

# PURE FACT SHEET NCLB- The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

*Straight Talk for Parents and Communities about the No Child Left Behind Act*



## What's GOOD about NCLB?

Many of the promises in NCLB *sound* like good ideas for improving education. Everyone wants our schools to do a good job educating all children. We want to close the achievement gap. We want qualified teachers in every classroom and safe schools. Parents want to have an important role in the schools. The public deserves to have more information about school and student progress.

*Our schools need improvement and support.  
But does NCLB deliver on its big promises?*

## What's BAD about NCLB?

The truth is, the way NCLB actually works *contradicts* the promises it makes.

- ▶ NCLB imposes a rigid, one-size-fits-all framework that relies solely on test scores to measure children and schools.
- ▶ It promotes teaching to the test and a dumbed-down curriculum.
- ▶ The “choice” granted to parents has been a bureaucratic nightmare which does nothing to improve neighborhood schools.
- ▶ NCLB forces school districts to pay for student transfers and privatization. These programs have no track record of success – they are experimenting with our children.

## Where NCLB turns UGLY for our schools and our children

High-stakes testing is already increasing the *drop out* rate and leading more schools to *push out* low-scoring students. Scarce education funds that are needed to reduce class size, provide more early childhood education, increase parent involvement, and purchase up-to-date textbooks are being wasted on testing, bureaucracy, and paperwork.

In a year or two, the majority of our public schools will be labeled as “in need of improvement” based on arbitrary and unscientific test score targets. Where will our children go when the federal government begins to close our neighborhood schools?

*Details on the following pages...*

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# PURE FACT SHEET NCLB- The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

## What's BAD about NCLB?

One major problem is the overemphasis NCLB places on *standardized tests*.

### What's wrong with standardized tests?

- They are designed to **rank and sort children**. Many use a scoring system in which half of all children in the nation always score below average.



*Tests designed to rank and sort students*

- There is a well-known **achievement gap** between the test scores of white and Asian students and African-American and Latino students. Rather than help all children achieve, this overemphasis on standardized tests will label more minority children and their schools as failures.

- **Standardized tests can be biased**. A study from 2002 showed that sample questions which were answered correctly by more African-American students were not chosen for use in the tests; this was done so that test results (showing African-Americans scoring lower than whites) would be “consistent” from year to year.

- **Test errors** continue to create chaos for families and schools. In Minnesota in 2001, a student was denied a high school diploma because of her scores on a standardized graduation exam. Her father had a lengthy fight with the state to see the test questions and answers. When he finally saw the test, he discovered that the answer key used to score the tests had some questions mixed up. In fact, his daughter should have passed the test. Since it took so long for the truth to come out, his daughter and many other students missed their chance to enroll in college and receive scholarships that year.

- A recent report found **50 major testing mistakes in 20 states**. The fact that most of these tests are kept secret from the community makes it likely that even more mistakes happen – we just never find out about them.

- Overemphasis on standardized tests can lead to a **dumbed-down curriculum**. These tests are made up mostly of multiple choice and short answer questions which can't and don't measure higher-order thinking, creativity, speaking or artistic skills, or many other important areas our children need to learn about. Unfortunately, areas which are not tested are becoming less and less a part of school, especially under the pressure of NCLB.

**A recent report found 50 major testing mistakes in 20 states.**

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So, what's BAD about NCLB? p.2

## The AYP mess

Another major contradiction between NCLB promises and the truth is the problem with something called AYP which stands for Adequate Yearly Progress. Some people have heard about AYP, but most parents and communities don't really understand what it is or how it works, and that's not surprising!

## What is AYP?

School improvement over the years is a good thing. But the formula NCLB uses to judge progress is *unscientific and arbitrary*.

- ▶ Adequate yearly progress or AYP is based on the major promise of NCLB that by the year 2014 100% of all children in all schools will be proficient in reading and math.
- ▶ NCLB requires every state to set adequate yearly progress (AYP) goals for each year between now and 2014 for the percent of students who score at the proficient level, so that by 2014 the target is 100%.
- ▶ For example, Illinois' AYP target for 2004 is 40%. The target jumps about 7% each year, to 47.5% in 2005, 62.5% in 2008, and up until it hits 100% in 2014.

## Make sense so far? No? Maybe?

- ▶ Each year, state test scores for each school in that state are compared to the state's AYP target percentage for that year.
- ▶ Schools which meet AYP two years in a row are given a pass.
- ▶ Schools which do not meet AYP two years in a row are put on a list of schools "In Need of Improvement" (INOI - often described as "failing schools").
- ▶ Because NCLB requires specific reporting about proficiency levels for major subgroups of students (called disaggregated data) such as low-income, minority, Limited English Proficient, and special education students, a school may end up with the INOI or failing schools label if any of those subgroups do not meet AYP.

