of the public and parents of children in K-12 schools (49%) correctly associate NCLB with standards, testing and accountability. Significant segments of the public associate NCLB with national testing for high school graduation (12%) or school vouchers (8%).
- One parent in the focus groups associated NCLB with not leaving students behind as they move from grade-to-grade at the end of the school year — a practice known as “social promotion.” It turns out that parent is not alone, as a large segment (26%) also get this wrong in the survey.
- College graduates are much more likely to select the correct description, with 64% describing NCLB as being about standards and testing. Among those with some college, 41% select standards and testing. Among those with a high school diploma or less, the proportion drops to 32%.

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### Public Support for NCLB Grows When It Is Defined

When asked about NCLB before the term is defined, public support is divided nearly evenly between supporters and opponents. When key NCLB provisions are summarized, however, support increases considerably.

### Support for NCLB Increases When Law Is Defined

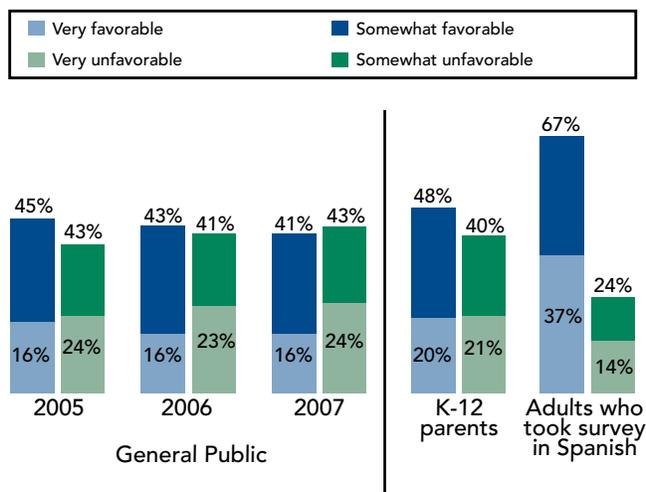


“The No Child Left Behind Act provides federal funds for school districts with poor children in order to close achievement gaps. It also requires states to set standards for education and to test students each year to determine whether the standards are being met by all students. In addition, No Child Left Behind provides funding to help teachers become highly qualified. It also provides additional funding and prescribes consequences to schools that fail to achieve academic targets set by their state.”

- Before hearing a description of the law, 41% have a favorable view, 43% an unfavorable view and 16% say they are neutral or without an opinion.
- After hearing a description of what NCLB entails, however, public support rises considerably, with a 56% majority favoring it and only 39% having an unfavorable view.
- College graduates hold the most negative view of NCLB, with just 35% having a favorable view before hearing a description. This rises to 47% favorable after they hear an NCLB description. This 12% jump in favorability compares with a 14-percentage-point increase (from 45% to 59%) among those with a high school diploma or less, and a 16-point increase (from 46% to 62%) among those with some college education. Because the less-educated groups started off less informed about NCLB to begin with, it is not surprising that they show more movement after they hear a description.

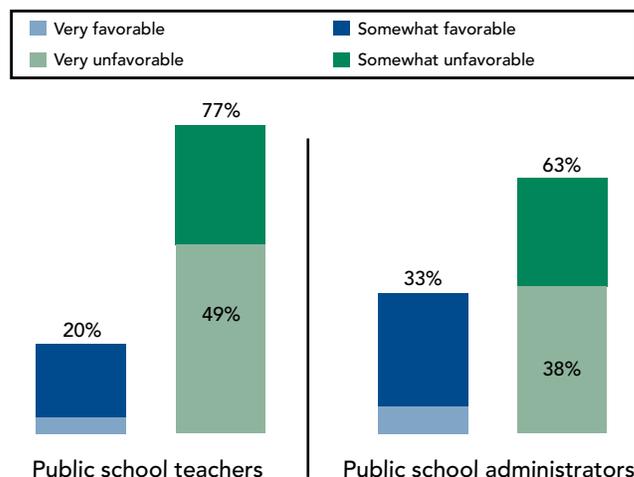
## Public and Parents Are Divided On No Child Left Behind

