

AAE Teachers Weigh in on NCLB

A Word from our Executive Director, Gary Beckner—

Important Information about NCLB Survey

Please Read before Turning Inside—

This edition of *Education Matters* is devoted entirely to sharing the results of our e-mail poll on the No Child Left Behind Act.

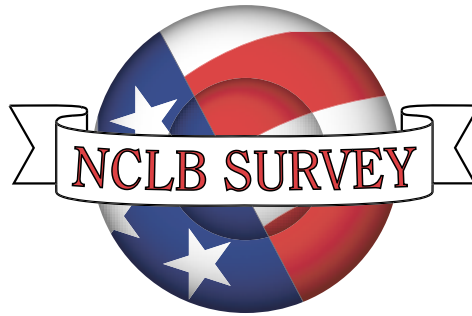
As you will see from the tenor of our members' comments (many of which are included in this report), AAE teachers are not shy about sharing their opinions. In fact, many expressed their gratitude for being asked for their opinions. It is also clear that this survey provided an opportunity for our members to release some pent-up frustration as well.

To meet our print deadline for this edition, we arbitrarily cut off survey responses after the first 1,000. All polling services tell us that any number between 500 to 1,000 responses will give us an accurate representative sampling of our membership.

We will be sending the survey results to key members of Congress, and officials at the U.S. Department of Education (DOE). Politicians are good at reading polls. They know that a cross-sectional survey like this, with responses from every region of the country, can be extrapolated to fairly represent the opinions of hundreds of thousands of classroom teachers with similar views.

For those of you who took the survey but whose opinions are not reflected in the majority, please know your voice still counted (as the comment section will validate). And if you are new to the AAE, let me reiterate that when we are asked where the AAE stands on various issues, we always refer to our surveys.

If you did not receive the survey and feel slighted, please forgive us, but we must be able to respond rapidly to topical issues. That is why we usually rely on e-mail surveys. To ensure that you will be included in all AAE surveys, please e-mail us your current e-mail address to email@aaeteachers.org.



Where Do We Stand on NCLB?

An Overview—

First of all, for those who participated in the survey and have good memories—you will notice that we have thrown out one of the questions. We agreed with numerous respondents that one question actually contained two questions in one. That conflicted too many respondents, so we eliminated it.

The remaining six questions were very simple and required only a “yes”, “no”, or “not sure” response. However, as you might suspect, teachers find it very difficult to limit their responses to just yes and no answers. So when they got a chance to expound in the “comments” section, they really gave us a piece of their mind!

It also quickly became apparent that many AAE members are in agreement with the NEA leadership on two major points: (1) NCLB cannot “ensure” that no child is left behind; and (2) teachers will continue to receive too much of the blame if NCLB isn't as successful as desired.

One of our Kansas survey takers predicted that many AAE members would side with NEA on this issue. She added “I believe it was Augustine who said, ‘Truth is truth wherever it is found.’”

However, AAE members and the NEA differ dramatically on another major point—our members believe that the basic foundational block of NCLB, that of *accountability*, is a big step in the right direction.

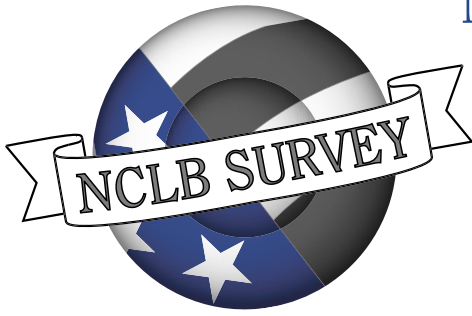


The survey comments show that our members very much want to support the Bush administration's effort to “close the gap” and leave no child behind. It is also clear that our members think NCLB is too simplistic and unrealistic, and so is doomed to fail unless the act is retooled. The good news is the President's education advisors have signaled their willingness to review and adjust the rules when and where needed to ensure success.

On the other hand, it was just as apparent that many of our members do not fully understand NCLB or have misconceptions about the rules and regulations of NCLB. In that regard, our Washington, D.C., representative, Tracey Bailey, asked the USDOE to answer a set of questions regarding some of the rules of the No Child Left Behind Act. The department response is on page 8.

In any event, we're hoping that this administration accepts our members' concerns and suggestions in the spirit in which they're offered. We all truly care about the education of America's youth. **EM**

Association of American Educators NCLB Survey Results



Question 1:

Do you think the No Child Left Behind Act will improve the academic performance of our nation's students?

- 48% [Yes](#)
- 29% [No](#)
- 23% [Not Sure](#)

Of those that said yes, many qualified their answer with an admonishment that NCLB might cause more teachers to just teach to the tests. Therefore, scores will rise. However, they added, higher scores on mandated tests does not necessarily mean our children will be better educated, or, as one respondent put it, "fully enlightened." Many more worried that NCLB could cause further erosion of the classic liberal arts curriculum.

See comments on pages 3 through 7.

Question 2:

Do you think NCLB is unfair to teachers?

- 41% [Yes](#)
- 45% [No](#)
- 14% [Not Sure](#)

This question was in reference to the NEA's media campaign against NCLB claiming the Act is unfair to teachers. As the numbers show, more than half of our members either agree with the NEA on this issue or are not sure.

