

### 3 Reasons Why Teachers MUST Speak Up Now



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If ever there was a time for educators to speak up and out against processes that they know in their heart of hearts are damaging to students, teachers, and United States itself, it is now.

In 2009, as always, schools are looked upon as the mechanism by which productive citizens are prepared and released into society. “For most people, the purpose of education is self-improvement—becoming better informed, more knowledgeable, better equipped to solve problems, more able to earn a living and prosper. The more effectively an education system delivers on those promises, the greater likelihood a community will thrive (Kennedy, 2007, p. 1).” To further the goal of an educated citizenry, the United States Congress, in 2001, passed the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation as NCLB 2001 PUBLIC LAW 107–110. In an effort to standardize learning by American students (K-12), NCLB has imposed stringent test score standards on the nation’s public schools (107th Congress of the United States, 2001). The primary goal of NCLB is to equalize learning for all students, to eliminate the learning gap between children regardless of race, culture, or economic status, and, therefore, to “leave no child behind” as others progress. Though admirable, these goals are not being reached under current conditions and using current processes.

*Five years after NCLB was enacted there is no convincing evidence that student learning has increased in any significant way on tests other than the states’ own tests. On measures such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), no reliable increases in scores have occurred, nor have achievement gaps between students of higher and lower socioeconomic classes narrowed. (Nichols & Berliner, 2008, p. 1)*

The progress of schools by NCLB standards is measurable via mono-modal methods, specifically and singularly by the results of standardized tests administered to students, and implemented against a grid of sanctions against students, teachers, and schools who do not meet them that may result in the withholding of funds.

*(A) IN GENERAL.—If a State fails to meet the deadlines established by the Improving America’s Schools Act of 1994 (or under any waiver granted by the Secretary or under any compliance agreement with the Secretary) for demonstrating that the State has in place challenging academic content standards and student achievement standards, and a system for measuring and monitoring adequate yearly progress, the Secretary shall withhold 25 percent of the funds that would otherwise be available to the State for State administration and activities under this part in each year until the Secretary determines that the State meets those requirements. (NCLB, 2002)*

The measurement of the success of the educational system in the United States is now based almost entirely on these mono-modal methods as dictated by NCLB:

*Standardized state testing and reported outcome scores have become the priorities of school districts across the nation due to the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act, a federal initiative to improve academic outcomes for students in U.S. public schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2002)."*

In addition, NCLB was designed on an assumption that to increase accountability of educators and schools for students' progress, as measured by standardized tests, would ensure satisfactory student achievement and progress.

*For example, high-stakes testing has been associated with suspicious forms of data manipulation, as well as outright cheating. The tests undermine teacher-student relationships, lead to a narrowing of the curriculum, demoralize teachers, and bore students. (Nichols & Berliner, 2008, p. 1)*

Many, including educators and researchers in Texas, the birthplace of NCLB, argue that funding adequate to support NCLB's ambitious goals was not included in the program's design (Umpstead, 2008, p. 18). Nelson, McGhee and Slater have argued that:

*... legislatures in 47 states have taken action to mitigate the effects of NCLB. These legislative responses range from petitioning the U.S. Department of Education for waivers to refusing to comply with some or all aspects of the law. Indeed, the Connecticut legislature went so far as to file a lawsuit challenging the legality of NCLB and the use of the policy to guide distribution of federal entitlement funds. (Nelson, McGhee, & Slater, 2007, p. 702)*

Others have argued that an overemphasis on testing has increased the rate of departure of experienced teachers. There are also numerous studies that describe drastic narrowing and dilution of curricula to optimize test scores, both of which can have serious long-term impacts.

*As a result of the overvaluing of test results, the curriculum has narrowed. All across the United States, the time devoted to untested subjects like art, music, and social studies has been reduced or eliminated completely so that schools can teach more math, reading, writing, and now science. For example, in Kansas in 2006, high school freshmen were required to "double dose" their English classes instead of participating in electives. In a California middle school, students were required to take two periods of all core subjects and funding was dropped for music, Spanish, art, and classes in the trades and industrial design. (Zastrow & Jane in Nichols & Berliner, 2006, p. 15)*

Right now, teachers who understand the ramifications of the current system need to speak up for three important reasons:

## **STIMULUS PACKAGE MONEY BEING INVESTED NOW**

The millions of taxpayer dollars being invested will "buy things" that schools, students and teachers need. School repairs, new equipment, computers and the like are greatly needed but any educator who has analyzed the situation knows that "things" are not enough...processes must be changed. The stimulus dollars are in part supposed to improve a situation that only process changes will resolve. Diluting core curriculum and teaching to the test are two strong trends that have resulted from too large an emphasis on test scores. All the money in the world will not help this. Educators, who know better, MUST speak out.

## **DECISIONS MADE BASED ON FALSE AND MISLEADING DATA COMING BACK FROM NCLB STATISTICS**

Many, many experts have written and spoken about the fact that NCLB data does not measure learning, just a student's ability to take a test, and his or her teacher's ability to position him or her to take that test. Do we want generations of future taxpayers, voters and leaders to be educated singularly in test taking? No educator in the world worth his or her salt would humiliate themselves by saying yes. Certainly, we would want future Americans to be more well rounded and worldly than that! The educational process is now being extended to include "better assessments" but what it needs to include are processes that support better environments that support better teaching, better professional development and preparation of teachers, and more and better learning by students. Statistics can be and are manipulated to make certain results seem true. But the fact that children in urban areas and children with disabilities are being marginalized and

educators with many year of experience are leaving the fray, shows that the NCLB aggressive testing programs are failing our teachers, our students, and our country.

## WHO ELSE IF NOT EDUCATORS? IF NOT NOW, THEN WHEN?

Nothing will change, nothing will get better, students will fail and teachers will resign UNLESS something is done now. Grassroots movements in the USA have a history of success, but they require a lot of dedication, noise, raised voices, and refusal to accept the status quo. Who else will speak up for education if not educators themselves, those who have dedicated their own lives to the future of the current generation? Who can students depend on to defend their right to a substantial and worthy education? Politicians and decision makers are motivated to do what they do best, to resolve and issue as quickly and painlessly at least on paper as possible. The problems in education are too complicated and process based for that. We have seen this since this the beginning of NCLB in 2002 that regardless of statistics has created more damage than good. The Obama administration is shiny and new, and attempting to resolve many important issues of the country including a disastrous economy. If educators do not stand up and speak up now, education will be dealt with in as simple as way as possible, that is by throwing dollars in its path. If you care about the future of education in this country now is the time to step up and say so. Visit [www.elementaethics.com](http://www.elementaethics.com) and add your name to the mailing list and find out how you can become part of the solution, part of the committee writing a declaration of equity and excellence in education, RIGHT NOW that will be presented to the new administration. Invite your colleagues to join this movement NOW. Passivity will not bring the results you want – now is the time for action!