Attitudes Toward No Child Left Behind



## Teachers and Administrators Are Firmly Against NCLB

Attitudes toward No Child Left Behind



- Even though many people are uninformed about NCLB, enough associate the law with President Bush for meaningful, partisan differences to emerge. Republicans support NCLB by 52% to 34%. Democrats oppose it, with 35% in favor and 51% opposed. Independents look more like Democrats, with 35% supporting NCLB and 48% opposing it.
- Hispanics (55% favorable, 24% unfavorable), especially Spanish speakers who took the survey in Spanish (67% favorable, 14% unfavorable), are very supportive of NCLB.
- African Americans also have a more favorable view of NCLB than the general public (46% favorable and 32% unfavorable). But, they are also the most likely to have no opinion or to feel neutral or unsure (22%) about the law.

- Teachers and administrators have a very negative view of NCLB, with 77% of teachers and 63% of administrators viewing the law unfavorably. Just 20% of teachers and one in three (33%) administrators have a favorable view.

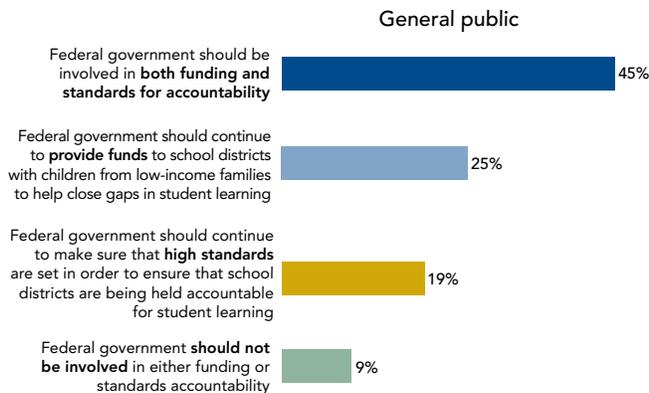
In the focus groups, teachers and school administrators went on at great length detailing the problems they have with No Child Left Behind. Their concerns centered on the pressures to teach to the test and their need to emphasize test-taking skills and material that is on the test at the expense of other material and broader learning. They also raised issues of dislocations in their classrooms and throughout their schools. They cited resources being shifted to subjects that are tested and toward students who are “on the bubble” between passing and failing state tests to the detriment of nontested subjects and students who are either comfortable with the grade-level material or falling farther behind their class.

These criticisms and others raised by teachers, administrators, and parents in the focus groups helped inform a survey question that is reported later in this report. (Page 11)

## Support for Basic Provisions of NCLB

Even if the public is divided in its assessments of NCLB and largely uninformed about its specific provisions, it continues to strongly support the fundamental principles behind the law. Americans do not believe the federal government should stay out of education policy. In fact, most parents, teachers, administrators and the public say the federal government has an important role to play in improving the nation’s schools.

## Support for Basic NCLB Provisions of Accountability and Funding



- Asked whether the federal role in education should provide funding for schools in low-income areas or set accountability standards, very few (9%) say the federal government should not play either role. The largest segment of respondents (45%) says the federal government should play a role in funding and accountability.

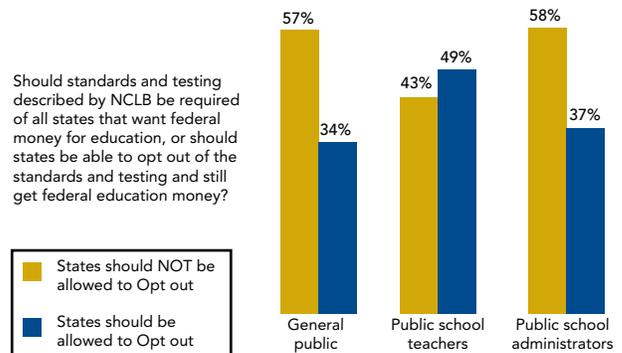
- Support for federal funding (including among those who answered "both" funding and accountability standards) is strong among all groups: 70% of the general public, 67% of K-12 parents, 79% of teachers and 84% of administrators. All groups clearly value the role the federal government can play in closing the achievement gap by helping school districts with students from low-income families.

