

March 28, 2007

Working Group of Social Studies Discipline Organizations Joint Statement on NCLB

How do we measure the success of the US education system? Many would answer with “data,” i.e., evidence that indicates that our students are prepared for their roles as citizens, as members of a 21st century workforce, and as participants in our democracy. In 2001, Congress passed the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, setting laudatory goals that included attaining proficiency in math and reading by 2014, narrowing the achievement gap, and having well-prepared, highly qualified teachers in every classroom. In doing so, an unintentional consequence of implementation arose, one that involved the marginalization of the core social studies disciplines— civics/government, economics, geography, and history. While NCLB identifies each of these as “core” for the highly qualified provisions of the law, they are not included in the basic program requirements, an anomaly that is resulting in an increased “civic achievement gap.”

Evidence of the civic achievement gap is rampant. Measures of knowledge and skills reveal lower scores for Blacks and Hispanics, those from single parent families, and those who are poor. Civic attitudes, as reflected in levels of political and social trust, political efficacy, and civic duty are significantly lower for those who are poor and/or of minority or immigrant status. Civic behaviors, including voting, campaign work, and community activity, follow the same pattern. In the 2004 election, voting rates indicated that 67% of white citizens, 60% of Black citizens, 47% of Hispanic citizens, and 44% of Asian American citizens voted.¹

These indicators of civic engagement need to be addressed to the same extent as the indicators of the academic achievement gap.

The key attributes of good citizenship

include knowledge of the core social studies disciplines, as well as skills, attitudes, and behaviors. Recognizing the role of US citizens in world affairs and the realities of a global economy, our students must be prepared for a culturally diverse environment that requires the capacity for economic and political cooperation.²

For example, since the fate of the planet is one shared by all, recognition of a common good needs to guide the human use of Earth’s environment. Responsible civic values can be applied to these matters in a dynamic manner through a mastery of the content and skills of the core subjects of the social studies. However, the narrowing of the curriculum unintentionally fostered by NCLB has resulted in fewer resources, fewer contact hours with students, and fewer opportunities for professional

The following statement was sent to the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor on March 28, 2007, and shortly thereafter to the House Committee on Education & Labor. Thus, the statement is part of Congress’s deliberations on NCLB, which are ongoing. Read more at www.socialstudies.org/advocacy/nclb/.

development in civics/government, economics, geography, and history. Since the enactment of NCLB, for example, 33% of school districts surveyed reduced time for the teaching of social studies disciplines.³

Data also indicate a deficiency in students’ knowledge of history. This lack of knowledge of the basic content of history and of historical thinking skills results in a loss of the nation’s memory of past ideas, events, and important personalities, and their collective impact on the development of the United States. The study of history enables students to “understand how the present world we inhabit is the result of choices people have made and convictions they have held.”⁴

Our members, who include more than 50,000 educators in the core disciplines of social studies from the pre-

kindergarten to the graduate levels, urge Congress to reverse the marginalization of the social studies—and narrow the civic achievement gap—by including provisions for standards, assessment, and professional development in the reauthorization of NCLB. The future of our democracy depends on it.

Specifically, our combined membership recommends:

1. Subpart 1—Basic Program Requirements, sec. 1111. State plans, (b) (1) (C)

Add “the core social studies disciplines—civics/government, economics, geography, and history” to this academic standards provision.

2. Subpart 1—Basic Program Requirements, sec. 1111. Academic Assessments (b) (3) (A)

Add “the core social studies disciplines—civics/government, economics, geography, and history” to the requirements for assessments and accountability.

3. Title II professional development fund requirements include alignment with state standards and assessments.

Adding “the core social studies disciplines—civics/government, economics, geography, and history” to these provisions would allow for equity in funding for these content areas. 🌐

Notes

1. Meira Levinson, “Working Paper 51: The Civic Achievement Gap” (College Park, MD: CIRCLE, The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, 2007), www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/WorkingPapers/WP51Levinson.pdf
2. Partnership for 21st Century Skills, www.21stcenturyskills.org
3. “From the Capital to the Classroom: Year 4 of the No Child Left Behind Act” (Washington, DC: Center on Education Policy, 2006), www.cep-dc.org/nclb/Year4/Press
4. National Assessment Governing Board, “US History Assessment Framework for the 1994 and 2001 National Assessment of Educational Progress” (Washington, DC: US Department of Education, 2001), p. iv, www.nagb.org/pubs/hfframework2001.pdf