Question 3:

Do you think NCLB is unfair to students?

- 28% [Yes](#)
- 60% [No](#)
- 12% [Not Sure](#)

As you will see in the comments, this is a hot button for many teachers! The perception that the success or failure of NCLB is placed solely on teachers' shoulders

with no corresponding "accountability" required of students (or parents) is very frustrating to our members.

Question 4:

Do you think NCLB will help close the performance gap between our urban and suburban school districts?

- 29% [Yes](#)
- 41% [No](#)
- 30% [Not Sure](#)

See comments on pages 3 through 7.

Question 5:

Do you think NCLB will help to ensure that, indeed, no child is left behind?

- 23% [Yes](#)
- 48% [No](#)
- 30% [Not Sure](#)

See comments on pages 3 through 7.

Question 6:

Do you think the No Child Left Behind Act has some flaws and unrealistic expectations but is a step in the right direction?

- 79% [Yes](#)
- 14% [No](#)
- 7% [Not Sure](#)

The responses to the first five questions didn't prepare us for this result. However, after thoroughly reviewing the comments from all of our survey respondents, it makes more sense.

Twenty-three percent of our survey respondents have been teaching for more than 15 years and 19 percent have been teaching for more than twenty-five years! They have seen "reform" come and go, and they are naturally skeptical of yet another far-ranging initiative to improve our schools. One respondent quipped, "Remember Goals 2000? Didn't every politician from Reagan, Bush Sr., and Clinton think that was going to fix our problem?!" Another old-timer spoke for many members, "No one ever asks those laboring in the classroom each day, under the paper weight of all of these changes, what we think!"

Still, it is evident that AAE members truly believe that "accountability" is the key ingredient for any successful reform effort. This is why they believe NCLB is a step in the right direction.

Furthermore, AAE members seem more than willing to be held accountable. This professional attitude is what sets AAE apart from the NEA. The NEA thinks NCLB is conceptually flawed. AAE members think the concept behind NCLB—that of accountability—is right on target. However, as you will see from some of their passionate comments on the pages that follow, AAE members are very concerned, even pessimistic, that NCLB can be applied fairly and if it's not applied fairly, it won't work.

If our members are right, for NCLB to even come close to reaching its goals, some major revisions to the project will be needed over the next eleven years.

We stand ready to help in any way we can and hope we're asked. **EM**



Thumbs Up Responses

“Accountability is the key component of the Act. All educators and all school systems must be held accountable for educating our children and stop making excuses and blaming others for poor performance. This Act is a step in the right direction.”

—*K-12 Curriculum Coordinator, 32 years, Wisconsin*

“We cannot continue to use the excuse that a child comes from a poor, disadvantaged family/neighborhood as the reason he cannot learn. It is very challenging for the school system to educate a child who comes from a background where education is not valued nor supported, but the cost of not training and educating our young people is more than our country can bear. Economically, spiritually, and morally, we must do all we can to ensure that every child has the opportunity to learn, if not in one academic setting, then another.”

—*High School Business Education teacher, 23 years, Virginia*

“Several of my answers of ‘yes’ could better be expressed as a ‘I certainly hope so!’ Until we have more teachers who love teaching for the children’s sake, and who are not threatened by being held accountable for what they are doing or not doing, we will still have children who have been failed by the system. As long as we have the NEA to fight against the very heart of what is truly needed for reform, things will remain the same. I appreciate your allowing us to voice our opinions.”

—*1st Grade teacher, 20 years, Alabama*

“I like that states get to set their standards, inclusion of local involvement, and the accountability features of NCLB. Seems a good and fair blueprint to be put forth, especially by the federal level of government. Five years is too long to give any school to meet minimum standards.”

—*Ph.D. educator, 13 years, Arkansas*

“Thumbs up. But teacher training will be necessary. Many teachers do not know or practice research-based (highly effective) instruction techniques. It is so important to teach teachers in how to give explicit, responsive instruction. Thanks for asking for my opinion.”

—*Kindergarten teacher, 10 years, Washington*

“It is worth trying. Seems to be working in Florida.”

—*Educator for 28 years, Florida*

“There are some problems introduced for local school districts but these can be worked through. As much as I appreciate increased funding, including pay raises, money is not the automatic solution to every problem in our education system.”

—*Elementary Art teacher, 14 years, North Carolina*

“NCLB is getting a bad rap. I think that administrators are hiding behind NCLB; rather than fully explaining the law, they refuse to give educators solid reasons for their never-ending barrage of paperwork and directives, responding ‘It’s because of No Child Left Behind.’”

—*4th Grade teacher, 25 years, Louisiana*

“Probably the best thing I have seen from the NCLB is a program this summer that trains the advanced placement teachers in their subject area. Always before, the programs have been for the 504s and special education-type student.”

—*Physics, Science, & Technology teacher, 15 years, Tennessee*

“NCLB is far from perfect, but it is better than anything else that has been offered over the past twenty years and it is at least somewhat consistent with current educational research on meeting the needs of individuals in the classroom. It focuses on the goal and allows local school districts the freedom to choose how they will achieve that goal.

