

Redefining the Federal Role in Education as the No Child Left Behind Act is Reauthorized

Talking Points



The National Council of Churches Committee on Public Education and Literacy has released a statement, *Ten Moral Concerns in the No Child Left Behind Act*, that proclaims, “As people of faith we do not view our children as products to be tested and managed but instead as unique human beings, created in the image of God, to be nurtured and educated.” We do not support a philosophy of test-and-punish.

Now in this 2008 federal election year, we remind the candidates for President and the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives that justice in public education is much on our minds. We look for a more carefully considered role for the federal government in federal education policy.

We lift up ten changes in the No Child Left Behind Act, each directed to one of the concerns in our statement: “Ten Moral Concerns in the No Child Left Behind Act.”

1. Establish ambitious student achievement targets to set high expectations for all children, but eliminate the utopian and unrealistic goal of universal proficiency by 2014.
2. Measure the growth in each student’s learning over time, and use additional measures of assessment, particularly those diagnostic measures that can guide instruction.
3. While setting high standards, develop policy that values the accomplishments of all children and their schools.
4. Challenge all students with disabilities academically and assess their accomplishments. However, policy should recognize that Individualized Education Plan (IEP) teams are best positioned to determine which assessments are most appropriate for students identified as needing special education and related services.
5. Teach English Language Learners the English language and other academic subjects at the same time their native culture and language are honored.
6. Support teachers by ensuring adequate resources, quality staff development, and strong school leadership.
7. Fully develop the gifts of all children, intellectual, physical, civic, psychological, and ethical. Require a rich curriculum that includes reading, math, the humanities, the sciences, the social studies and the arts.
8. Focus federal investment on improving public schools by reducing sanctions that privatize services. Any remaining federally funded, privatized services must be federally regulated.
9. Stop ranking schools and school districts on the basis of one annual standardized test. The educational endeavor is complex, many-faceted, and multi-variable.
10. Fully fund the mandates of this law and press states to address school funding inequity. The United States is a society with pockets of deep poverty and other pockets of astounding affluence. No Child Left Behind has been a double blow because it imposes sanctions without equalizing resources and opportunity. Restore the historic federal role in education to more fully support equal opportunity.

The No Child Left Behind Act culminates our society’s growing computerized capability to measure and quantify, but education remains primarily qualitative—the establishment of trust between teacher and child—the development of community within and beyond the school. We ask Congress to uphold high expectations for all children but honor every child’s accomplishments; shift the focus from punishing public schools to strengthening them; reduce high stakes testing; and fully fund the law.