- Accountability and federal standard-setting score nearly as high (including among those who answered "both"), with 64% of the public, 68% of K-12 parents, 49% of teachers and 49% of administrators. The lower numbers among public school faculty are notable and clearly reflect their concerns about the accountability standards in NCLB. Even so, the numbers reflect a nearly even divide between teachers and school administrators on the question of whether there should be a federal government role in setting standards for educational attainment.

- Differences in support for funding and standards are clearly evident based on party identification. As might be expected, a higher proportion of Democrats (78%) than Republicans support federal funding. Still, a 62% majority of Republicans support federal funding. Independents fall squarely in the middle, with 70% agreeing that the federal government should provide funding. When it comes to setting standards and accountability, Republicans register the most support (72%), while Democrats (61%) and independents (61%) are somewhat less supportive.
- African Americans also register stronger support for funding, with 81% believing that federal funds should be provided to low-income school districts.

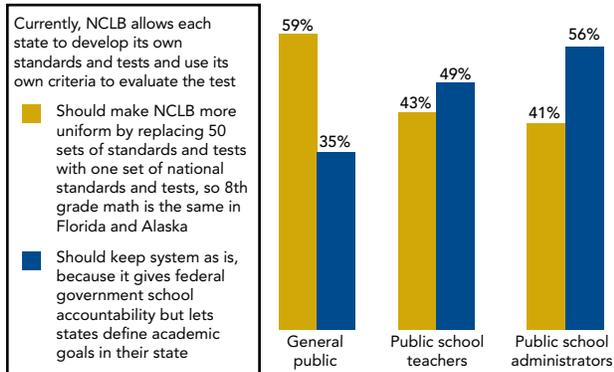
## NCLB Values: Federal Funding Should Come with Standards

Public Rejects NCLB Opt-Out



- The public clearly opposes allowing states to opt out of NCLB accountability requirements. A 57% majority believes that states should be required to have accountability standards in order to receive federal funding. Only 34% would allow them to opt out and still receive federal funding. Teachers are the notable exception to this rule. By a narrow 49% to 43%, they support allowing states to opt out and still receive federal funds.
- This question breaks along party lines in a noteworthy way, with only 26% of Republicans supporting states' right to opt out and set their own standards. Among Democrats, 39% would give the states this option.

## Public Wants Uniform Standards, Teachers/Administrators Disagree

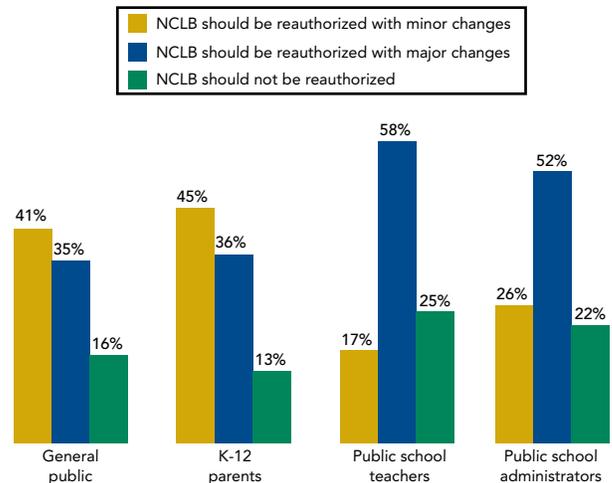


- The public would, however, modify NCLB in one major respect. Nearly three in five (59%) say they would prefer a single set of national standards and tests to replace the status quo in which each state sets its own standards and creates its own tests (35%). By contrast, more teachers and administrators favor state standards and tests over a national model.
- Support for a single national test was surprisingly uniform between the two major political parties, with 58% of Democrats and Republicans agreeing with the idea. Independents are slightly more favorable, with 63% supporting it.
- The idea of national testing faces its weakest support among those in the West (53%) and those over age 65 (52%). African Americans (64%), blue-collar workers (65%) and 35- to 49-year-olds (65%) are most enthusiastic in their support.