“NCLB also seems to do what the NEA has never wanted, which is to shift the focus of education on the needs of students rather than the needs of teachers. I am a public servant. I have chosen a career that allows me the privilege to serve our nation’s youth. Those youth don’t owe me anything. I pledged myself to serving them and putting their needs above my own. The NCLB theme seems to be consistent with my perspective.”

—*High School Physics teacher, 5 years, Wisconsin*

“With the NCLB Act on the horizon, long time teachers are having to take a second look at instruction, curriculum, etc., in order to continue to move high performing children forward and various subgroups forward, too. I believe this is a good thing! Our clients (parents, children, and the taxpayers) should expect accountability. Reevaluating ‘business as usual’ is bound to bring some fruitful results.”

—*1st Grade teacher, 33 years, California*

“The testing part of NCLB seems to make sense since it tests the same students in the same areas every year. This longitudinal type of accountability should provide some interesting info down the road.”

—*High School teacher, 9 years, Kentucky*

“I am thankful that President Bush is trying to help the students of America. I really like that NCLB says decisions will be made by local districts, and by each state. I think that overall NCLB is a step in the right direction. I would like to see it include something about parents being accountable. As a teacher in an urban school with poor tests scores, I feel that the parents are not equipped to help their children in the evenings or during the summers. Perhaps

some of the money could be spent on training parents. I have several years of data that many of my students are reading on grade level (according to the PALS assessment from the University of Virginia) at the end of the school year only to

return to school in the fall having not read for most of the summer and now are below grade level. Is that really the fault of the teacher, state, or school district?”

—*High School Geometry & Algebra teacher, 6 years, Virginia*

“The high school where I teach has already implemented programs and measures to help students who are failing or are in danger of failing because of NCLB. The steps we follow require parental involvement and input. This is of utmost importance since many of these failing children have parents who seem to have lost sight of their role in the student’s educational process. Many of the parents need a wake-up call and get it during the required visits to the school. They re-engage with their child’s teachers and educational needs, and often become our greatest allies in pulling the child back from educational disaster.”

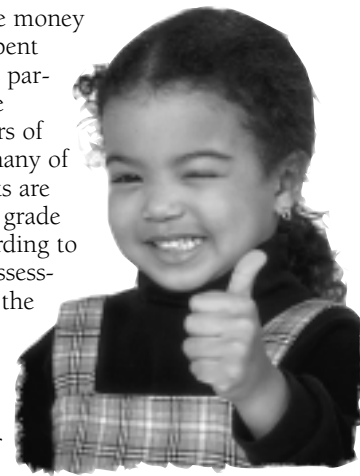
—*Art & Computer Technology teacher, 10 years, West Virginia*

“It’s time we hold all teachers and administrators accountable for the education system and not hide behind the clout of the unions that protect incompetence and complacency. I am tired of ‘career’ teachers just maintaining the status quo. ‘We’ve always done it this way’ just won’t work anymore. Our system has become stagnant because we have too many resisting doing the work that has to be done to meet student needs. Restructuring doesn’t take more money—just more work—which the dedicated are not afraid to do!”

—*High School English & Journalism teacher, 11 years, Louisiana*

“The biggest question is whether there is a fair way to measure student growth from school to school when there are so many variables between schools. However, if we truly aim to ‘Leave no child behind,’ we have to stop making excuses and start seeking programs that really work with kids. If we keep doing what we’ve done, we’ll keep getting the same results as we’ve always gotten.”

—*Title 1 teacher, 23 years, Nebraska*



"I am a teacher who is 'caught in the middle' of NCLB. I will be eligible for retirement within 5 years. I presently have a K-9 certification, which has allowed me to teach 9th grade math at a high school. I have a proven track record in teaching math. On the value-added system in Tennessee, I'm listed at the 88 percent on teacher effectiveness. However, in spite of all this, I have been told that to teach my present area the last year before I'm eligible to retire, I am to score 136 on the Praxis math secondary exam or take 24 hours of college math. All I care to teach are my 9th graders, and I feel that I'm pretty good at that. I have no desire to teach geometry, trig, calculus, or probability and statistics. In this way, I feel that the NCLB Act is unfair to 'some' teachers. However, I still feel that the law was created not to remove competent teachers, but to prevent incompetent teachers from teaching."

—*Math teacher, 25 years, Tennessee*

"The NCLB Act, while not perfect (Is any law?), means that we may all be on the same page in education for the first time in a very long time in the U.S.A. I look forward to having an opportunity to give this bill a chance."

—*High School teacher, 22 years, Kentucky*

"My favorite part of the plan is that proven teaching methods will be supported. Whole language and other unproven experiments, coupled with low expectations of students by parents and schools, have been a disaster. I see this as a lifeline of hope for the 'sinking ship' of public education."

—*Educator of 10 years, Florida*

"I think it is about time we hold schools accountable for the education of its students. If schools were businesses in 'corporate America,' they would have been shut down thirty years ago. Maybe unions and principals will now quit protecting poor classroom teachers. I am totally in favor in NCLB."

