



Public involvement. Public education. Public benefit.

Position Statement on No Child Left Behind (NCLB) June 6, 2007

Major Cross-Cutting Elements

Public Education Network (PEN) believes that the federal government should play a key role in ensuring that all children receive a quality public education. PEN also believes that No Child Left Behind (NCLB) has helped focus national attention on issues of equity, school reform, and highlighting existing student achievement gaps. PEN would like to see any re-authorization of NCLB move beyond that contained within the current act, including implementing lessons learned over the past five years, promoting innovation, improving accountability, and increasing support for schools that consistently under-perform. NCLB has called attention to the need to do more to ensure that all students have access to a quality public education, but PEN believes NCLB should be dramatically changed to better help schools and communities serve students more effectively.

The federal government has an important role to play in ensuring that every child has a quality public education and in realizing that equity and high achievement are necessary for a strong democracy as well as a talented and skilled workforce. The government also must focus more attention on what constitutes a quality teacher, and clarify more definitively the role that local, state and federal governments play in making certain that every child has a quality teacher. Research is replete with evidence about the importance of quality teachers, and NCLB needs to focus far more of its attention and resources into attracting quality teachers to the most difficult schools. For this to be accomplished, there are a number of elements that cut across all aspects of change and improvement that if not addressed, would greatly diminish efforts to improve the most difficult schools. These issues are: capacity, greater federal support and leadership, shared accountability, and funding.

- ❑ Increased **capacity** at the state and local level to provide **the needed school and student supports** in implementing NCLB, especially for schools that are identified as low performing or in need of corrective action.
- ❑ **Greater federal support and leadership** in areas of research, identification of best practices, increased allowance for local flexibility that recognizes community and student differences, parental and community engagement, and building a national system of incentives to attract the best teachers to the most difficult schools

- ❑ **An accountability system that is research-based** with a **focus on incentives**, rather than prescription, and that is not only school-based, but **shared among the various stakeholders** at all levels.
- ❑ **Full-funding of NCLB.**

Priority Areas:

PEN has identified five priority areas that include specific recommendations for improvements to the act. The areas listed above cross-cut each of the priority areas. Each priority area is addressed in the following pages.

- 1. Congress should retain its emphasis on highly qualified teachers, but it must get more serious about policies that will provide resources required to help teachers become more effective in a data-driven and student-focused school environment. In achieving these results, Congress needs to assure that it does not mandate policies that lead to unintended consequences that would erect barriers in retaining high quality teachers. It also needs to make certain that talented new teachers are encouraged to enter the profession.**

Overview:

Building 21st century learning opportunities largely depends upon the quality of teachers and school administrators. The re-authorization of NCLB requires an urgent focus on providing meaningful development and support that teachers and school administrators need to make sure every student receives a quality education.

Providing the support that teachers and administrators need involves more than “putting the heat on the school.” It also involves changes in the structures, culture and policies that determine the way teachers are supported, prepared, inducted as beginning teachers, developed, compensated, recruited, and assigned. Changes need to occur at multiple levels: the policy level, within schools of education, state departments of education, and at the district and individual school level.

The current act sets a minimum standard for a “qualified teacher.” While many districts have used this provision to weed out individuals with little or inadequate basic preparation, the re-authorized NCLB needs to place more focus on teacher effectiveness, and not on a minimum and arbitrary standard of “qualified.” These supports also recognize the importance in developing qualified administrators to create school environments that attract and retain the most qualified teachers in high needs schools. Unless NCLB gets serious about building teacher success, as well as in using data and diagnostics in ways that will improve student, teacher and administrator performance, NCLB will not be seen as a friend of education change and reform, but as a barrier to such change and reform.

Recommendations:

- Allocate federal funds to create a national teacher and education leadership corps that will create special opportunities for new and existing teachers and administrators to receive the leadership and teaching skills necessary to teach in high needs schools and work with high needs students. Through a competitive grant process, 25 schools of education would be identified as providing effective teacher education programs for educators in high needs schools. These schools would then enter into partnerships with local school districts and community-based organizations to provide both pre-service and in-service

programs for schools and school districts that have the greatest needs. Both administrators and teachers would be granted special certification.