## Public, Teachers and Administrators Support NCLB Reauthorization

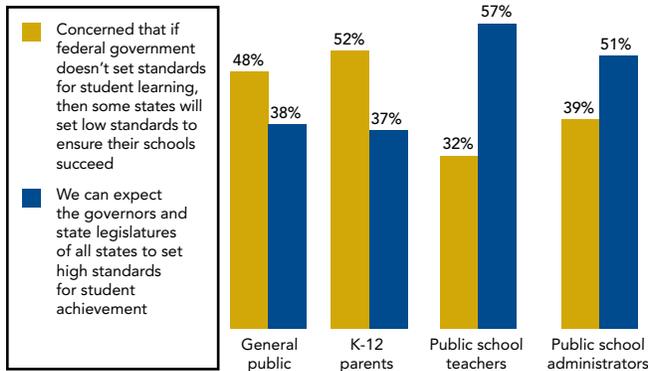
Despite parents' and the public's mixed views of NCLB and teachers' and administrators' strongly negative views of it, both groups firmly support reauthorization.

## Public, Administrators and Teachers Want Reauthorization



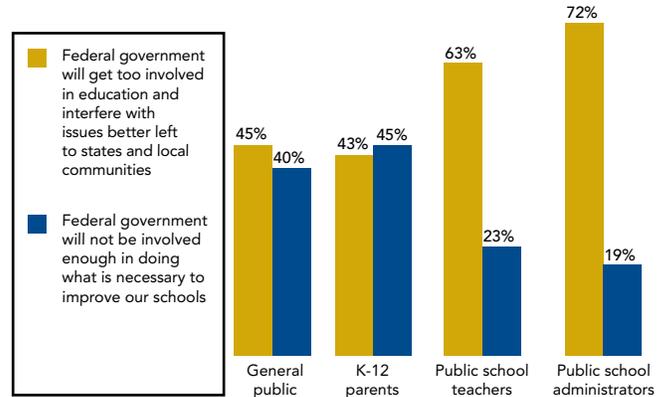
- The general public supports reauthorization (76%), but is divided fairly closely over whether major changes (35%) or minor changes (41%) should be made during the reauthorization process. Only a small minority (16%) do not want NCLB reauthorized at all.
- Among parents of school-age children (K-12), support for reauthorization stands at 81%, with 45% calling for minor changes and 36% wanting major changes in the law. Only 13% of K-12 parents do not think Congress should reauthorize NCLB.
- Surprisingly, perhaps, given their negative views of the law, public school teachers (75%) and administrators (78%) also support reauthorization. Only 25% of teachers and 22% of administrators do not think Congress should reauthorize the law. While educators have misgivings about the law, their support appears to be a case of supporting "the lesser of two evils" — a law they know as opposed to an unknown alternative that might be worse. Not surprisingly, however, they are much more likely to support major changes (58% of teachers, 52% of administrators).

