

**Mississippi Association  
for  
Assessment Reform  
(MAAR)**

<http://www.dr-rhythm.com/MsAssocforAssemntReform.htm>

**July 15, 2007**

**Thank Goodness that Bush's revision of the elementary and secondary act (called No Child Left Behind) is now being seriously questioned. Many lawmakers and parents don't really understand the elements behind the terms Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and performing on grade level. Let me take a minute to explain the term "grade level." It means the students perform at the 50th percentile or greater. That means the law expects all students to be at the 50th percentile or greater by 2014. Fifty or more out of every one hundred students perform better than the other forty-nine. If everybody is at fifty, where are the other forty-nine? Do they just disappear?**

**The case of AYP involves the comparison of 4th and 8th graders in schools over time. Scores must improve each year or sanctions are placed on the school. Billie Stanton of the Tucson Citizen writes the following:**

**The No Child Left Behind Act has done great harm,  
despite all the spin by President Bush and Education  
Secretary Margaret Spellings.**

**The bad news is: The elephant in the living room  
probably is here to stay.**

**It's rarely discussed now, but once upon a time,  
America had a thing called "states' rights," and  
schools came under something known as "local control,"  
by which school boards, PTAs, parents and other  
community members made their priorities and concerns  
known.**

**Not any more. The advent of NCLB in 2002 put the  
federal government squarely in charge.**

**Now we're stuck with federal control, which wouldn't  
be so bad if the lofty goals articulated - standards,  
accountability and closing the achievement gap - were  
intelligently pursued and adequately funded. But  
they're not.**

**So we can only hope that . . .  
thoughtful members of Congress will get us an elephant  
that provides props instead of penalties.**

**NCLB's reliance on tallying up scores from  
multiple-choice tests has led to what some bureaucrats  
call "more focus" and what educators and parents call  
dumbed-down curriculum, with a "drill and kill" focus  
on only questions that will be tested.**

**The high stakes, by which "failing" schools can be closed and reconstituted, have led to some desperate measures.**

**Some schools have encouraged poor-performing students to leave, even drop out, so as to improve the institution's scores average.**

**Others have tried to deter enrollment by certain kids, i.e., those from families that are poor, minority or both.**

**Many schools have eliminated fine arts, social studies, history and anything else that isn't tested, though research keeps showing that music, art, field trips, experiential learning and other creative approaches have profoundly positive effects on kids' academic achievement.**

**But some schools are doomed to failure no matter how hard they try to meet the mandates.**

**That's because they're in poor neighborhoods, have a high percentage of English language learners or maybe a high number of special education students.**

**NCLB doesn't make allowances for such challenges. It deems those schools failures even if they have propelled their students forward by miraculous measures.**

**The feds flunk out:**

**Government not providing dollars to make No Child Left**

**Behind Act work to improve the worst schools**

**BILLIE STANTON**

**Tucson Citizen July 10**

**For several months, the Department of Education has been claiming that NCLB had improved fourth grade reading scores on a national test, the NAEP. Several analyses by respected scholars have shown, however, that the gains came before NCLB was implemented.**

**The administration repeated their claims of victory after a report was published by the Center on Education Policy, using tests given by individual states, but analysis showed that elementary school reading test scores were increasing before NCLB went into effect. NCLB did not increase the rate of improvement.**

**According to Gerald Bracey, even conservatives are beginning to admit that NCLB was a mistake.**

**"We should have seen this coming. We and others who have pressed for higher academic standards in recent years--particularly since the Charlottesville education 'summit' set national education goals in**

1989--should have anticipated the 'zero sum' problem that it would give rise to...Insofar as we recognized this, however, we naively assumed that school days and years would expand to accommodate more of everything...

"We were wrong. We didn't see how completely standards-based reform would turn into a basic-skills testing frenzy or the negative impact it would have on educational quality."

Chester E. Finn, Jr., and Diane Ravitch  
Beyond the Basics: Achieving a Liberal Education for All Children.

**Finn and Ravitch point to 4 trends that need to be reversed for a rebirth of liberal education:**

- 1. The gradual death of liberal learning in higher education**
- 2. A standards-and-accountability movement increasingly focused only on "basic skills."**
- 3. Growing support for math and science at the expense of the rest of the curriculum.**
- 4. Widening gaps: "the accelerating advantage of the have-a-lots over the have-littles--and we see a worsening gap, not its opposite."**

Finally, a portion of the article from U. S. News and World Report:

**Do Schools Pass the Test?**

By Alex Kingsbury  
US News and World Report  
June 18, 2007

The No Child Left Behind Act has been revolutionary for American education. A combination of reform strategies, it is designed to simultaneously raise achievement levels for all students and close the gap between different types of students. Jack Jennings, president and CEO of the nonpartisan Center on Education Policy, has seen many reports critical of the law, even published a few, but the center's latest report-"Answering the Question That Matters Most: Has Student Achievement Increased Since No Child Left Behind?"-is different. Examining data from all 50 states, the report released last week shows that schools are making progress in reading and math test scores, though it's unclear if NCLB deserves all the credit.

**How do we know how well the public schools are performing?**

**There's controversy over how much No Child Left Behind has raised test scores, but there's little doubt that the reforms under NCLB and those under President Clinton have given us an infinitely better understanding of what is going on in our schools. We have more data all around, which is also leading states to use common measures of data. That's very important. In the past, schools within the same state didn't always use numbers and measures that were comparable with each other.**

**Has NCLB made students smarter?**

**NCLB is not a curriculum, so it is misleading to talk about it like that. The law [tells] states to set their own standards and implement accountability measures, not what to teach. We can say that test scores have shown achievement since 2002 in both math and reading. There's more of an increase in math than reading, and more of an increase at the elementary school level than the higher grades.**

**[The Center on Education Policy's report included a section comparing elementary school gains for the two years before and two years after NCLB was implemented in 11 states. I calculated that before NCLB, the yearly rate of improvement in these states was 1.2 percent. After NCLB, it was 1.5 percent, a difference of less than one third of 1 percent.**

**In other words, reading scores were going up before NCLB, and NCLB did little or nothing to improve the rate of improvement. NCLB has cost us billions, and Reading First, the reading component of NCLB, imposes an extra 100 minutes per week of reading instruction. . Stephen Krashen]**

**Those trends [are shown in] other studies as well. The achievement gap between minority students and white students is closing, too. It's slight, but it's moving in the right direction. That is a trend that's also more evident in math than reading. We are doing something right in this country when it comes to math. In reading, we still have a lot of work to do.**

**What's to stop states from setting low goals and bragging about meeting them?**

**States have set their own proficiency standards, which can either be reasonable or artificially low, so we used statistical models [in preparing the report] to**

compensate for that. But states do set their own standards of what students should know. Some states have set ambitious achievement levels ...

Massachusetts, California, and Florida, for example, have high standards. Other states have set less than ambitious goals for what their students should be learning.

Such as?

I hate to mention states by name **[I will – Mississippi]**, but it's clear. Look at any state that has a 90 percent proficiency level with lots of students in poverty. That doesn't happen without either an extraordinary effort to raise the quality of education for all students or setting lower standards. The Department of Education also annually publishes state test scores and national test scores so that they can compare them. It is a matter of public discussion. . .

Please, friends, pass this along to other people. Let them know to contact their Senators and Congressmen that we need to dramatically change our measures of accountability to include many other variables.

**BLF**

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