

Understanding No Child Left Behind

PARENT HANDBOOK

Senator John Ensign

As the father of three young children, I am keenly aware of how critical parental involvement is when it comes to educating our children. For too long, parents were considered outsiders in the process—teachers and administrators were trusted to always have the best interests of students in mind.

While our schools are blessed with many incredible educators, they can't always make our son or daughter their number one responsibility—that job is reserved for parents. In 2001, parents were finally empowered with the tools to make decisions about their child's education with enactment of No Child Left Behind (NCLB)—the most sweeping education reform in more than 35 years. Unfortunately, NCLB also became the most widely misunderstood—to the detriment of our public education system. Because of myths and erroneous information, many of the remarkable aspects of NCLB have been lost under the rubble of misinformation.

It is my hope that this handbook will assist you in better understanding the details of NCLB and how they can help you guide your children through their school years. You will also find resources you can access to answer additional questions. Keep in mind that NCLB is a work in progress. As a parent, you hold an important vantage point with regard to how these reforms are changing education for the better. If you have concerns, criticism, or even positive feedback, my office and I would appreciate hearing from you. Together, we can make Nevada schools the best in the country.

What is No Child Left Behind (NCLB)?

The No Child Left Behind Act is a landmark in education reform designed to improve student achievement and change the culture of America's schools. With NCLB the federal role in education will no longer be to throw money and empty promises at failing schools. NCLB is built on four common-sense pillars: accountability for results, an emphasis on doing what works, expanded parental options, and expanded local control and flexibility.

What are the major requirements of NCLB?

NCLB requires states to assess students in reading and math in grades 3-8, and once during grades 10-12, using state-designed tests. Teachers of core academic subjects

will be required to be highly qualified by the end of the 2005-2006 school year. School districts will be required to provide public school choice and supplemental services to students in Title I* schools that have not met Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) goals for two or more years.

*A school is designated a Title I school if the school has a high concentration of students from low-income families. Title I is the largest source of federal funding for education.

Does NCLB federalize education?

No. State flexibility is one of the cornerstones of NCLB. Each state is given the flexibility to determine a number of factors related to how NCLB functions in its state, including which test is used to determine AYP, the annual proficiency levels for schools and school districts, and the amount of progress that must be made each year to meet AYP.

What is Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)?

AYP is the measurement used to determine whether a school is meeting the annual goals it has set for each of its student groups. The purpose of AYP requirements is to serve as the basis for identifying schools and school districts where performance is unsatisfactory so that inadequacies may be addressed. AYP and NCLB never label a school as failing. Rather, schools are determined to be in need of improvement. Only when a school does not meet AYP for two consecutive years will it be identified as in need of improvement.

What happens if my child's school does not meet AYP?

The school is required to inform all parents if their child's school is designated as in need of improvement and does not meet AYP. Detailed below are the actions a school must meet for each year it is designated as not meeting AYP and being in need of improvement.

First Year: The first year a Title I school does not meet AYP it is put on a watch list. At this time, the school can request technical assistance from the school district. Schools are also given additional financial assistance each year the school is in need of improvement to help it meet their achievement goals.

Second Year: A Title I school that has not met AYP for two consecutive years will be identified as being in need of improvement. Once this happens the school must develop a two-year improvement plan and is given technical assistance from the school district and state to implement this improvement plan. It is at this time that the school must offer students and parents the option of transferring to another public school in the school district that has not been identified as needing improvement.

Third Year: If a school does not make AYP for three consecutive years the school remains in school-improvement status, and the school district must continue to provide public school choice to all students. In addition, students from low-income families are eligible to receive supplemental educational services, such as tutoring, from a provider who has been approved by the state.

Fourth Year: If a school does not make AYP for four years, the school district must implement certain corrective actions at the school, such as replacing staff or implementing a new curriculum. The school district would be required to continue both public school choice and supplemental services for low-income students.

Fifth Year: If a school does not make AYP for five years, the school district must initiate plans for restructuring the school. This could include having the state take over the school, a completely replacing all school personnel, or turning over control to a private company.

What are supplemental educational services?

Supplemental educational services are additional academic instruction services that are designed to increase the academic achievement of students in schools that have not met AYP for three or more years. These services may include tutoring and after-school activities. The state of Nevada has an approved list of supplemental educational services providers available at <http://www.doe.nv.gov/accountability/nclb.attachment/302012/0506SESlist.doc> .

TEACHER QUALITY

How does NCLB improve teacher quality?

NCLB requires all teachers that teach core academic subjects (defined as English, reading or language arts, math, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, arts, history, and geography) in Title I schools to be “highly qualified.” A teacher is considered to be highly qualified if the teacher has a bachelor’s degree, full state certification as defined by Nevada, and demonstrated competency in each core academic subject taught.

How do I find out whether my child’s teacher is highly qualified?

Parents of children enrolled in Title I schools are guaranteed annual notification of their child’s teachers qualifications. As a parent, you may request information from the school regarding professional qualifications of the teacher, including state certification, whether the teacher has an emergency or provisional certification, and the bachelor’s degree major of the teacher.

Do paraprofessionals, or teachers' aides, have to meet requirements under NCLB?

If a teachers' aide is assisting in instruction in Title I funded schools or classrooms, then that person must have at least an associate degree or two years of college or meet a rigorous standard of quality as demonstrated through a formal state or local assessment. If the role of a paraprofessional in a Title I school does not involve facilitating instruction, then the requirements would not have to be met.

How does NCLB assist teachers and improve their teaching skills?

NCLB provides almost \$3 billion each year to programs that improve teacher quality. These funds can be used by states and school districts in a wide variety of ways, including professional development opportunities.

REPORT CARDS AND PARENTAL NOTIFICATION

What is a state/school district report card?