### Some Concern That States Might Set Low Standards Teachers/Admin Trust State Leaders



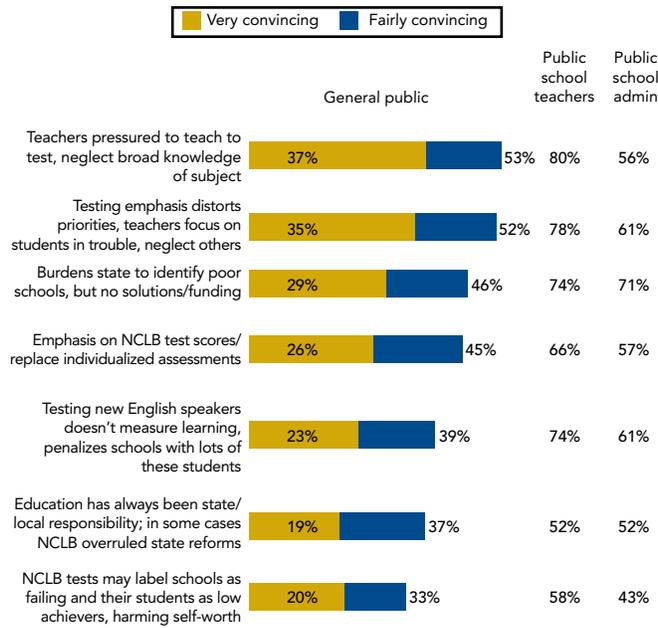
- The general public is concerned that states might not set standards high enough. They have more confidence than other groups in the federal government's ability to set standards for student learning. By 48% to 38%, they express more concern that states would set low standards.
- Teachers (57%) and administrators (51%) are much more comfortable allowing states to set standards, and they express more confidence in governors and state legislatures to set high standards for student achievement.
- Thirty-five- to 49-year-olds are the most nervous about allowing states to have control, with 58% of them being concerned about giving the states too much leeway to establish accountability standards.

### Some Concern That States Might Set Low Standards Teachers/Admin Trust State Leaders



- The public is divided on the question of federal involvement in education, with 45% worrying that the federal government will get too involved, and 40% concerned that the federal government will not do enough to improve our schools.
- Democrats are much more in favor of an activist federal role, with 46% worrying that the federal government will not be involved enough and just 39% thinking that the federal government will get too involved. More than half (52%) of Republicans are concerned about too much federal involvement and just 34% saying that the federal government will not be engaged enough.
- College graduates (50%), small town/rural residents (55%) and seniors (54%) also are more concerned than most groups about too much federal involvement.

## Reasons Against Reauthorization

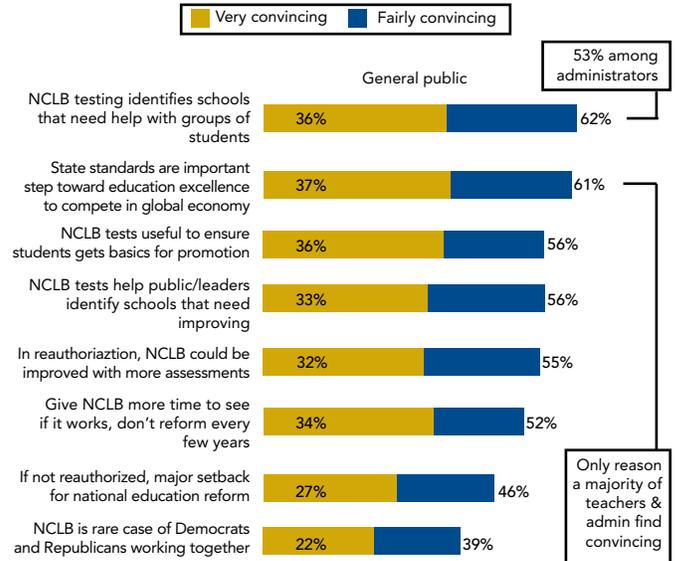


- The greatest public concern about No Child Left Behind is that the law forces teachers to teach to the test. Fifty-three percent find this argument against reauthorization convincing. This argument definitely hits home among teachers, with 80% agreeing. Administrators are more skeptical (56%), but still more sympathetic than the public at large.
- Age is a definite factor in criticisms of NCLB testing. Eighteen- to 34-year-olds are especially receptive to this argument, with 62% saying it is very or fairly convincing. Only 43% of those age 65 and over find it convincing. Thirty-five- to 49-year-olds fall in between at 52%, as do 50- to 65-year-olds (53%).
- This argument also fares well among those with college degrees, with 61% finding it very or fairly convincing. Of those with just a high school diploma or less, only 46% find this argument convincing.
- The second leading concern about NCLB is that it distorts the education process and diverts resources to the so-called “bubble children” — students believed to be able to pass state tests only with added attention at the expense of students who are either more advanced or further behind. A 52% majority of the public finds this argument against reauthorization to be very or fairly convincing. Teachers (78%) and school administrators (61%) find it even more convincing.

