

Campaign for High School Equity

Preparing every student for graduation, college, work, and life

A Stronger NCLB in 2008: Critical for High Schools and Students of Color Background for Briefing High School Accountability and Equity in NCLB

Although it is but one milestone in a history of forward steps to improve education, NCLB can significantly strengthen accountability and equity for all students if it is imbued with the right policy adjustments. *Our American system of public education has inadequately served poor and minority students for decades. Nonetheless, incremental progress has been made over time. While Brown v. Board ensured access for minority students, it failed to achieve the equally important goal of equity in public education. As such, Americans of all stripes must work to remove racial and ethnic disparities in education so that every child has an unfettered opportunity to achieve and to graduate from high school fully prepared for work and college.*

- Access to high quality public education promised in *Brown v. Board of Education* is still a fundamental right upon which all others depend; and yet fifty years later, the promise of *Brown* remains unfulfilled.
- Some progress has been made. Recent results from the 2007 National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) for urban school districts in reading and mathematics show strong improvement in academic performance over the past five years, particularly among the lowest-performing students. In fact, many big-city districts have gained more than their respective states.
- But inequality is still rampant. NCLB's test scores paint a bleak picture of the achievement gap, with virtually every state's white students passing state exams at a significantly higher rate than low-income, minority, and English language learners.
- Far too many of our school are failing students of color. Today, just over 50 percent of minority students graduate from high school on time and with regular diplomas. Moreover, the schools with the highest dropout rates nationwide produce a disproportionately higher amount of minority student dropouts.
- 57.8 percent of Latino, 53.4 percent of African-American, and 49.3 percent of American Indian and Alaska Native students in the United States graduate with a regular diploma, compared with 76.2 percent of white students.

NCLB has been a step forward in improving education for the nation's poor and minority students. NCLB has ensured that schools, districts, and states are held accountable for the achievement of all students and ensured that critical information about student performance is available to parents and the public.

- The U.S. Census Bureau projects that by the year 2050, about 50 percent of the U.S. population will be African American, Hispanic, or Asian. NCLB has recognized that minority populations must be accounted for when determining school success through strong disaggregation requirements.
- Adequate yearly progress requirements were designed to give parents, students, teachers, and school administrators information on the progress of their schools with the goal of ultimately breaking the cycle of failure, and ultimately seek to break the cycle of failure that has continued to deny some children access to quality education.

NCLB must be strengthened to further accelerate the achievement of the nation's poor and minority students and to ensure that all students graduate prepared for college and the work place. This is not the time to turn back the clock on accountability. Rather, it is now time to strengthen accountability and expand NCLB to support the achievement of high school students. If Congress does not reauthorize NCLB in 2008, students and communities most in need will continue to suffer:

- There will be no help for the 1.2 million students who fail to graduate from high school each year, more than half of whom are students of color;
- Important reforms—such as growth models and graduation rate provisions—will not be available to more accurately hold schools accountable for student success, leaving too many poor and minority children unaccounted for and left behind; and
- The more than five million English language learner students will not get important help that will allow them to succeed, including access to rigorous coursework, effective teachers, and accurate assessments.

By reauthorizing NCLB in 2008, Congress has the opportunity to begin to end the inequities in the current system by raising expectations and demanding significant change. The Campaign for High School Equity's "A Plan for Success" includes specific recommendations for strengthening NCLB, which include:

- Make all students proficient and prepared for college and work;
- Hold high schools accountable for student success;
- Redesign the American high school;
- Provide students with the excellent leaders and teachers they need to succeed;
- Invest communities in student success; and
- Provide equitable learning conditions for all students.

The Campaign for High School Equity is a diverse coalition of national civil rights organizations representing communities of color that believe high schools should have the capacity and motivation to prepare every student for graduation, college, work, and life. Members of the Campaign include the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights Education Fund, the League of United Latin American Citizens, the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials Educational Fund, the National Council of La Raza, the National Indian Education Association, the National Urban League, and the Southeast Asia Resource Action Center. The Alliance for Excellent Education serves as the Campaign's convener and coordinator.