

School Improvement (Title I, Section 1111)

Students ARE Being Left Behind: How Do We Improve Struggling Schools?

No Child Left Behind expands the use of notoriously unreliable, high-stakes standardized assessments to judge the quality of public schools. It then imposes sanctions *only on low-income schools* that do not meet annual goals for student achievement on these tests. Much public attention has been paid to the fact that the law allows some students to escape failing schools, or to obtain tutoring services from (usually) commercial sources. But the new law also creates large pots of money to improve failing schools for the children left behind. It will be up to organized communities to insist that these new resources are used, and used effectively to improve schools for *all* students.



MAJOR PROVISIONS OF THE LAW

Under Title I, Part A, Section 1111 schools are required to meet "Adequate Yearly Progress" goals for student achievement. Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) is the state-defined, quantifiably measured movement towards narrowing achievement gaps in student performance on required standardized tests.

For the first time, the new law requires schools to disaggregate test scores, and show progress for *all* students, particularly those in four "targeted assistance groups" named in Title I. These groups include economically disadvantaged students, major ethnic and/or racial groups, disabled students, and students with Limited English Proficiency (LEP). The targeting is appropriate: in the past, schools have been able to create the appearance of success by showing an increase in the *average scores* of its students—often through focused efforts to improve the performance of the top tier of children at the expense of those who have struggled for years.

All schools are monitored for Adequate Yearly Progress. Title I schools however—many of which have faced a lack of equitable resources for years—face sanctions if they do not show incremental improvement for all student groups. Title I schools failing to meet AYP requirements for two consecutive years are identified for "School Improvement."

When a school is designated for School Improvement (Title I, Part A, Section 1116) it must:

- notify all parents in an "understandable language and format" about the designation, what School Improvement is; how their school compares to other local schools; and the actions being taken to improve the school;
- offer "public school choice" to all students—giving them the option to transfer to another public school within the district, and providing transportation (using Title I dollars) for those who choose to do so;
- develop a two-year School Improvement Plan. The school *must* solicit input from parents and community members in developing this plan.

Title I schools that fail to show progress one year *following* their identification for School Improvement must also provide "supplemental education services"—tutoring or academic enrichment programs—to students at the school. School Districts and schools must annually inform parents of the option to receive supplemental services and provide a list of area service providers.

Schools not making progress after *two* years under School Improvement are designated for "Corrective Action." Corrective Action can involve:

- Staff/ personnel replacement;
- Institution of new curriculum and professional development;
- Use of an outside expert to advise the school on making AYP;
- Extension of the school day or year, and/or
- School reorganization.

If schools do not improve after one year of Corrective Action, the school may be reconstituted, taken over by the State, or even shut down.

Again, these sanctions apply *only* to Title I schools.

NO CHILD Left Behind continued

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Turning Around Failing Schools

While much of the public attention to the new law's "accountability" measures has focused on the choice and supplemental services provisions, the new law creates several pots of money that may be used to support failing schools and the students left behind. These include:

- **School Improvement Fund** (Title I, Section 1003). For the 2002 and 2003 school years, states are required to reserve 2% of their overall Title I funding for technical assistance and support to local school districts. In 2004 this amount increases to 4%. Of these funds, 95% must go directly to local districts to help schools identified for improvement, corrective action and/or restructuring.
- **Professional Development set-aside** (Title I Section 1119(1)) is a 5%-10% set-aside for professional development to meet the goals for highly qualified teachers. This money could be used for teacher quality programs in low-performing schools.
- **Financial Incentives** (Title I Section 1113 (C)(4)). This section designates financial incentives for teachers who serve in schools under "School Improvement," "Corrective Action," or restructuring, for the purpose of attracting and retaining teachers and to reduce teacher turnover.
- **Comprehensive School Reform** (Title I Part F)
- **Professional Development** (Title II) funds can be used to meet the requirements for highly qualified teachers and aides. The funds target the schools with the lowest percentage of highly qualified teachers, the largest class sizes and schools in need of improvement, under "Corrective Action" or restructuring.

???? QUESTIONS TO ASK LOCALLY

- Which schools in your district are designated as failing under Title I? How long have they been identified for improvement?
- Are students taking advantage of the public school choice provisions? How many students, and where were they transferred to?
- Has a published list of supplemental service providers been made available to parents? This part of the law is likely to attract a gaggle of commercial, for-profit companies vying for the new market. Groups should carefully investigate the reputations of the designated providers.

- Ask to see the School Improvement Plan for targeted schools. Were parents involved in its development? Is the plan being implemented?



ORGANIZING OPPORTUNITIES

- Demand that the state (and local district) monitor the quality of supplemental service providers. Under the law, the local district must insure that such providers have "a demonstrated record of effectiveness."
- Demand that immediate "supplemental services"—perhaps through an infusion of new, highly qualified teachers or other resources—be made available and provided to *all* children in schools identified for improvement.
- Demand that parents be at the table in developing a plan for school improvement.
- Push your district to apply for all funding available to improve failing schools.
- Work with local allies (groups, academics, unions) to develop a comprehensive school improvement plan and insist that the District carry it out—or come up with a better plan.



RESOURCES

Parents Left Behind: A Study of State, Federal, and School District Implementation of No Child Left Behind, a report by The Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) on state's early implementation of the school choice and supplemental services provisions of the law. December 2002. Available on ACORN's website at www.acorn.org/acorn10/betterschools/BetterSchoolsReports/parents/index.php

The full text of the **No Child Left Behind Act** is available at: <http://www.ed.gov/legislation/ESEA02/>

In addition, the Department of Education has developed a **Desktop Reference** to NCLB that can be useful. The Reference is available in PDF format at: <http://www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/reference.html>

Education Week

<http://www.edweek.org/context/topics/>