The AYP formula is not just messy and confusing. AYP sets up an entire system of "standards" which are *not scientific or based on research* about what works for children. What's worse, AYP judges schools based on changes in their test scores from one year to the next. Educators consider this kind of comparison to be *invalid and unreliable*. They say that you can't fairly compare scores from one year to the next because they are the results of different students taking different tests.



*So, if our test scores don't go up 7% every year, we're failing?*

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Where NCLB turns UGLY for our schools and our children

### ***Increased dropouts and pushouts***

Because of the pressure to raise test scores, **growing numbers of lower scoring students are being pushed out.** Student drop out rates in districts with high stakes testing have been increasing. Research on students in Chicago who were held back based on one set of test scores showed that **more children dropped out at earlier ages.** These dropouts will be trying to survive in the world with a 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> grade education.



*More children dropping out at earlier ages*

### ***The false promise of parental choice***

Once a school is labeled “in need of improvement” (INOI), the school must send letters to parents telling them that they can transfer their children to another school. The problems start there.

- ▶ NCLB does not provide school districts with anywhere near enough money to place and transport all the children in INOI schools to other schools.
- ▶ In most districts there are not nearly enough spaces in “better” schools.
- ▶ The federal government has actually suggested that schools offer classes in trailers so that more students can transfer. Most parents would not consider this a better option. Research also shows that most children actually **lose academic ground when they move from one school to another,** and that it is better for children to have a stable school experience.



*These programs can be expensive and are not required to have certified instructors*

### ***The false promise of supplemental educational services (SES)***

If a school is on the INOI list a second year, all parents must be offered tutoring for their children. This tutoring must be done by non-school programs or businesses. While tutoring can be a good thing, under NCLB...

- ▶ these businesses **do not have to use accredited instructors,**
- ▶ they **do not have to run a background check** on the tutors.
- ▶ often programs are not at the school, so the family has to figure out transportation,
- ▶ some programs require students to have up-to-date computers at home,
- ▶ this tutoring can cost the school system up to \$100 per hour, and, again, **NCLB does not provide anywhere near enough money** to pay for this program for all the eligible students.

### ***False goal***

Most people, even those who wrote this law, agree that it is very unlikely that all schools and all subgroups will meet the goal of 100% proficiency by 2014. The truth is that the exact opposite is likely to happen- that **nearly every school in the nation** will eventually end up on the INOI list. However, the federal government has said that it will not consider revising that goal. They call it “setting a high standard.” **That means that almost any school in the U.S. may face the ultimate consequence of NCLB which allows the federal government to fire all the staff or close the school down.**

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# PURE FACT SHEET **NCLB- The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly**

What do parents and the community want from the schools and government?

*There are many important things which are not addressed by NCLB such as:*

## ★ **High-quality educational programs**

Every child needs an excellent, high-quality educational program which is student-centered, motivating, and relevant to children's real lives. All schools, not just those in wealthy neighborhoods, must offer the full range of subjects and programs including science, higher mathematics, history, civics, arts, foreign languages, sports and physical fitness. All students must be given the opportunity to acquire speaking, listening, problem-solving, creative thinking, collaboration, organization, and interpersonal skills.

## ★ **Adequate resources**

Currently, most schools are not given nearly enough funding to do their important job. Children are being asked to meet high standards when their school buildings are falling down, textbooks are decades old, and the curriculum is more like test preparation than a rich educational experience that motivates children to learn. Teachers need more support, too, including lower class size, mentoring, time to share information and strategies, and a lot more respect.

## ★ **Fair, useful assessments**

High-quality assessment uses multiple tools to evaluate school and student success and progress towards state, district, and local goals and standards. This includes teacher analyses of student strengths and weaknesses, student portfolios, classwork and homework, exhibitions of student work, results of local school annual internal reviews, and state assessments. Instead of getting one or two confusing letters every year saying that their children's school is failing, most parents want real, understandable information about student progress throughout the year, so that any problems can be corrected in time to make sure the child is ready for the next grade.

## ★ **Real accountability**

Parents want to have an important role in helping their children succeed. Other community people want to have a strong school at the center of the neighborhood. Research shows that schools improve when the people in the school community have greater control over important decisions about that school's educational programs, remedial services, staffing, and student and school assessment. Labeling of schools by the federal government does not promote strong, involved school communities.



*Research shows that schools improve when the people in the school community have greater control over important decisions about the school.*

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## NCLB- The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

What are the elements of a high-quality accountability system?

What's the alternative to NCLB?

