

## No Child Left Behind Act: What Teachers, Principals & School Administrators Need to Know by Suzanne Heath, Research Editor, Wrightslaw

Did you know that 68 percent of fourth graders cannot read proficiently at grade level?[[1](#)] Did you know that 83 percent of twelfth graders are not proficient in math [[2](#)] and that 82 percent of twelfth graders are not proficient in science [[3](#)]?

These statistics have held steady for years, leading to an increased emphasis on accountability in the No Child Left Behind Act.

### The Challenges

Twelve years from now, all children who attend public schools must be proficient in reading, math, and science. We will not reach this goal if we continue to do more of the same thing with more intensity. How schools are structured and what successful schools look like is changing. Teachers, principals and school administrators who are knowledgeable about these changes will be able to meet the challenges of the No Child Left Behind Act.

No Child Left Behind affects virtually every person employed in the public school system. All schools in districts that accept Title 1 federal funds must make detailed annual reports on the progress of all children. Each school must also report the progress of four subgroups: minority children, children with disabilities, children with limited English proficiency, and children from low-income families.

If a district is not successful in raising the level of all students, immediately and steadily, to the state-defined level of proficiency, the district will lose control.

Detailed information about the performance of schools in the district and subgroups of children must be readily available to anyone who wants this information. Real estate agents will use these reports to answer customer questions about school districts and neighborhoods. Teachers will examine this information before deciding to apply for a position in a school, district, or state. Superintendents will use this information to determine which principals are running successful schools and which are not. School boards will use this information to evaluate superintendents. Voters will use this information to evaluate school boards. Industry will use state report cards to make decisions about where to locate new facilities.

What company wants to locate a new factory in a state with a high dropout rate?  
Who wants to buy a house in a neighborhood where the schools are not successful?  
Who will apply for a teaching job in an unsuccessful school?

### The Changes

The No Child Left Behind Act changes public school accountability. No one will judge schools as successful because of attractive buildings, new books, small classrooms, number of volunteers, etc. The *only* thing school personnel will get credit for is their ability to teach children to the level of proficiency-all children, not just the easy ones. Being able to say that 20 percent of a school's graduates go on to Harvard will not keep a school out of the "Needs Improvement" category if the drop out rate is high,

or if children in one of the subgroups are not learning to read or do math at a proficient level.

Principals and teachers in successful schools should expect an influx of students because of the school choice provisions. Saying the school is too full to accept new students is not an option. Saying the school cannot accept new students because the staff wants to maintain a specific class size is not an option. Saying there are not enough teachers to teach new students is not an option.

## Impact on School Personnel

Student test results will affect everyone employed by the school district.

K-3 teachers must teach all children to read. These teachers must learn how to assess children and how to use assessment results to plan effective instruction. If a child is not making progress with one method of instruction, the teacher must use a different, more appropriate method. Teachers must use research-based methods of teaching and be knowledgeable about phonemic awareness and phonics.

Many teacher-training programs do not require students to be knowledgeable about research-based teaching methods or phonemes in order to graduate. Many states do not require this knowledge for certification or licensure of elementary school teachers. Under the No Child Left Behind Act, elementary school teachers must meet the new "highly qualified" standard.

Teachers who teach upper elementary grades must teach math, reading, and science at higher levels of skill. These teachers must have the skills to teach many levels of students. Annual testing will show the amount of gain made by students of individual teachers. Schools will not be able to keep ineffective teachers. The stakes are too high.

Middle school and high school teachers must meet the new "highly qualified" standard in the subjects they teach. Teachers in higher grades are responsible for gains made by their students. These teachers will be responsible for educating students who transfer into their schools without the level of instruction they should have had.

Music teachers, gym teachers, computer teachers, and foreign language teachers are not immune from this law. If their school must offer school choice, many of their students may leave. They may have to follow the students to a better school and teach the rising population there.

Speech pathologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists and guidance counselors may have to work academics into their therapies to make up for the child's time out of the classroom. When children exercise their school choice options and leave unsuccessful schools, there may not be a need for as many related service providers.

Special education teachers must teach students to the level of proficiency. If a special education teacher teaches a core subject, she must meet the standard of a highly qualified teacher in that subject. Special education teachers must work more closely with regular educators. A student may take an alternative assessment if his

disabilities prevent him from taking the regular state assessment but alternative assessments must test grade level knowledge.

Principals must redesign their schools, implement research-based curricula, ensure that teachers are trained in research-based instructional methods, and provide core reading knowledge to elementary teachers who did not get this training in college. Principals who increase their school's effectiveness must prepare for sudden increases in student population.

