The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 has stirred reactions, both positive and negative, from a variety of stakeholders. The overall intent of the law is for all students – regardless of economic status, race, ethnicity, language spoken at home or disability – to attain proficiency in reading, math and science by 2014.

NCLB at a glance

The focus of NCLB is standards, testing, accountability measures and teacher quality. It specifically requires states to set standards and develop assessments and annual measurable benchmarks and requires districts and schools to implement them. Under NCLB, states are required to:

- Develop rigorous state education standards that define what all students should know and be able to do at a specific age and grade level.
- Identify schools in need of improvement.
- Establish an accountability plan based on state standards (the U.S. Department of Education approves each state’s accountability measures).

State plans also must address the following areas:

Testing

- Test students in reading and math every year in grades 3-8 and once in grades 10-12, beginning in the 2005-06 school year.
- Test students in science at least once during elementary, middle and high school beginning in the 2007-08 school year.
- Gather a sample of students in each state every year to participate in the fourth- and eighth-grade National Assessment of Educational Progress in reading and math to help the U.S. Department of Education verify how well students are performing and progressing.

Accountability measures

- Develop Adequate Yearly Progress benchmarks to ensure that all students meet state standards for proficiency in reading, math and science by 2014.
- Publicly report achievement disaggregated by student race, ethnicity, family income, home language and disability, using data collected from the 2002-03 school year as the baseline. Schools and districts meet AYP only when each student group meets AYP.
- Set clear timelines for improving student achievement with particular emphasis on closing achievement gaps between traditionally low-performing groups of students and their peers.
- Assist schools not meeting their annual AYP targets. Title I schools not making AYP are deemed “in need of improvement.” The state and district must devote “additional attention and
resources including funds for supplemental services* to help improve student achievement.

- Develop corrective measures for Title I schools that consistently miss AYP. Some suggested sanctions include: restaffing the school, converting a public school to a charter school, shifting management of the school to a private company or closing the school.

**Teacher quality**

- Ensure that all students are taught by “highly qualified” teachers by the 2005-06 school year. The law defines a highly qualified teacher as one who has a college degree, demonstrates content knowledge in the subject taught and holds state certification or licensure. The law allows states to add to this definition and gives states flexibility to determine which tests they use for teacher certification along with the level of test proficiency that defines “highly qualified.”

- Provide professional development for those entering teaching via alternate routes (e.g., career changers). Along with professional development, these teachers also must receive intensive supervision and make progress sufficient to achieve full teacher certification by the 2005-06 school year.

**How can I learn more?**

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 is a highly complex piece of legislation. Fortunately, lots of information is available to help parents, teachers, administrators, school board members and others understand the law. Below are a few of these resources.

**Resources**

**Council of Chief State School Officers:** A nonpartisan, nonprofit organization of public officials who head departments of elementary and secondary education in the United States, the District of Columbia, the Department of Defense Education Activity and five U.S. extra-state jurisdictions. www.ccsso.org/federal_programs/NCLB/index.cfm

**National Governors Association Center for Best Practices:** Focuses on state innovations and best practices on issues that range from education and health to technology, welfare reform and the environment. www.nga.org

**National School Boards Association:** A nonprofit federation of state associations of school boards across the United States. www.nsba.org

**Education Trust:** An independent, nonprofit organization whose mission is to make schools and colleges work for all of the young people they serve. www2.edtrust.org/edtrust

**The Learning First Alliance:** A partnership of 11 national education associations dedicated to improving student learning in America’s public schools. www.learningfirst.org

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