The top concern among school administrators (71%) and a leading concern among teachers (74%) and the public (46%) is that NCLB test results require states to

identify poorly performing schools, but not to provide solutions and funding to help turn them around. In this and other surveys’ results, all groups express a desire to emphasize fixing rather than merely identifying schools and students who are struggling to perform well on state tests.

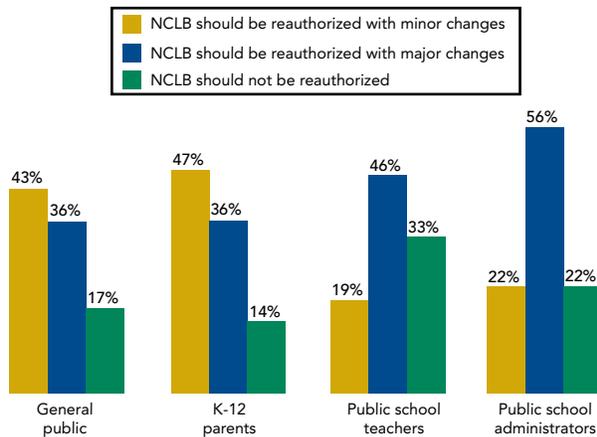
## Reasons for Reauthorization



The desire to shift the emphasis toward solutions and help struggling students and struggling schools is particularly strong when respondents react to arguments in favor of NCLB reauthorization. Each message that emphasizes this aspect of the law rises to the top of the list of reasons people find persuasive for supporting NCLB reauthorization.

- The top argument in favor of No Child Left Behind reauthorization is that the test data enables schools to identify groups of students falling behind and work with them to help them close achievement gaps. A 62% majority of the public finds this argument very or fairly convincing. They are joined in this judgment by 63% of school administrators.
- This message also resonates among those over 65 (63%), African Americans (64%), lower-income adults (66%) and those with just a high school diploma (62%).
- Supporting standards by describing the important role education plays in the global economy also garners a solid majority of adults (61%) who find it convincing. The elderly (70%), Northeasterners (67%), suburbanites (66%) and those with just a high school diploma (70%) are particularly convinced by this argument. Notably, blue-collar workers (66%) are more likely than white-collar workers (57%) to realize higher standards are needed for their children to compete on the global stage.

## After Arguments, Public Still Wants NCLB Reauthorized Teacher Opposition Grows But Remains Minority



- The list of arguments in favor of and against NCLB reauthorization does little to shift support in either direction. The public still overwhelmingly supports reauthorization (79%).
- Teachers show a slight up-tick in opposition when reminded of some of their concerns about NCLB. Teacher opposition grows from 25% to 33%. Opposition among administrators holds steady at 22%.

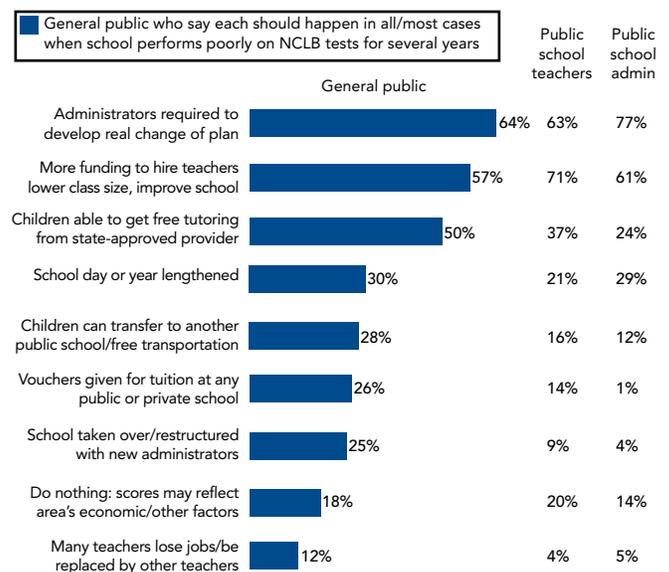
## Flexibility and Funding: Fix Poorly Performing Schools