Special education directors must recommend effective research-based methods for children with different learning styles. Graduation rates for students with disabilities will be broken out on school and district report cards. These report cards will show the proficiency rates of students with disabilities at each school. If the drop out rate is high, the superintendent or school board will expect an explanation. If test scores of students with disabilities are low, directors of special education may need to explain why these children are not achieving higher scores, even though each child has an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) that is designed to meet the child's unique needs.

Superintendents must oversee and evaluate training for personnel in research-based methods and curricula. They must also ensure that all paraprofessionals in Title 1 schools are working in appropriate capacities and meet minimum education and knowledge requirements.

Superintendents must deal with student populations that fluctuate annually as school choice options change. These changes will affect schools that have to offer school choice, and schools that do not accept Title 1 funds. The child who exercises school choice does not have to attend another Title 1 school. He may choose to attend a school that does not receive Title 1 funding. Once a child chooses a school, he may stay at that school until he successfully completes the highest grade in the school.

If students in a district are eligible for supplemental services, the superintendent must contract with providers, monitor goals for each student, monitor the effectiveness of service providers, and pay service providers according to their individual payment requirements.

School board members must hire administrators who have the expertise to improve student learning and make the district successful. School board members must become knowledgeable about effective teaching methods and research-based curricula. Some board members may think they have this knowledge. If this were true, schools would not have a 68% failure rate in teaching students to read by fourth grade.

By the time the school board receives their school and district report cards, more schools may have entered the "Needs Improvement" category. School boards must deal with the personnel and transportation issues that occur when student populations fluctuate. In the past, school boards could study population growth trends to determine when they would need more space, and for which grades.

Anticipating sudden student population shifts will be more difficult. Because districts and states will issue report cards during the summer, families will make school choice decisions before the new school year begins. Managing budgets, transportation contracts, teaching contracts, and space will be difficult in districts

when schools are moving in and out of the "Needs Improvement", "Corrective Action" and "Restructuring" categories. Learning how to be successful the first time around will be the key to keeping the needs for space and teachers stable.

## The Good News

The good news is that there is finally a way to draw attention to what does not work and how to fix it. Teachers who want to teach a solid curriculum will have that curriculum. Teachers who need training they did not receive in college will receive that training.

We have research that shows what works. Funding is available for effective programs. Money is available to train teachers. Supplemental services are available to raise student achievement. Detailed annual reports are available to show schools where to direct their efforts, and when they have reached their goals.

The improvements mandated by No Child Left Behind will lead to changes in other areas. The No Child Left Behind regulations include statements about the economic and non-economic benefits of a good education:

- ?? Nations that invest in quality education enjoy higher levels of growth and productivity, and a high-quality education system is an indispensable element of a strong economy and successful civil society.
- ?? High school graduates are more likely to continue their education and receive the additional skills and knowledge necessary to compete for jobs in a high-technology, knowledge-driven economy. Scholars have also found strong, positive correlations between higher levels of schooling and higher lifetime earnings, higher savings rates, and reduced costs of job search.
- ?? More educated individuals lead healthier lives and have lower mortality rates. They are more likely to donate time and money to charity, and to vote in elections . . . the educational level of parents is a positive predictor of children's health, cognitive development, education, occupational status, and future earnings . . . education is negatively correlated with criminal activity and incarceration, and more educated mothers are less likely to have daughters who give birth out of wedlock as teens.

---

## Endnotes

[1] U.S. Department of Education

<http://www.ed.gov/nclb/overview/importance/edlite-index.html>

[2] U. S. Department of Education, The Nation's Report Card, Mathematics, 2000,

<http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/mathematics/results/natachieve-g12.asp>

[3] U.S. Department of Education, The Nation's Report Card, Science, 2000.

<http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/science/results/natachieve-g12.asp>

Copyright © 2002-2004 by Suzanne Heath

---

## About the Author

Suzanne Heath, research editor for Wrightslaw ([www.wrightslaw.com](http://www.wrightslaw.com)), is the co-author of **Wrightslaw: No Child Left Behind** (ISBN: 1-892320-12-6) published by Harbor House Law Press (<http://www.harborhouselaw.com>).

Sue is also the webmaster for the New Hampshire Branch of the International Dyslexia Association ([www.nhida.org](http://www.nhida.org)) and membership chair of the Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates (COPAA) ([www.copaa.net](http://www.copaa.net)).