

Top Ten Myths About No Child Left Behind



Business Roundtable

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No Child Left Behind: Myths and Realities

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) is working. This legislation is strengthening America's public schools by calling for higher standards and accountability to ensure that every single child receives a good education. We're seeing many groups of students set records in reading and math scores. The achievement gap is finally beginning to close. And these results prove the belief on which the law was founded: *Every child can learn and succeed in school.* Unfortunately, misinformation about NCLB undermines the law's potential for continued support and success.

Here are 10 of the most common misconceptions about NCLB, along with the facts to help set the record straight.

Myth #1

NCLB is not working.

Reality: Multiple studies and reports show that student achievement is rising in schools, districts, and states that are seriously and thoughtfully implementing NCLB. We are beginning to see results from the standards-based education reform movement and NCLB – nine-year olds made more progress in reading between 1999 and 2004 than in the previous 28 years combined. Reading and math scores for African-American and Hispanic students are at all-time highs.

Thanks to NCLB, educators, parents and taxpayers finally have access to important data on student achievement and school performance for every school across the country. Teachers now get the information they need to tailor their instruction. Principals are better able to monitor progress in their schools. Parents can understand how their children's schools are performing in reading and math compared to other schools, encouraging them to become better consumers of education. And taxpayers can assess the return on their investment in education.

Myth #2

NCLB takes away local control of education.

Reality: NCLB respects state and local responsibility for education. Each state has the flexibility to determine its own standards, tests, and definition of grade-level proficiency in reading and math. Local school districts and schools set strategies to help their students reach the state's standards.

Myth #3

NCLB is an unfunded mandate.

Reality: NCLB is neither unfunded nor a mandate. Federal funds, which have increased 40 percent since NCLB was enacted, are specifically intended to improve the academic performance of low-income children who are traditionally underserved in school. While there are disagreements about whether additional funding is needed, states are under no obligation to accept the billions of dollars a year in federal education aid that NCLB offers. States that do not wish to be held accountable by the federal government for improving student achievement can decline the additional funds.

Myth #4

Children with different types of disabilities are expected to achieve on a "one-size-fits-all" test.

Reality: NCLB requires that the test scores of all children, including those with disabilities, be included when evaluating schools. Before NCLB, the performance of children with disabilities was often excluded from the data schools reported. Local school districts have the flexibility to provide testing accommodations for children with special needs to help them achieve. However, the expectation is that most students, with appropriate testing accommodations and good instruction, will be able to meet state standards. Schools can administer or develop alternative tests for the small percentage of students who have severe cognitive disabilities.

Myth #5

NCLB requires teachers to "teach to the test," which undermines "real" instruction and limits creativity.

Reality: NCLB does not require teachers to teach to the test. Instead, NCLB asks all states to develop standards for what students are expected to learn and assess their learning. When teachers use sound instructional practices to teach a well-designed curriculum based on the state's standards, students will be prepared for any test. Good tests are useful tools to help teachers identify where students are falling behind, where they are excelling, and where teachers need to focus and tailor instruction for each student.



Myth #6

NCLB is unfair to students who are learning English.

Reality: NCLB offers states flexibility in assessing “Limited English Proficient” students, while also assuring that schools are held accountable for providing the education these students deserve. For students who have attended schools in the United States for less than a year, there is a one-time exemption from taking the state reading assessment and from including their math scores in the accountability system. In addition, states can give the reading assessment to students in their native languages for up to three years, or in some cases five years – a decision left to the state and locality. Once students become proficient in English, states can continue to report their scores with those who have limited English proficiency for up to two years in order to demonstrate the progress that schools are making with English language learners.

Myth #7

NCLB sets unreasonable expectations.

Reality: NCLB asks states to set ambitious – but not unrealistic – goals for every student. The law established a 12-year timeline for every school district to increase the number of students who can read and do math at or above grade level so that every student will meet these goals by 2014. For students who may need additional time or accommodations to reach grade level – such as those with significant disabilities, those who have just arrived in the United States, or those who are still learning English – NCLB provides flexibility to help states and schools take these circumstances into consideration when assessing performance. Of course, students who exceed grade-level expectations also should be challenged to achieve at more advanced levels.



Myth #8

Schools that do not make adequate progress are considered “failing” and will lose federal funds.

Reality: NCLB does not label schools as “failing.” When a school does not make adequate progress with every group of students, it does not lose federal funds. The law identifies it as a school that is “in need of improvement” and calls for development of a plan to ensure the school’s students reach grade level or above in reading and math. In fact, NCLB provides additional resources to help struggling schools and students who have significant challenges meeting achievement goals.

Myth #9

NCLB narrows the curriculum taught in schools.

Reality: Every student should be challenged by a rigorous, well-rounded curriculum. NCLB focuses on achievement in reading and math, the foundations of a strong education. There is nothing in the law that precludes states and local districts from including additional subjects. In many successful schools, the teaching of reading and math is integrated with the arts, history, and other subjects. Local school districts determine the best curriculum for their students to achieve state standards as well as local education priorities.

Myth #10

NCLB undermines confidence in public schools.

Reality: NCLB seeks to instill confidence in public education by focusing on improving student achievement and providing resources to ensure that students succeed in public schools. NCLB offers funding for tutoring and also allows students to transfer to other high-performing public schools. NCLB also provides parents with the information they need to make smart decisions about how their children’s schools are performing, and educators with the data they need to improve student achievement.

For more information, please visit www.biz4achievement.org.