One of the questions that has challenged the standards-based reform movement all along has been the question of what to do when schools perform poorly on standardized tests for a period of several years. The survey responses are quite revealing in this regard.

Participants were given a list of potential consequences for schools that come up short on NCLB tests for a period of several years and asked whether schools should face these consequences in all circumstances, most circumstances, some circumstances or not at all. The most striking result is the degree to which the public seems to support

flexibility. Only three items garner majority public support as the consequence in all or most cases. They are increased funding, tutoring and — at the top of the list, the most flexible consequence of all — allowing administrators to develop their own plan for change. The public overwhelmingly rejects other blanket consequences for schools that perform poorly on state tests, particularly any designed to punish teachers or administrators for poor performance. They recognize that different schools face different challenges and they favor solutions that are tailored to the needs of individual schools.

## Public's Views on Dealing With NCLB Poorly Performing Schools



- The most popular solution is the most flexible — requiring administrators to develop a comprehensive school improvement plan tailored to the schools' needs without required elements, as long as it provides a departure from the school's current approach. This receives 64% support as the right consequence in all or most cases.
- The public believes that funding should be increased, not reduced, for schools that fall short of their AYP objectives on state tests. The second most popular consequence for poorly performing schools is not really a consequence at all: increased funding so struggling schools can hire more

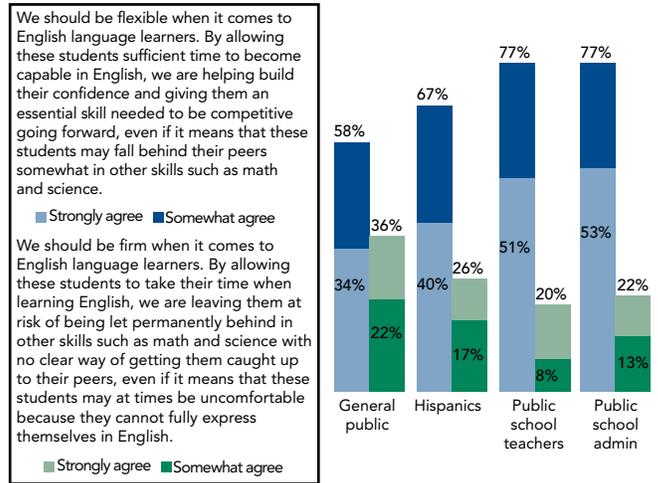
teachers, reduce class size and improve classroom conditions. It gains support from 57% of the public in all or most cases. Naturally, this is most popular among teachers (71%).

- Respondents reject the idea of accepting the status quo. Even if some have questions about the validity of tests, few would be willing to ignore several years of poor performance on them. Attempts to explain or excuse the test results and do nothing to change the school receive support from only 37% of those surveyed.
- Punitive proposals receive far less support. A school takeover, in which school administrators are replaced, is viewed as the right consequence of poor performance in all or most cases by just 25% of the public. While 48% say it may be the answer in some cases, 24% believe that it should never happen. Not surprisingly, school administrators line up firmly against this idea (56% never, 40% some cases and 4% in all or most cases).
- The proposal that earned the least support in “all or most cases” is firing teachers and replacing them with new ones. Only 12% of the public believe that this should be the consequence in all or most cases (46% some cases, 40% never). Teachers join them, of course (4% all or most, 33% some, 62% never).