—*8-year veteran teacher, Indiana*

Thumbs Down Responses

"I'm tired of being evaluated by one test during the year when children receive little motivation from home to inspire them to learn. Sure, it is our job to motivate students, but that is virtually impossible sometimes when the parents don't even care if they learn or not. Society is a mess! Is it all on the teacher's shoulders to right it and at the same time bear the criticism for not teaching our children what they need to know? Are the children responsible at all for taking ownership in their learning? I try to motivate and love and care about my seventh-graders. I want them to learn. But I think it is unfair to post scores in the newspaper every year making it look like a teacher whose scores are low one year is a pitiful teacher."



"I think teachers should be held accountable and I want to be. I just don't think NCLB is a good tool for that right now."

—*7th Grade teacher, 19+ years, Tennessee*

"My biggest concern is the mandate that all children are to be on grade level by 3rd grade, and that all students will graduate by 2013 or whenever. I have no control over my students' well-being, or the fact that the parents are behind the child or the school system. Also, I have children who are in need of special help, but there is no help. I also have no control over the amount of time a child is allowed to do video games, or stay up late because of computer games instead of studying. I will support the NCLB, but I am concerned that I am working as hard as I can and yet that might not be good enough to 'fix' the child."

—*3rd Grade teacher, 15 years, South Carolina*

"God has given us all different abilities and talents. No matter how much I train, I will never run a 5-minute mile. Should we expect all our students to be able to run a 6-minute mile, how about a 7-minute mile? Why not? Academically, how can we demand that all students achieve a certain ability at each grade level? These additional assessment tests in Pennsylvania have caused us to miss much instructional time. This is an enormous waste of taxpayer dollars, just to determine that students from lower socio-economic households tend to have lower scores."

—*High School Mathematics teacher, 31 years, Pennsylvania*

"I believe NCLB is headed in the wrong direction. Test me—test my students—but do it fairly."

"Don't threaten me with closing my school down. Not until I see you (federal and state department) walk into my class-

room, teach my students the same skills with the same materials or lack thereof, and have them score higher on this or that particular test. Not until I see you spend \$4,000 out of your own pocket on that classroom every year. Not until I see you sit up until midnight because the paper chase is becoming unending. And not until I see you walk in the classroom at 7:30 with a smile and a hug for each of those students—not because it's a job—but because it's your family."

—*Title 1 teacher, 24 years, Alabama*

"I'm not certain the bill takes into account transiency, parental involvement/accountability with homework, or excessive absenteeism. I fear there will be undue pressure on teachers to "teach to the test" rather than providing rich lessons geared to higher thinking skills."

"If we perhaps spent more energy providing support systems that would allow our teachers to use their professionalism in simply teaching and free them from other duties (that range from social work to janitorial duties), we would most likely see a dramatic change. If elementary teachers were able to focus 90 percent of their energy on direct teaching, I doubt if there would be many children left behind."

—*Elementary teacher, 7 years, Nevada*

"This is just one more layer of paper work for schools to dig through. It would make more sense for the feds to fully fund special education."

—*3rd & 4th Grade teacher, 10 years, New Hampshire*

"The fact of the matter is not all students can learn to the same degree. We are born with different talents. You can't pass legislation that will make all kids good athletes or good musicians. Also, in small schools, it is not uncommon for one person to be (for example) the entire science department. Where are these schools going to find someone with a major in all of the sciences? We are already dealing with a teacher shortage and this legislation is going to compound the problem. The good news is, if you are in a big school system and you are teaching in your major, and if you don't mind 'teaching to the test,' teacher shortages should drive up wages."

—*Jr. & Sr. High School Science teacher, 25 years, North Dakota*

"I support President Bush in just about everything but this. I am opposed to the social agendas of the NEA and WEA, but they are correct on their stand against high-stakes testing. High-stakes testing has become education's field of dreams: 'If you test them, they will learn.'"

—*High School Math & Science teacher, 11 years, Washington*

"As many know, Virginia is well ahead of NCLB in the school-reform movement. We implemented statewide Standards of Learning (SOLs) several years ago, and we

have statewide assessments to measure student, school, and district progress. While I applaud accountability and documentation of school improvement, and more importantly, student improvement, I have serious concerns about the type of education we are offering our students in an effort to get them to pass these SOL tests!”

—*Elementary Reading teacher, 10 years, Virginia*

“I believe NCLB is a step in the right direction, but it comes down to the states’ and districts’ implementation of it. Unfortunately, policy makers do not have a real understanding of what goes on in a typical classroom. Children today are carrying more ‘baggage’ with them. It is next to impossible to meet all the needs of each child in the classroom when the ratio in a primary classroom is 25-to-1, especially when some of those students have special needs. Teachers can only be stretched so far.”

—*1st Grade teacher, 12 years, West Virginia*

“I do not support the NEA’s response to the NCLB, especially the language surrounding ‘just give me more money.’ I do, however, wonder where the families’ responsibilities lie in the NCLB? I believe NCLB is heading in the right direction of teacher school/accountability, but I am concerned not that it won’t possibly improve growth rates, but rather that it does not take into account the fact that teachers and administrators do not represent the entire human ‘team.’ There are parents and students themselves who need to accept responsibility for students’ achievement/growth. Students are not wards of the state.”