- Use multiple measures (similar to those used for students) to identify teacher effectiveness in meeting the needs of the whole child.
- Institute national voluntary teacher standards and professional development standards to help build district and state capacity about what is known about teaching and how to better assess teacher effectiveness.
- Identify the school conditions necessary for teachers to be effective.
- Require a portion of NCLB resources be used to train principals and other school administrators to better assess teacher effectiveness.
- Provide incentives to districts and states that provide leadership opportunities for highly effective teachers to share their practice and expertise with other teachers.
- Increase resources to study and research teacher effectiveness and to make this research available to schools and districts.
- Provide loan forgiveness and other financial incentives to attract and retain the best and the brightest students into the teaching profession.
- Support state efforts to build data systems that allow districts and schools to measure student performance in ways that inform teacher instructional practice.
- Require states and districts to use a larger percentage of their Title II resources to support high quality professional development for both teachers and administrators.
- Provide incentives (research) grants to districts, in partnership with their community and with local education funds that want to experiment with more performance-based definitions of teacher effectiveness.
- Require that districts ensure that Title I schools have the same proportion of qualified and effective teachers as all schools in the district.
- Align and coordinate the reauthorization of NCLB with the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act that sets standards for schools of education in preparing highly qualified teachers that meets the needs of high needs schools in a data-driven and student-focused environment that meets the needs of the whole child.

2. Schools need a student-focused, comprehensive accountability system that rewards progress and encourages continuous improvement.

Overview:

PEN supports standards-based reform along with assessments measures that are aligned with the standards. However, PEN believes that the assessments should be comprehensive and focus on additional subject areas besides math and language arts. The assessments also should be student-focused and lead to incentives that serve to encourage continuous improvement. Multiple assessments that are research-based and cover student progress in a variety of subject areas are preferable to a single, high stakes test in just two subjects. PEN also believes that local districts should be provided more flexibility in experimenting with various assessment systems that are aligned with the standards, but are developed with community and local involvement and input. PEN supports the requirement to disaggregate data, as well as the requirement for school district intervention to improve consistently under-performing schools.

PEN supports a value-added assessment program that measures more than reading and math, as well as punitive interventions that promote incentive-based changes and improvement. In addition, PEN believes that the transfer provisions are not effective mechanisms for improving low performing schools and divert attention away from the goal of continuous school improvement. Lastly, PEN believes that the supplemental education services provisions should include mechanisms leading to greater local district and community oversight and accountability of service providers. Overall, the law's emphasis needs to shift from applying sanctions for failing to raise test scores to holding states and localities accountable for making the systemic changes that improve student achievement.

Recommendations:

- Replace the current NCLB system of AYP and escalating sanctions for schools, districts and states that receive Title I money with a growth model that measures achievement progress.
- Develop longitudinal testing which would track the same students as they progressed through their elementary and secondary career versus the current method of comparing by school and grade level.
- Allow states to measure progress by using students' growth in achievement as well as their performance in relation to pre-determined levels of academic proficiency.
- Ensure that states and school districts make regular reports to the government and the public with regard to their progress in implementing systemic changes to enhance educator, family, and community capacity to improve student learning.
- Provide a comprehensive picture of student and school performance by moving from an overwhelming reliance on standardized tests to using multiple indicators, both academic and non-academic, that are related to student progress.
- Require that states provide assessment data to school districts and communities the same year that students are tested, and that teachers be given the tapes of the test questions.
- Require that each state develop standards for both academic and non-academic learning supports that are necessary for students to meet state academic expectations.
- Require that SES becomes the first option when a school or district is identified as low performing (at the beginning of the third year of not meeting AYP), and transfer becomes the second option (at the beginning of the fourth year that a school or school district does not meet AYP).
- Require greater monitoring of SES by the U.S. Department of Education by the provision of annual state-by-state reports on the impact and quality of SES services. Ensure that personnel providing SES services meet the "qualified teacher" criteria established by the state and required of all public school teachers who teach core subjects.
- Continue the ELL proficiency assessment, but allow school districts greater flexibility in administering English language grade level tests to students who are not fluent in English.