## Flexibility Toward English-Language Learners

The public, K-12 parents, teachers and administrators believe that schools should be flexible in how they teach and assess English-language learners. Teachers and administrators feel more strongly about this issue and are more united in their views.

## Most Want Flexibility for English-Language Learners

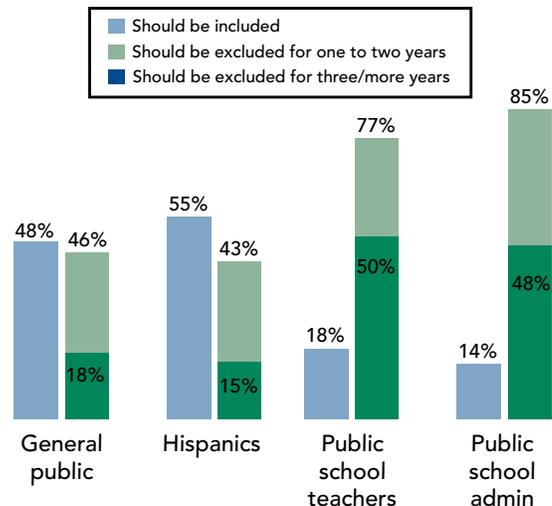


- By 58% to 36%, the public (and parents by 56% to 37%) supports giving English-language learners the time and flexibility to learn English before they are expected to complete core courses at grade level.
- Teachers and administrators (77% of both groups) strongly agree.

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## But Public Is Divided Over Their Test Scores

Should English-language learners' NCLB test scores be included in their school's overall NCLB score?



- The public and K-12 parents are, however, divided over whether English-language learners' test scores should be included with those of other students. A 48% majority of the public and a 55% majority of Hispanics support immediate inclusion of test scores. Teachers (77%) and administrators (85%) overwhelmingly believe that English-language learners' scores should be excluded.

## Conclusion

A majority of the American public agrees that our nation's future success in the global economy relies on an improved public education system that prepares America's youth to compete with students from around the world. While many have lost or never fully had a clear understanding of what No Child Left Behind really means, most support its underlying provisions.

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Separate, in-depth interviews among leading education experts and policymakers find strong support for NCLB reauthorization, but only as a necessary next step and not the catalyst for dramatic increases in standards and student achievement many suggest the nation really needs. They argue that it is necessary to continue NCLB to collect the data needed to implement the next set of measures designed to improve schools. Their eyes are set farther down the road, and the passion of their comments reflects this.

NCLB may not be the only measure needed to put American education on the right path. But, if the key provisions are fully explained to the public and if the changes the public and educators are seeking are made to add flexibility and an emphasis on finding solutions and funding measures to help struggling schools, then the public and teachers and school administrators will support reauthorization.

"Version 3.0, which is down the road, will be where you start to see the big shift, whether it's things like national standards or really new forward-looking ways to doing accountability. ... Version 3.0, which is not the one we're ready for yet, I think the big shift will be the one after this where we may be in a position to really go in a new direction."

— National Education Policy Leader

"The real challenge for us in the next 10 years is to see how we can really help schools respond to the challenges that some of these reforms bring. ... Support for schools to respond to those reforms, to respond to the demands that testing brings, to respond to the demands of teaching to one standard ... to respond to the demands of closing the achievement gap and of what schools do once they find that pocket of students who are underperforming in their schools. That's the real challenge."

— National Education Policy Leader

"I don't think that NCLB is going to solve it because NCLB is a national framework, but ultimately, at least in my view, you've got to take this issue state by state. Go to the leaders of the states, the business leaders, the education leaders and the political leaders in the state and say that we've got to look at what really are the rigors of the courses, how well are our students doing and what's the achievement level of our students that are measured by a national test with some really good state tests. ... Let's align what kids learn with what's needed in higher education and what's needed in the work force, which is not happening now."

— National Education Policy Leader





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