—*Middle School Gifted & Talented, 9 years, Minnesota*

“I agree completely with the idea of accountability; however, I think too many politicians and people who don’t work directly with kids have too much input. I teach special education (educable mentally impaired) students in a more affluent suburban school district; from what I understand, much of our ‘accountability’ here in Michigan is dependent on the state assessment test—two of my nine students (because their certification is not mentally impaired even though their placement and functioning level is EMI) were required to take the 8th grade MEAP tests ...based on those scores, what kind of teacher would that make me?! There has to be a better way!”

—*Middle School Special Education teacher, 36 years, Michigan*

“There is no parent accountability. Even students with both parents in the home are now at a disadvantage. If a child complains, parents feeling guilty because of lack of time spent with their children, question the amount of work given, the difficulty of the work assigned, and student behavior in the classroom. Until academics is deemed important by all parties, we will not see a

true increase in student scores. Students, whose parents stress the importance of an education, back up words with action and support teachers/schools, will always succeed. Just look at magnet schools or the enrollment at private schools. Schools are becoming daycare facilities with teachers as caregivers. Food for thought—what if an education were not free?”

—*6th Grade Social Studies, Science teacher, 11 years, Georgia*

“I think that while we should be concerned about our lack of academic progress in this nation, I am not sure that NCLB is the right program. In theory, it sounds good, but in reality, all it means is more



standardized tests that do not measure a student’s achievement and curriculum that reflects nothing but teaching to a test.

“My school system is in the process of stripping away everything that does not reflect those precious standards, including foreign language, family/consumer sciences, music, etc. It’s sad and I’m ready to look for another job because I’m so discouraged by all this beauracritic nonsense. I’m not allowed to do what I do best—teach.”

—*Middle School Foreign Language teacher, 26 years, Indiana*

“I believe that I am a very good teacher and will try my best to follow these new guidelines and hope that they achieve the goals they have set. Having said this, I would gladly endorse this effort if I felt it would improve student performance. Yet, I am not convinced that it will and suspect that this, too, will collapse under its own weight either before the Bush term ends, or certainly after, if a president is elected from the Democratic party. Thus, it is an exercise in futility.”

—*Gifted & Talented K-12 teacher, 24 years, Iowa*

“I don’t think it is fair for schools to be shut down when they are trying to improve, but the state continues to cut their funding. We have faced major budget cuts in the last year. We are now at the point where our district is strongly considering cutting the number of student days in order to meet the impending budget crisis. How can we not leave some children behind, when we can’t afford to keep them in school?”

—*English & Language Arts teacher, 3 years, South Carolina*

“There will be problems with the state setting realistic goals. Our state board acknowledges problems with our state tests, but chooses to use them anyway because there is no money to overhaul them, and our students are expected to perform well on faulty tests. Results reflect poorly on our school performance. Currently teachers and students are so focused on doing well on the state tests that other valuable education is being left out.”

—*Middle School Technology teacher, 27 years, Kansas*

“I have been teaching in Maine for the past 17 years and I do not believe that the NCLB is the answer. I teach in a public school and I have numerous ideas that are not popular with the NEA but I believe will improve student learning.

“I believe in charter schools. I believe teachers need to be protected from vindictive administrators, but I don’t believe tenure is the way. I also believe that unions too often protect the weak teachers and employees.

“I believe we should have alternative ed programs, which are far more hands-on. I teach in the inner city and I believe that the college track is useless for many of our students.

“Ultimately, I believe that NCLB will not work because many parents and kids simply do not care. Schools are expected to remedy too many societal problems. As teachers we do our best and we do make some progress, but many students will fall through the cracks. We simply need to work with and value one child at a time and do our best.”

—*High School Latin & French teacher, 17 years, Maine*

“I do think the NCLB Act will help a bit in some ways, but elements of it may be somewhat analogous to beheading a few serfs (teachers) to make the rest work harder. Marginally effective in the short term, but probably counterproductive in the long run.”

—*Professor of Biology, 15 years, California*

“NCLB has many flaws, but not the ones the NEA suggests. One major flaw or assumption in NCLB—that I have experienced personally—is when students from a low-income area or school are allowed to transfer to one that functions at a higher academic level. The students actually have less chance of success for a variety of reasons.

NCLB assumes that the 'environment' with high standards will allow the student to succeed, which is an erroneous assumption.

"NCLB is a great idea—but it falls short of addressing, much less solving, the problem."

—High School Counselor, 22 years, Washington

"I teach in a middle school where parents are nonexistent at home and at school functions. Most children come to school without any materials—including free textbooks provided by our state—no paper, no pencils, or no other supplies. They believe if they do this they will not have to do any schoolwork. I cannot describe the frustrations and stress teachers have with all the many programs being shoved down our throats at the same time. Discipline in the classroom is impossible. Until parents get involved, there is no way these students will be motivated to learn. But, I will never give up. However, I believe NCLB will just be another flop. Parents and teachers must be a team for success to happen."