- Allow only those students who are low achieving in those groups who did not meet AYP to take advantage of the transfer and SES provisions.
- Use more stringent quality criteria, preferably random-based evidence, to select service providers giving assurances that the provider is able to deliver high quality services.
- Allow the school district to refuse to include a provider on the district list if a school district evaluation demonstrates that a provider is not a high quality provider.
- Allow a school district designated as low performing or in need of corrective action to serve as a service provider if the district meets the criteria as a service provider.
- Allow the school district to terminate the contract of a service provider that does not meet the agreed to terms of the contract, especially if that provider fails to raise student achievement levels.

3. Improve the use of data and analysis in making teaching and learning more accountable

Overview:

Data are essential if a community is to hold its schools accountable for performance. Data also are essential if it is to be used as a diagnostic tool to improving teaching and learning. PEN supports the disaggregation of data, as well as the need for more data concerning schools and students that go beyond single, high stakes test scores or an annual “assessment snapshot in time.” Data should not be used to penalize schools, but should be used as tools to propose and implement strategies for school improvement. There are five phases to effectively using data that include:

1. Sufficient data that go beyond test scores and provides a comprehensive picture of school performance.
2. Data that is accurate, timely, valid and reliable.
3. Data that is understandable to educators, parents and the community.
4. Data that is communicated to the various stakeholders.
5. And, most importantly, school personnel who know how to use the data that lead to appropriate changes in teaching and learning

PEN is especially concerned about the fifth phase and believes that increasing the knowledge of administrators, teachers, parents and the community in effectively utilizing data leads to school improvement in teaching and learning, and does not just use the data as a means of penalty. In addition, when changes are recommended for individual students and schools that require additional resources, changes in time or instruction, or the in-school structure, the expertise and resources should be available to produce such changes. To be effective, a school must use the data in order to determine what works, improve on practices, and create new avenues to address barriers to learning and teaching.

Recommendations:

- Provide useful diagnostic information, including data for educators, parents, community, business, students, policymakers and other major stakeholders that

lead to improved teaching and learning beyond the current state AYP assessments

- At least five percent of the Title I money now being allocated for student choice and SES should be set aside to increase educator and community understanding in order to effectively utilize data for schools identified as low performing or in need of corrective action.
- Require the school district to employ a professional who is part of the instructional division, possessing both assessment and instructional expertise, to support and assist schools and educators in effectively utilizing the data.
- The state should provide technical assistance to school districts in the effective use of data to improve teaching and learning.
- For schools that receive Title I funds, the state should monitor the NCLB communications by local school districts and provide an independent effectiveness evaluation report and post on the state website.
- As part of the district Title I plan, evidence must be shown that proves the district has developed an effective communications plan that demonstrates it is able to reach deep into the community with information about school quality.
- Provide technical assistance to teachers and administrators in how to effectively communicate school data to parents and the public.

4. Expand the opportunity for shared accountability by including the community as partners

Overview:

Under the current system of NCLB accountability, a school is held accountable for providing quality education for all students. But community support and partnership involvement is key to school performance, thereby dictating a sharing of accountability for quality public education. In fact, without the involvement of local education funds, community-based organizations and individual community members, NCLB will not be able to meet the high achieving standards established by the state. In many cases, schools do not know how to access local education funds and community organizations. As well, many communities do not know to partner with schools. Shared accountability is not an end in itself, but is a strategy to develop a comprehensive learning supports system and team that requires schools and communities to build strategic connections and partnerships.

Recommendations:

- Require full community representation on all major Title I national, state and local Title I committees, with educators, parents, researchers and academia in the development and evaluation of the Title I plan.
- Compile evidence-based and empirical research of the most effective community education and community collaboration models and widely disseminate to SEAs, Title I schools and school districts, community-based organizations, and educators.
- Provide incentive grants to local school districts and/or local education funds to include the community as a full partner in improving low performing schools.