- ❶ **Use multiple assessments** to evaluate school and student success and progress towards state, district, and local goals and standards. Include teacher analyses of student strengths and weaknesses, student portfolios, classwork and homework, exhibitions of student work, results of local school annual internal reviews, state external reviews, and state assessments. *Base no important decisions about schools or students on scores from a single test or set of tests.*
- ❷ **Replace both “social promotion” and retention** with effective and timely educational support designed to address identified needs of students.  
**Retain students in grade only with agreement of the parent(s)**, and only after considering multiple measures of progress and determining that retention would likely help, and not harm, the individual child.
- ❸ **Support teachers in their role as the primary assessors of student progress**, recognizing that high quality assessment results in improved instruction. Provide teachers with sufficient time, resources, and training to develop quality assessment strategies. Develop active partnerships among parents, students, and teachers to evaluate student progress.
- ❹ **Review and strengthen key academic and non-academic goals and standards** for student growth and achievement using an inclusive process of public development and regular review. These include state learning standards and any district and local school goals and standards.
- ❺ **Strengthen the development of local school improvement plans (SIPs) and state, district, and local school review processes.** Include in SIP local school a plan to create an inclusive, effective, student-centered learning community and assure that all students reach state, district, and local goals and standards. Specify the variety of assessments and the benchmarks to be used to evaluate progress toward these goals and standards. Use comprehensive reports by the local school internal review and state external review processes in the school's annual self-evaluation and in district and state evaluation and assistance activities.

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**NCLB- The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly**

What you CAN do to use NCLB tools for improved education

❖ **Call on your local school board to hold community meetings** to review the state school report card, district accountability reports, and other information which will help you evaluate the progress of your school and its students.

❖ **Join the NCLB Parent Advisory Committee** to help create your school's parent involvement plan, parent compact, and a spending plan for NCLB parent involvement funds.

Here are some ideas for using the NCLB parent involvement money:

- ★ family nights with a variety of artists for fun, educational activities
- ★ training and support for parent volunteers
- ★ parent surveys, newsletters, mailings, phone trees and other outreach activities
- ★ a school brochure to share the good news about your school
- ★ parent patrol
- ★ a community resource fair
- ★ parent and family field trips
- ★ a computer room for parents
- ★ sending parent leaders to national conferences
- ★ holding area-wide meetings to network with other parents
- ★ visiting other schools, and
- ★ offering a variety of parent workshops.



*Parents love coming to school for student fairs and performances!*

❖ **If your school is labeled “in need of improvement,” learn as much as you can** about available options for transferring your student to another school or enrolling him or her in tutoring. Talk to parents at receiving schools; visit off-site tutoring services; ask for information and advice from parent support groups. Weigh the pros and cons and make the best decision for your child.

❖ **Be sure you receive all the information you are entitled to under NCLB** (get the PURE Fact Sheet, “Parents’ Rights under NCLB”, from our web site, [www.pureparents.org](http://www.pureparents.org)) including the professional qualifications of all your children’s teachers, notification when your child’s teacher is not highly qualified, and frequent progress reports about your child. Parents of children in bilingual program should receive additional information about your child’s status, the bilingual programs and your right to include or remove your child from bilingual programs. Visit your child’s classroom from time to time, which is your right under the law.

❖ **Above all, learn more, talk to others, and stay involved!**

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## NCLB- The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

What else you SHOULD do to make changes in NCLB to improve education

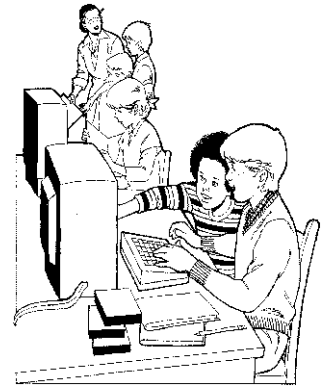
- ✓ **Learn more about NCLB** by visiting the FairTest web site, [www.fairtest.org](http://www.fairtest.org), where you can find fact sheets about standardized tests, articles related to NCLB, and ways to network with others concerned about these issues. Other good information can be found on the PURE web site, [www.pureparents.org](http://www.pureparents.org), and the Chicago Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights under Law web site, [www.clccrul.org](http://www.clccrul.org).

- ✓ **Work with your school's parent groups and teachers** to develop multiple measures beyond state standardized tests for evaluating student and school progress.

- ★For a richer understanding of student progress, consider student portfolios, demonstrations, and projects, class work, teacher analysis of student strengths and weaknesses, student self-analysis, and other information in addition to tests.

- ★For a richer understanding of school progress, use an internal review process which uses a variety of ways to look at a school including classroom observation, review of student work, and interviews in addition to test and other achievement data.

- ★Find out more about a pilot program being developed by the Chicago Lawyers' Committee and FairTest to implement an alternative evaluation system for schools (call Sarah Vanderwicken at 312/630-9744)



*Look at actual student work, not just test scores.*

- ✓ **Hold a parent and community forum** at your school, place of worship, library, or other community site to discuss NCLB; invite local educators and education activists to share their perspectives and distribute copies of this brochure and other information you find useful.
- ✓ **Ask your local and state legislators to hold public hearings on NCLB.** Help spread the word and turn people out for these hearings; present testimony about the effects of NCLB on your school and students.



- ✓ Write to your U.S. Senators and Congressmen asking for improvements in NCLB, and **investigate candidates' positions on NCLB** before you vote!

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