—Middle School teacher, 24 years, Alabama

"The 10th Amendment specifically prohibits the federal government's involvement in this area. Bush's costly and counterproductive educational scheme is a budget-busting, big government intrusion into an area where it has no business. This will only ensure that the politically correct leftists who have been running our schools will get an even firmer foothold and hasten public education's demise. I'm sorry that the AAE hasn't been able to see through the propaganda."

—4th Grade Language Arts teacher, 37 years, Arizona

"People who make these rules should try substitute teaching to see what the real classroom is like! They are still in the 1970s classroom. As a high school teacher, I see students with no respect for authority, who think they world revolves around them, who receive no parenting, and could not care less about making good grades. If a school does not make 'expected growth,' it is the teacher's fault, not the student or parents. Where is the accountability of the students and their parents to see that no child is left behind?"

—High School AP Science teacher, 10 years, North Carolina

"Not letting teachers teach in their minor is not fair, either. There are some excellent teachers in our high schools and jr. highs that are teaching in their minor. I believe there are some very unrealistic goals in the NCLB Act."

—Special Education teacher, 26 years, North Dakota

"In Wyoming, state and federal law has increased the number of administrative positions and decreased the amount of money reaching the classroom. High quality teach-

ers are looking to leave the profession, while those teachers with limited ability and/or integrity stay and use class time to complete the mountain of educationally irrelevant paperwork at the expense of their students."

—Middle School Science teacher, 15 years, Wyoming

"I know of a school that scored in the 80s on their first round of assessments—well above the accepted norm. The second year they scored 5 points lower—still above the accepted norm. However, since their school showed a decrease in overall score, they were deemed to be a school 'needing improvement.' This is not right. I also have been waiting for the Bush administration to start the 'parent phase.' In reality, who is ultimately responsible for a child's education? Yet, Bush is totally silent on calling parents into accountability for doing their part in sending kids to school who are ready, willing, and able to learn! NCLB, in its current state, is simply not going to work. Statistically, it is impossible for every student and every school to be 'above average'!! Please tell me that AAE will at least admit to that part."

—High School Guidance Counselor, 20 years, Nebraska



"To my knowledge, Bill Spady started this 'all children can learn' nonsense over 15 years ago, and it's snowballed into an avalanche since then. The reality is that although all children are *equally important* and of *equal worth*, not all children have been blessed with the same intellectual prowess. A second problem with NCLB is 'the ripple effect.' My freshman son, who is already scheduled to take the course that the KSDE will soon require, already observes that there are many areas he'd like to explore but cannot. That's a pity, but an even greater pity is that my sixth grade son, also a musician with many other interests in 'hands on' subjects, will now have three fewer elective options. The new requirements are reducing our best students' opportunities to become stronger in a wide variety of disciplines. Thanks for doing the survey. I suspect this issue will cause many thinking AAE members to side with the NEA. I believe it was Augustine who said, 'Truth is truth wherever it is found.'"

—Teacher of 25 years, Kansas

Quite a few of our members gave NCLB a thumbs up on some parts of the Act, and a thumbs down on others. Here are some of their comments:

Thumbs Up & Thumbs Down Responses

"NCLB will definitely help grades K-3 to focus on the scientifically, peer-reviewed, replicated reading research, which is sure to improve students' reading ability. NCLB has the power to do a good job in the hands of honest state education officials. NCLB has the power to dumb down education across all grade levels and across all school districts if the state education officials are dishonest.

"The testing requirements should have mandated objectively scored answers. This would have made sure that the performance-based, subjectively assessed, affective, politically correct/multiculturalism social agendas were kept out of today's classrooms. Instead, NCLB left that requirement out of the final legislation; and now the day-to-day classroom instruction, which is controlled by state-mandated testing, will follow the constructivist philosophy—exactly the wrong philosophy for students from dysfunctional homes. Most of today's students need the teacher to be the authority figure instead of the facilitator. They need directive instruction—not the nondirective approach. NCLB had the chance, once and for all, to set the schools on the right path. Unfortunately, the politics of special interest groups prevailed."

—Retired Educator, Education Analyst, 30+ years of teaching, Texas

"If you are going to hold teachers/schools accountable for their results, they better be able to control the 'raw materials' coming in. I love my students, but it is very hard to make a silk purse out of a sow's ear. NCLB seems like too much testing! As a science teacher, I feel there are many skills that can't be tested with pencil and paper. I don't want science to be reduced to memorizing knowledge. I like the concept of flexibility and choices within NCLB, but I am not sure high stakes testing is the answer. With that said, it might not hurt to give it a try."

—Middle School Science teacher, 7 years, Wisconsin

"I feel the ideas in NCLB are well-intended, and that, of course, teachers should be held accountable, but I also feel that the people ultimately responsible for the education of their children are the parents. From birth to 5 years may be the most important years of their lives, and I do not see any academic standards or parental guidelines listed in NCLB for the pre-K years."

—5th Grade Special Education teacher, 8 years, Indiana

"It is trying to fix a system that has been prone to fads. It will help immensely, but it will not help some children until families and society value a strong education along with us."

