

Forum on Educational Accountability

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DIVERSE ALLIANCE RELEASES BLUEPRINT FOR OVERHAUL OF NCLB;
CALLS FOR CHANGES TO ASSESSMENT, ACCOUNTABILITY, FUNDING AND
SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

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An alliance of 84 national education, civil rights, religious, disability, parent and civic organizations today released a blueprint for overhauling the controversial federal “No Child Left Behind” (NCLB) law by funding programs proven to raise educational quality. *Empowering Schools and Improving Learning* calls for developing tools to measure academic achievement that go beyond multiple-choice tests, providing sufficient funding so all students have an opportunity to learn, and ensuring better training for teachers. The proposal was issued by the Forum on Educational Accountability (FEA), an alliance supporting comprehensive school reform.

“For the sake of our children and the nation's future, we must overhaul the federal education law,” said FEA Chair Dr. Monty Neill, who directs the K-12 assessment reform program at the National Center for Fair & Open Testing (FairTest). “It is not enough to just replace the name NCLB, as some suggest. The FEA plan will lead to better performance from all students while closing the achievement gap. It strengthens teaching and turns assessments from weapons that narrow curriculum into tools to advance learning. It provides schools with resources needed to do the job right and makes accountability a way to improve rather than punish schools.”

Empowering Schools explains, “Incremental changes will not fix NCLB's serious flaws and will not enable all students to succeed. To ensure high-quality learning outcomes, Congress must . . . focus on improved assistance, help ensure funding equity and adequacy, redefine accountability, and reshape the federal relationship with states and districts.”

“This is the largest alliance of major organizations ever to come together on a detailed set of recommendations for overhauling No Child Left Behind,” said Quentin Lawson, Executive Director of the National Alliance of Black School Educators. “It represents a remarkably unified voice for so many disparate groups to endorse these far-reaching proposals.”

“*Empowering Schools* recognizes the need to view children as more than standardized test scores,” said National Education Association President Dennis Van Roekel. “It attempts to fundamentally shift away from the test, label, punish regime established under No Child Left Behind and toward a renewed commitment and role for the federal government in education. If implemented, *Empowering Schools* will get us a step closer toward realizing the vision of great public schools for every student.”

Other organizations signing the *Empowering Schools* statement to overhaul NCLB include:

League of United Latin American Citizens, ASPIRA, Advancement Project, Council for Exceptional Children, Learning Disabilities Association of America, National Council of Churches, Public Education Network and American Federation of School Administrators.

The Statement says, "Schools must have programs to provide all students with a coherent and intellectually challenging curriculum that includes 21st century critical thinking, problem solving, and high-level communication skills, and that ensures deep understanding of content." It addresses 14 key areas in which the federal government must play a positive role in improving school quality and student achievement. Among them are:

- Greatly strengthen teachers' abilities to succeed with all students, parent involvement, and parent learning. In particular, expand high-quality professional development for teachers.
- Build new local and state assessment systems that use multiple measures from tests to projects and portfolios, support learning, and provide information about student progress across all important subject areas as well as grade promotion and graduation rates.
- Require states to report on students' opportunity to learn, using data from both school and community; then design approaches to overcome inadequacies and inequities.
- Create accountability systems that consider resources available to schools, improvement processes schools use, and learning outcomes; expect rates of improvement in student achievement based on real-world evidence of success; and provide additional assistance and interventions based on careful analyses of each school's strengths and needs.
- Live up to federal promises by fully funding key education laws and making them mandatory items in future budgets.

Empowering Schools and Improving Learning builds on the *Joint Organizational Statement on NCLB*, issued in October 2004 and now signed by 151 national organizations. The Forum will soon sponsor Congressional briefings and meet with Education Department staff to ensure its recommendations form the core of a new federal law.

Empowering Schools is available at <http://www.edaccountability.org>, as is the *Joint Statement* and several reports that provide more detail on key FEA recommendations.

Selected contacts from Forum on Educational Accountability:

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Statements from selected signers of Empowering Schools and Improving Learning:

"*Empowering Schools* focuses attention on the critical need to engage parents by giving them the tools to actively and meaningfully participate in their children's education."

- Connie Parr, president of the Learning Disabilities Association of America.

"The *Empowering Schools and Improving Learning* statement sets forth critical priorities to ensure that diverse student needs are met. In particular, instituting multiple measures of assessment and adequate teacher training will provide English Language Learners and other special needs populations the flexibility and attention they need to excel."

- Khin Mai Aung, Attorney, Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund

"It is time for this nation to take responsibility for changing the culture in our most needy school districts, not only with money, but with the dissemination of a cohesive plan to address the education of all of our children. Simply closing and reopening schools will not work.

Empowering Schools offers that coherent plan."

- Jill Levy, President, American Federation of School Administrators

"People understand that kids need a good education to compete for jobs and become good citizens. That means all kids need a genuine opportunity to learn. The *Empowering Schools* recommendations can build that opportunity for the many urban and rural kids now being shortchanged."

- Molly A. Hunter, Director, Education Justice, Education Law Center

"In the church, we are supportive of *Empowering Schools and Improving Learning* because we believe it is immoral and unjust to demand equal outcomes without equalizing the resources that create the opportunity to learn. By fully funding Title I and making that funding stream mandatory, Congress would take a great step toward equalizing educational opportunity."

- Jan Resseger, Minister for Public Education and Witness, United Church of Christ Justice & Witness Ministries; Chair, Committee on Public Education, National Council of Churches

"*Empowering Schools and Improving Learning* challenges policymakers to seek alternatives to multiple choice tests and consider the needs of all students, including those with disabilities and gifts and talents, when examining what is possible to measure, what is important to measure and how we get there."

- Lindsay Jones, Senior Director for Policy and Advocacy, Council for Exceptional Children

"For arts education, the *Empowering Schools and Improving Learning* statement is a positive step towards providing the necessary support to *all* the core academic subjects. It addresses the unintended consequences that have narrowed the curriculum in many public schools and greatly limited access to arts education."

- Robert L. Lynch, CEO & President, Americans for the Arts

"America's citizens have compelling national interests in having virtually all our children become academically proficient. By providing that schools use an amount equal to 20% of Title I funds, plus an equal state match, to enhance staffs' knowledge, skills, and collaboration, *Empowering Schools* would go far toward meeting that objective."

- Gary Ratner, Executive Director, Citizens for Effective Schools