

The Seven Deadly Absurdities of No Child Left Behind

From Peter Campbell:

This incredibly powerful, very concise list of the worst aspects of NCLB from Jerry Bracey belongs on everyone's refrigerator.

(source - <http://www.educationnews.org/an-interview-with-gerald-bracey.htm>)

- 1) NCLB uses the phrase "scientifically based research" 111 times and demands that such research support educational programs, but *no* scientifically based research—or any research--supports the law's mandates.
- 2) NCLB lacks research support because NCLB depends solely on punishment. As schools fail to make arbitrary Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), the law, in the grand tradition of the beatings will continue until morale improves imposes increasingly harsh sanctions. Even those who think punishment can motivate people would never use it as NCLB does.
- 3) NCLB punishes the entire school for the failures of the few, often the very few. If a school's special education students fail to make AYP, the whole school fails. If a school's English language learners fail to make AYP, the whole school fails. If 95% of any group fails to show up on test day, the whole school fails. Most schools have 37 ways to fail (some California schools have more), only one-way to succeed.
- 4) All students must be proficient in reading, math, and science by 2014. Testing expert Robert Linn of the University of Colorado projected it will take 61 years, 66 years, and 166 years, respectively, to get fourth-, eighth-, and twelfth-graders to the proficient level in math. Alas, Linn's projections are wildly optimistic. A forthcoming journal article argues that the 100% proficient requirement is so irrational it is unconstitutional.
- 5) As a consequence of #3 and #4 above, California has projected that by the deadline year of 2014, NCLB will label 99 percent of its schools "failing." California students do not do all that well on tests, but Minnesota is one of the nation's highest scoring states. Yet even Minnesota projects that 2014 will find 80 percent of its schools wanting. Any school that fails to make AYP for two consecutive years must offer all students the option to transfer to a "successful" school. Thus, if a school's special education students fail to make AYP one year and its English language learners fail the next year, the school must offer *all* students the "choice option" in spite of the fact that the school worked for

the other 36 student categories.

6) In cities and rural areas, the choice option is a farce. This year, Chicago had 200,000 students eligible, but only 500 spaces for them. In New York, principals receiving some 8,000 transfers gave Chancellor Klein so much flack about the disruptions to their schools that Klein later limited the number of transfers to 1,000. In some rural areas "choice" means a two-hour drive each way and in parts of Hawaii and Alaska it means a plane ride.

7) The biggie: Schools alone cannot accomplish what NCLB requires. Many observers have noted that American schools are always failing because so much is expected of them. NCLB expects even more—it expects schools, all by themselves, to close the achievement gap between affluent and poor, majority and minority. This is ridiculous. The gap appears before school and between birth and age, 18 children spend only 9 percent of their lives in schools.

Some of us have always seen NCLB as yet another Bush administration Orwellian Double Speak program. Under cover of its idealistic name, it aims to increase the use of vouchers, increase the privatization of public schools, transfer large sums of public funds to the private sector, reduce the size of the public sector, and weaken or destroy the teachers unions (two Democratic power bases). The primary beneficiaries of the law to date have been the testing companies, the test preparation companies, and companies that provide tutoring and other "Supplemental Educational Services" (for which the companies are in no way held accountable). Once we arrive at the time when failing schools can be "reconstituted," the educational management companies such as Edison, Mosaica and the rest will move in on a grand scale. One can foresee the day when there are no publicly run schools left.