—27 years in education, Montana

"I do believe that many schools need much accountability and I applaud President Bush and his administration's efforts toward requiring more achievement from the schools. However, I believe more strongly that the brunt of students failures are in the hands of parents who are failing to adequately parent their children, abdicating their responsibility to schools, churches, and/or community organizations."

—Jr. & Sr. High School Music teacher, 17 years, Nebraska

"I agree with the motto that all students have the right not to be left behind, but responsibility needs to lie also with the student and their parents besides the schools and teachers to ensure this. As a teacher I believe I have made a positive impact on all my students whose parents have allowed me to do so, but parental support is imperative!"

—Teacher with Department of Defense Schools, 23 years. Presently in Okinawa, Japan

"NCLB is a step in the right direction, but the biggest flaw to any federal legislation is that it perpetuates the idea that the federal government can solve people problems—it can't! Federal regulation cannot make people value education or respect authority and their fellow man."

—Elementary School teacher, 20 years, Louisiana

"Should not the teaching programs at colleges bear a significant portion of the weight, as well? I am appalled at the caliber of teachers that are now being turned out—and I don't think it's all the teachers' fault! I believe when a teacher does not 'make the grade,' his/her alma mater should bear the responsibility as well."

—5th Grade teacher, 10 years, Virginia

"The truth is that our public schools do need improving, and need to be held accountable. The best way to accomplish that is to allow Boards of Education to dismiss administrators or teachers who are not performing, and provide money to those schools that are in high risk/poverty areas. We could subsidize teachers who are highly qualified and willing to teach at the 'problem' schools. We could provide additional administrators and counselors to work with schools that have a large at-risk population. NCLB is about to come under intense fire from Congress. It is a beginning, but it is nowhere near the plan that must eventually come forth to change America's schools."

—Teacher for 25 years, Alabama

"I think it can help bridge the gap between urban and suburban schools only if there is

stronger parental involvement in the lives of all children, especially urban. Teachers cannot open up the heads of individual students and pour knowledge and skills in. Also, if some professional development involves teachers from high performing schools helping 'train' teachers from low achieving schools (funding and days off of school to do this provided by the NCLB fund), I see some shrinkage of the gap possible."

—High School English teacher, 10 years, Missouri

"A step in the right direction. Still, I have a hard time accepting all of this testing. If a farmer wants to increase the milk production of his cows, he doesn't weigh them more. Similarly, testing the students more will not in itself create higher performing students. There's a lot of money being spent on testing that may be better used by simply letting schools decide how to spend it. From experience, I have seen that more testing leads to lots of teaching-to-the-test. And I have seen schools create loopholes to get students through."

—Special Education teacher, 10 years, Indiana

"I support accountability, but have always been concerned about factors that are beyond our control. I am more than willing to be held accountable for students who put forth the expected amount of effort to learn, but less than a majority of mine do. As an illustration, I teach lower-level freshmen math students and many refuse to do homework assignments that take between 15-30 minutes.

"Another concern is the percentage of transient students within a school. There is an elementary school in my district that has been placed on academic watch due to a low passing rate on the state test (55 percent and down from the previous year), yet more than half of the students tested had not been in the school more than one year. (Most of that neighborhood is apartment housing.) However, three cheers for more block grants with less strings attached and more state control!"

—High School Math & Chemistry teacher, 10 years, Indiana

"I am concerned that inadequate tenured teachers will still not be gotten rid of. Teacher unions that back poor teachers hurt our students more. Also, the best teachers should somehow be assigned to our at-risk schools. There are also long time excellent teachers who do not have their masters who may be forced out. I have some serious reservations about all the aspects of the law, but I know something needs to be done to improve the achievement of our students."

—Teacher for 22 years, Nevada

"It sure seems to have the NEA people stirred up. Teacher accountability??? I will



have to see more of NCLB. In the past 25 years I have seen many government programs come and go. None seem to stay from one administration to the next. We kick God and work ethic out of the school systems and our nation, and we expect things to get better?"

—High School Business Education teacher, 25 years, Idaho

"I am seeing the effects of NCLB at the university level and although the intention is good, it results in overweighing of certain characteristics and seems to ignore others. For example, on the new Pedagogy form used by the State of Washington to meet the expectations of the NCLB, eight of the fourteen domains student teachers must pass pertain to meeting the needs of 'historically marginalized students' and teaching 'multiculturalism perspectives.' We should be addressing these issues, but overweighing this form in this manner leaves the expectation for the student teacher lacking."

—Middle School English teacher, 12 years, Washington

"Teachers are still accountable for students that should not be in a public school setting. Many of our students are mainstreamed into regular classrooms because of no funding, and in some cases, the law mandates that they be in those classes. Somehow, we have to be in a situation where we can teach and not spend all our time trying to discipline students who do not want to be in school. At a point in time you have to show that you are willing to earn and work for an education and not just have a right to it without any effort or ownership. Federal funding has to address the special education laws and provide more resources and other programs, maybe even other schools for these students."

—High School Physics & Technology teacher, 28 years, New Hampshire

"NCLB most certainly targets large urban bureaucracies. There must be applause for the administration for having the courage to finally provide the vehicle, that has forced the thirty plus years of debate on reform to be changed into action. As the years pass until 2014, goals and targets will need to be amended to more realistically reflect what we can accomplish."

