

AFT on Student Testing and NCLB

THE REAUTHORIZED ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION ACT

What NCLB Says

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), the reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act, requires states to implement annual reading and math assessments in grades 3-8 and once in high school, beginning in the 2005-06 school year. Beginning in the 2007-08 school year, states must administer science assessments once in elementary school, once in middle school and once in high school.

These assessments must be based on state standards, and each state must determine what constitutes "proficiency" on its tests.

Results of these tests are used to determine adequate yearly progress (AYP) for every school and subgroup (the major racial groups, students with limited English skills, students with disabilities and students in poverty). With few exceptions, all students in the state must participate in these assessments and have their scores count in AYP calculations.

Where AFT Stands

Unfortunately, NCLB has caused schools to narrow their curriculum to tested subjects only. The AFT believes that accountability should not drive schools to reduce meaningful instruction in curricular areas that are not included in the accountability system.

Also, much of the extended time for reading and math instruction is devoted to test preparation drill instead of high-quality reading and math instruction. If students are very far behind, they should be provided opportunities for additional intensive reading and math instruction that is integrated within other content areas, rather than stealing time from those subject areas.

NCLB has caused an overemphasis on testing. Many states and districts have added NCLB testing requirements onto an already overburdened testing schedule. Valuable instructional time is lost to testing that is redundant or that fails to yield timely or useful information.

Finally, NCLB has a one-size-fits-all requirement that all students, including English language learners and students with disabilities, take the same assessment as their peers. The AFT believes that NCLB should more appropriately assess ELLs and students with disabilities. Students with disabilities should be assessed as determined by their Individualized Education Program team and not be subjected to arbitrary caps. States must take steps to increase the availability and quality of alternative assessments to meet the needs of each child who is learning English or has a disability. Likewise, English language learners should have the opportunity to reach English proficiency before their scores are included in AYP calculations.

For more information on the No Child Left Behind Act, visit our Web site at www.aft.org/topics/nclb.



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