

Mississippi Association for Assessment Reform (MAAR)

I recently received a newsletter from MAE, of which I am a member, touting their acumen and presence at the state legislature. I am concerned about their actual effectiveness. Senator Bryan brought to our attention that we are not doing well in the lobbying arena. What can we do? blf

One example of an effective, public education activity around "No Child Left Behind" and the related testing mania is the booklet "How the ESEA is Endangering Wisconsin's Great Schools" recently published by that state's National Education Association affiliate:

<http://www.weac.org/News/2005-06/dec05/nclb.htm>

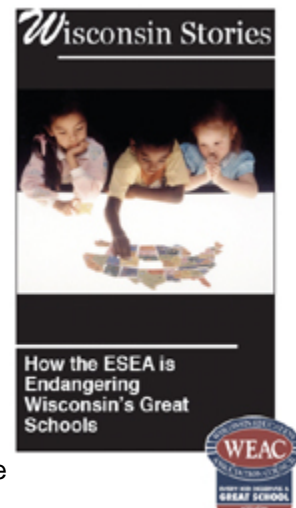
Following is a summary from the above site:

The increased testing brought about by the so-called "No Child Left Behind" law is robbing students of valuable learning time and disrupting the learning atmosphere in schools, Wisconsin teachers are telling their congressional representatives in a new booklet of written testimonials.

"This testing takes up a great deal of time. In our already short year, I estimate that it takes up about three weeks of teaching time," wrote Sauk Prairie teacher Marie Larson.

"Testing is driving teachers to put pressure on children at a younger age," she added. "As a teacher, I am struggling with teaching for test preparation versus teaching for the whole child. I think education is getting test crazy and, as a consequence, we are forgetting to keep an eye on the bigger picture in education: educating the whole child."

Larson was among more than 100 teachers and education support professionals who put their thoughts on paper for a booklet that was distributed to Wisconsin's congressional delegation in early December by Wisconsin's NEA directors. The booklet is titled "Wisconsin Stories: How the ESEA is Endangering Wisconsin's Great Schools."



The authors – the people on the front lines of Wisconsin's education system – cite many serious problems with the NCLB law, which is officially known as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

"As testing coordinator," wrote Appleton School District counselor Sherry Mutchler, "I logged in over 120 hours developing a testing schedule, proctor schedule, proctoring, counting books, labeling, boxing books (four times to meet state requirements), make-up testing, teaching test-taking strategies, buying snacks, counting snacks, modifying EEN students, modifying for ELL students, explanatory e-mails, etc. etc."

"Our 7th grade students missed over 7.5 hours of class (testing, breaks, directions) times 210 students = 1,575 hours of lost time to learn," Mutchler wrote. "Our 8th graders missed over 12.5 hours of class (testing, breaks, directions) times 269 students = 3,362.5 hours of lost time to learn."

Colby High School Spanish teacher Sandy Fults wrote her classes were "left in shambles" by the interruptions and distractions of testing.

"We alternated testing mornings and afternoons," she wrote. "I have two sections of Spanish 2. Sometimes I had a class of five students, sometimes I had my regular class of 27. The continuity of the Spanish 2 lesson – forming and using past tense verbs – was lost. Even when all students were in my afternoon classes, sophomores were so mind-boggled from testing all morning that their ability

to focus was lost. I, in all reality, lost a full week of instruction in all Spanish 2 classes, and those sophomores enrolled in Spanish 1 and Spanish 3 classes were a week behind their classmates."

Denmark High School social studies teacher Bill Otradovec echoed those comments, saying that the expanded testing "places a monkey wrench in a lot of teacher's lesson plans." But, he wrote, what concerns him the most is "the propensity for our school district to align and re-align our curriculum with what 'might be on the state test.' Our curriculum has become segmented, chopped, and out of sequence because of this.

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"Wisconsin has always prided itself on having a strong educational system built upon local control and pedagogical best practice," Otradovec wrote. "The result of these values...a state that routinely finishes top in the country on college entrance exams and has arguably the best educated workforce in America. Unfortunately, NCLB does not reflect our values and threatens the top-notch public education system that Wisconsin has to offer."

Franklin teacher Linda Riesen indicated the ESEA is compounding school funding problems. "Politicians should recognize Wisconsin's priorities, and provide adequate and equitable funding for public schools," she wrote. "But ESEA imposes mandates on public schools without providing the necessary funding to achieve success."

Neenah teacher Sue Peterson wrote she is concerned that the very students who need this testing the least - the students who on average perform significantly higher on standardized tests - "are penalized by not having systematic, rigorous instruction. Again, time is wasted on something that is not as important as actual learning."

Retired Niagara school counselor John Fox summed up many of the comments by saying: "'NCLB is a huge national, state, and local investment of time and money that seems more intent on rooting out 'failing' schools and privatizing them rather ensuring all schools have the resources to be successful."

"The testing program for NCLB gives the illusion of placing all students and schools on a level playing field," Fox wrote. "It is not a level playing field and is not research based. NCLB could have had an opportunity to accomplish positive change if it had promoted student responsibility in education, parent responsibility in education, equalized the dollar value behind all students, and provided the necessary support for more labor intensive populations of students."

Laura Vernon, an education support professional in Milwaukee, wrote: "All of us who work in the schools are affected by the ESEA."

"In addition to testing, the law attempts to pass judgment on the qualifications of both teachers and paraprofessionals," she wrote. "For paraprofessionals, we're under the gun to try to meet the ESEA requirements by an arbitrary deadline. But the law doesn't provide the funding to meet these standards, and it imposes rigid guidelines cooked up in Washington, D.C. It doesn't reward hard-working professionals who are committed to helping kids learn."

The booklet contains several suggestions for improving the "No Child Left Behind" law, including:

- Give states flexibility in measuring schools' Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Allow them to incorporate into school assessments such factors as attendance, graduation and dropout rates; percentages of students taking honors and AP classes; and results from other state and local assessments. Currently, such indicators can only be used in a negative way.

- Allow states to utilize the AYP academic growth models that acknowledge progress in student achievement both over time and within the school year. Under current law, the only measure is how students perform on a one-time test.
- Provide adequate funding and flexibility for Title I paraprofessionals to meet ESEA requirements. Provide that school districts use federal funds (including Title I and II funds) to pay costs incurred to meet the requirements. In addition, the law should make it clear that each paraprofessional has the right to decide which of the three options - an associate degree, two years of college courses, or a state or local assessment - he or she wants to use to meet the standard.

The booklet lists pieces of legislation that make those changes and asks congressional

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