—26-year veteran teacher, Pennsylvania **EM**

NCLB Questions for the US Department of Education

Many of our members' comments about "No Child Left Behind" contained the same concerns. So we decided to consolidate them into the most commonly voiced issues, and then asked the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) to respond. We will be discussing these issues with the USDOE in a question-and-answer format over the next several months.

This month's topic deals with Teacher Accountability for Under-Performing Students. This concern is premised on a simple, recurring question from our teachers: "If I do a great job with the students in my class, but I have a disproportionate number of students who enter my class already two or three grade levels behind, then isn't it true that I'm going to be accused of doing a poor job as a teacher and held accountable simply because I couldn't bring these students up to grade level in just one year?" This is an especially common question from teachers with a high percentage of low-income and special education students.

At the end of the school year, these students still may not be up to grade level, even if a teacher has made more than one year's academic progress with them. Will this teacher's great progress be taken into account, or will the achievement of his or her students simply be reported as an average end-of-the-year grade level – with no credit for how far they have progressed from their starting point at the beginning of the year? Is this a fair evaluation of academic progress? More to the point, does the NCLB accountability system take into account this statistical fact – that academic progress measured from an annual incoming baseline for each student is a more accurate indicator of individual teacher performance? Or is this a state-level choice on how to deal with this issue, rather than the misperception of a tightly prescribed federal mandate?

AAE teachers have often stated that they don't mind being held accountable, but they should only be held accountable for the academic progress of students "during the time that those students have been under our care and supervision". This seems only fair, and is certainly a more accurate reflection of true progress with under-performing students than simply reporting raw student average grade-level scores.

The answers to the questions that follow are provided by representatives of the USDOE:

Question: What do you say to a teacher who feels that it is unfair to hold them individually accountable for bringing a student up to grade level (in just one year), when that student may come into their classroom two, three, or even four grade levels behind academically?

USDOE: First, NCLB was not designed or intended to be the "accountability system for individual teachers." It is primarily designed to hold schools and school districts accountable for ensuring the academic progress of all of its students.

Second, there are "safe harbor" provisions in NCLB that acknowledge that some schools are starting much farther behind others, and give them "credit" for raising student achievement dramatically, even if those schools do not reach the "adequate yearly progress" bar set by the State.

Third, the annual testing provisions of NCLB are meant to be diagnostic, not punitive. In the area of medicine and children's health, we frequently measure the height and weight of children to ensure that they are growing properly. An extended period of weight loss or slow growth would be cause for alarm, further diagnosis, and intervention to cure the problem. This is similar to the monitoring, diagnosis, and academic intervention that NCLB expects for all children.

Finally, while NCLB does not require it, States are certainly free to design a system that also looks at "value-added" achievement from year-to-year, and recognizes teachers for making more than one grade of progress with their students.

Question: How much of this decision or approach about "teacher accountability" is dictated by federal law in NCLB? And how much is determined by a "State-level Choice of Implementation Strategies" within the federal law?

USDOE: There is nothing in NCLB that dictates holding teachers accountable for student achievement. All accountability is directed at the school and school district levels.

The "adequate yearly progress" (AYP) provisions of the Act, which are intended to hold schools and districts accountable for student progress, are fairly specific but also give States discretion in determining, for

instance, what is a "proficient" level of student performance in reading and math and what should be the additional (non-testing) indicators of a school's performance. Each State is developing its own AYP definition.

Question: Does NCLB take into account this issue of "low incoming level of academic achievement" or "Gain Scores" in the context of accountability and reporting? (Again, most teachers feel that these incoming student grade levels should be taken into account in order for reporting to be fair.)

USDOE: NCLB insists on high academic achievement of all of our students, and sets the challenging goal of ensuring all students are proficient in reading and math by 2013-2014. States must set interim targets to reaching this goal, and schools that don't meet these targets for two or more consecutive years will be identified as "in need of improvement." However, as mentioned above, there are safe harbor provisions that allow schools that are making great academic progress, but are not yet meeting the AYP benchmark, to remain off the "needs improvement" list. States are also free to add a value-added component, to look at gain scores over the course of a year, to their accountability systems.

Question: Will the Annual Testing requirements of NCLB help move States toward a "Gain Score or Value-Added" approach (perhaps with an annual benchmark for each child) that does take into account incoming baselines or grade levels for accountability?

USDOE: NCLB does not mandate or require a "Gain-Score or Valued-Added" approach as you describe. However, because of the essential requirement of annual testing in order to closely monitor annual academic progress of all children, states or school districts that wish to use a gain-score or value-added analysis will be able to do so with little extra effort.

In effect, annual testing does provide an annual benchmark for each child that answers the question, "Where was this child academically before they came into my classroom?" This could be very helpful for individual teachers in terms of evaluation and planning academic strategies. And while not an intent or focus of NCLB, these annual incoming grade-level scores might also prove helpful for individual teachers who are looking to monitor their own progress. **EM**



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EducationMatters is published by the Association of American Educators. For more information, contact AAE, 25201 Paseo de Alicia, Suite 104, Laguna Hills, CA 92653

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