- Require that every Title I district that has schools under the NCLB sanctions (or in rural districts, a consortia of districts) employ, with the involvement and input of parents and the community, a community coordinator with experience in Title I, school improvement, and community education and collaboration to be the “point” person to link the school and community, mobilize the community, coordinate services, and organize the learning supports and interventions necessary to enhance student learning progress.
- Provide Title I funds for school districts to support a full-time community coordinator and the staff and services required to support that coordinator.
- Require that every Title I school identified under NCLB sanctions to organize a school support team that includes community members. The team must be charged with recommending scientifically-based research strategies that strengthen the core academic and learning supports program (as identified by the state learning supports standards—see above) and use data and information to recommend a school improvement strategy.
- Provide technical assistance to school districts to restructure a school to be community-based, including: services needed and provided; length of school day and school year; development of partnerships; community governance; involvement of parents, students, business, seniors, health and social services, law enforcement, and juvenile justice; and, coordination with other federal and state educational categorical education programs.
- The district MUST include the community in the development of the district’s Title I plan—the plan in essence becomes a school-community plan—and strategies for school improvement. The district would be required to fully inform the public, community, parents and students about the Title I plan.
- The district MUST provide information to the state, in the district Title I application, about how it will include the community in school improvement with the input of the School Improvement Committee.
- Each state should create an office with a contact person and the necessary expertise to advise and provide technical assistance to local school districts in developing school/community partnerships and providing incentive grants so that (in partnership), the community and schools are able to create and implement effective systems of community supports and collaboration.

5. Strengthen the parental involvement provisions

Overview:

It was this area where respondents from almost every element of PEN’s data collection agreed that the parental involvement provisions of NCLB were not being implemented, evaluated or enforced. Despite the rights enunciated in the act related to parent involvement, parents and local education funds often comment that they are either not provided information, shut out of school decision making, receive data in language or formats they cannot understand. In essence, the parental involvement provisions in NCLB are unenforceable. The U.S. Department of Education reports that out of 20 states that have thus far been monitored with regard to NCLB compliance, 11 are not complying with the parent involvement provisions. State and local school districts often comment that they lack the personnel and capacity to fully implement the provisions.

Recommendations:

- Keep the parental involvement policy provisions of Section 1118, but build upon and strengthen the provisions.
- Develop an oversight mechanism that holds states and school districts accountable for effective implementation of the parental involvement provisions. Increase monitoring of SEAs to ensure that parental involvement is a major component of the state plan.
- Develop a complaint procedure starting at the local level for parents who believe that their school and/or school district is not implementing the parental involvement provisions of the law.
- Develop capacity at the national and state level to assist local school districts in implementing the current NCLB parental involvement requirements.
- Translate materials from the U.S. Department of Education regarding law, regulations, policy guidance and communications in a style and format that parents can understand.
- Coordinate national research related to field-based and evidence-based models of effective parental involvement practices.
- Establish benchmarks — in collaboration with local school districts and advocacy and community groups — for local school systems and schools to use in measuring the effectiveness and progress of their parent and community involvement policies and practices. Once these benchmarks are established, evidenced-based progress evaluations should be reported to the public.
- Include parents and the community in developing a statewide system (as well as one at the district level) of information related to the state accountability system, the provisions of NCLB, appropriate uses of assessment, teacher qualifications, and transfer and supplementary educational services that parents and the community can clearly understand.
- Develop a complaint procedure that provides redress for parents and community members to use when schools or districts fail to comply with the parental involvement provisions of NCLB.
- Ensure that each state department of education has a sufficient number of trained, highly qualified staff who can work intensively with districts and schools to help them address issues, problems, and concerns related to parental and community involvement.
- Assess local school system parent and community involvement training needs and provide appropriate technical assistance, training, resources, and mentoring.
- Work with colleges and universities to develop a course in parent and community involvement that is a requirement for all undergraduate education students seeking teaching certification.
- School districts must provide evidence to the state that they made extensive efforts to involve parents and the community in the development of the district Title I plan.
- Make annual reports as to what steps the school and school district is taking to implement the parental involvement policies. This is necessary for the public to hold the school district accountable.

- Ensure that schools provide training for parents and community members on leadership and effective involvement with schools. To maximize access to training, it should be offered at schools, or at additional sites that are convenient to the community, and on a website.
- If a school or district is identified as low performing or in need of corrective discipline or restructuring, the school or district MUST appoint a community school improvement team consisting of educators, parents, community leaders, higher education and other specialists familiar with data and evaluation to develop a school improvement plan. This should be coordinated by a full-time community coordinator cited above under the Shared Accountability Section.
- Develop a set of survey questions each year that could stand alone or be incorporated into existing local school system survey instruments to assess the effectiveness of parent and community involvement policies and practices.
- Local school systems must factor parent and family involvement into the annual performance evaluations of school administrators and staff.