NCLB requires states and school districts to compile and publicize student test scores and other data annually for the public, particularly for parents. The report card is required to include state assessment results by performance level that is broken out into groups of students by race, ethnicity, disability status, English language learners, low-income status, gender, and migrant status. This data would explain to parents and the public where a school, school district, or state is not meeting its achievement goals and may have not met AYP. It is important to note that this data is not broken down to these levels if the data would identify individual children. The report would also include accountability information that compares the actual test scores to the goals set for the school district and state and the percentage of students not tested. Graduation rates and the professional qualifications of teachers in the school district and state would also be included in the report.

What is NCLB referring to when it talks about a "parent's right to know"?

The purpose of parental notifications is to encourage parental involvement in schools and to improve the communication between schools, parents, and the community. NCLB requires a school district receiving Title I funds to send notification to parents to inform them of their right to request information on the qualifications of their child's teacher. The information the school district must provide (if requested) includes whether the teacher has met the certification requirements of the state, whether the teacher is teaching under an emergency or other provisional license, the bachelor's degree major of the teacher, and whether their child receives services from a paraprofessional. Title I schools must provide parents with information

regarding the child's level of achievement on state assessments and timely notice if their child has been assigned to or is being taught by a teacher that does not meet the highly qualified teacher provisions contained in NCLB.

STUDENT ASSESSMENT

What subjects are students tested on and how often are they tested?

NCLB requires that, by the 2005-2006 school year, students be tested once a year in both reading and math in each of grades 3 through 8 and at least once in grades 10 through 12. Each state designs and implements the tests according to grade-level curriculum. The federal government is not involved in the creation or administering of these tests. The tests should be aligned to the curriculum for that school year. Beginning in the 2007-2008 school year, states must also have science assessments in place that would be administered at least once during grades 3-5, 6-9, and 10-12.

Will the results of my child's tests be private?

Absolutely. Only parents and schools receive individual test scores.

Is it true that this testing has caused teachers to teach to the test?

State assessments required by NCLB are expected to measure how well students meet the state's academic standards. Curriculum based on the state's academic standards should be taught in the classroom. If this is the case, students should not need extra preparation for the tests given each year.

READING

What does NCLB include to assist students with early reading skills?

NCLB includes two new programs, Early Reading First and Reading First, that are designed to assist states and local school districts in implementing effective reading programs. States are encouraged to fund programs that focus on phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. The purpose of these programs is to increase the number of children who are at grade level in their reading and comprehension skills by the third grade.

Is NCLB an unfunded mandate on schools and school districts?

Absolutely not, NCLB does not contain any unfunded mandates. Education funding from the federal government is at an all-time high. Since 1995 Congress has been prohibited from passing any legislation that contains an unfunded mandate. In fact,

President Bush and the Congress are sending historic levels of funding back to states and local school districts to implement NCLB. The testing requirements under NCLB are also completely funded. In fact, if funding is not provided for these tests, states and local school districts do not have to comply with that requirement. However, in both Fiscal Years 2002 and 2003, states were provided more than \$380 million to develop and design their grades 3-8 tests even though school districts do not have to test until the 2005-2006 school year. A February, 2002 study by the Accountability Works project found that the costs of annual testing in reading and math have been grossly overestimated by some in the education field. They released a study that explains the costs of testing and why the federal money provided is sufficient to cover these costs. The report can be found at <http://www.accountabilityworks.org>.

The education reforms contained in NCLB were coupled with an historic increase in K-12 funding. States received an approximately 21% increase in overall K-12 funding. The bulk of the increases are in Title I (Education for Disadvantaged Children program), Title II (Teacher programs), and the technology and assessment programs. Under Title I, grants to states and local school districts increased by nearly \$1.6 billion or roughly 18%. The state of Nevada received \$64 million, in Title I funding; a 93% increase above 2001 funding levels. You will also be interested to know that during the consideration of NCLB, I secured passage of an amendment that requires the Department of Education to distribute federal funds using annually updated population data. This change has brought millions of additional dollars for education to Nevada. Over the past four years, Title I funding for the state of Nevada has more than doubled. Under Title II, states received a 35% increase in teacher funds, which school districts can use for professional development or bonuses, merit pay, financial incentives to recruit and retain highly qualified teachers, and class-size reduction. The state of Nevada received \$15.1 million.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Senator Ensign's website: <http://ensign.senate.gov>

Resources from the Department of Education: <http://www.ed.gov/>

NCLB - A Parents Guide:

<http://www.ed.gov/parents/academic/involve/nclbguide/parentsguide.pdf>

Information on State and District report cards:

<http://www.ed.gov/programs/titleiparta/reportcardsguidance.doc>

Helping Your Child Become a Reader:

<http://www.ed.gov/parents/academic/help/reader/index.html>

Helping Your Child With Homework:

<http://www.ed.gov/parents/academic/help/homework/index.html>

Helping Your Preschool Child:

<http://www.ed.gov/parents/earlychild/ready/preschool/part.html>

Helping Your Child Succeed in School:

<http://www.ed.gov/parents/academic/help/succeed/index.html>

Helping Your Child Learn Mathematics:

<http://www.ed.gov/parents/academic/help/math/index.html>

Helping Your Child Learn Science:

<http://www.ed.gov/parents/academic/help/science/index.html>

Homework Tips for Parents:

<http://www.ed.gov/parents/academic/involve/homework/part.html>

Other Resources:

National Center for Educational Accountability: <http://www.nc4ea.org/>

National Center for English Language Acquisition: <http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/>

Nation-Wide School Locator: <http://nces.ed.gov/globallocator>

National Reading Panel Report: <http://www.nationalreadingpanel.org/>

Nevada Department of Education: <http://www.doe.nv.gov>