Working Group of Social Studies Discipline Organizations

American Historical Association,
Teaching Division

Center for Civic Education

Constitutional Rights Foundation

Constitutional Rights Foundation/
Chicago

JA Worldwide™

National Council on Economic
Education

National Council for the Social Studies

National Geographic Society

National History Day

Organization of American Historians

World History Association

October 21, 2004

Joint Organizational Statement on the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act

The undersigned education, civil rights, religious, children’s, disability, civic and labor organizations are committed to the No Child Left Behind Act’s objectives of strong academic achievement for all children and closing the achievement gap. We believe that the federal government has a critical role to play in attaining these goals. We endorse the use of an accountability system that helps ensure all children, including children of color, from low-income families, with disabilities, and of limited English proficiency, are prepared to be successful, participating members of our democracy.

While we all have different positions on various aspects of the law, based on concerns raised during the implementation of NCLB, we believe the following significant, constructive corrections are among those necessary to make the Act fair and effective. Among these concerns are: over-emphasizing standardized testing, narrowing curriculum and instruction to focus on test preparation rather than richer academic learning; over-identifying schools in need of improvement; using sanctions that do not help improve schools; inappropriately excluding low-scoring children in order to boost test results; and inadequate funding. Overall, the law’s emphasis needs to shift from applying sanctions for failing to raise test scores to holding states and localities accountable for making the systemic changes that improve student achievement.

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Progress Measurement

1. Replace the law's arbitrary proficiency targets with ambitious achievement targets based on rates of success actually achieved by the most effective public schools.
2. Allow states to measure progress by using students' growth in achievement as well as their performance in relation to pre-determined levels of academic proficiency.
3. Ensure that states and school districts regularly report to the government and the public their progress in implementing systemic changes to enhance educator, family, and community capacity to improve student learning.
4. Provide a comprehensive picture of students' and schools' performance by moving from an overwhelming reliance on standardized tests to using multiple indicators of student achievement in addition to these tests.
5. Fund research and development of more effective accountability systems that better meet the goal of high academic achievement for all children

Assessments

6. Help states develop assessment systems that include district and school-based measures in order to provide better, more timely information about student learning.
7. Strengthen enforcement of NCLB provisions requiring that assessments must:
 - Be aligned with state content and achievement standards;
 - Be used for purposes for which they are valid and reliable;
 - Be consistent with nationally recognized professional and technical standards;
 - Be of adequate technical quality for each purpose required under the Act;
 - Provide multiple, up-to-date measures of student performance including measures that assess higher order thinking skills and understanding; and
 - Provide useful diagnostic information to improve teaching and learning.

8. Decrease the testing burden on states, schools and districts by allowing states to assess students annually in selected grades in elementary, middle schools, and high schools.

Building Capacity

9. Ensure changes in teacher and administrator preparation and continuing professional development that research evidence and experience indicate improve educational quality and student achievement.
10. Enhance state and local capacity to effectively implement the comprehensive changes required to increase the knowledge and skills of administrators, teachers, families, and communities to support high student achievement.

Sanctions

11. Ensure that improvement plans are allowed sufficient time to take hold before applying sanctions; sanctions should not be applied if they undermine existing effective reform efforts.
12. Replace sanctions that do not have a consistent record of success with interventions that enable schools to make changes that result in improved student achievement.

Funding

13. Raise authorized levels of NCLB funding to cover a substantial percentage of the costs that states and districts will incur to carry out these recommendations, and fully fund the law at those levels without reducing expenditures for other education programs.
14. Fully fund Title I to ensure that 100 percent of eligible children are served.

We, the undersigned, will work for the adoption of these recommendations as central structural changes needed to NCLB at the same time that we advance our individual organization's proposals. 🌐

The most current list of signers, which includes NCSS, can be seen at the FairTest website www.fairtest.org/joint%20statement%20civil%20rights%20grps%2010-21-04.html. Signers as of July 4, 2007 are shown on the next page.

Signers of the October 21, 2004 Statement on NCLB

Advancement Project
The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE)
American Association of School Administrators
American Association of School Librarians (AASL), a division of the American Library Association (ALA)
American Association of School Personnel Administrators
American Association of University Women
American Baptist Women's Ministries
American Civil Liberties Union
American Counseling Association
American Dance Therapy Association
American Federation of Labor – Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO)
American Federation of School Administrators (AFSA)
American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)
American Federation of Teachers
American Friends Service Committee
American Humanist Association
American Music Therapy Association
American Occupational Therapy Association
American Speech-Language-Hearing Association
American School Counselor Association
Americans for the Arts
Annenberg Institute for School Reform
Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund
Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance (APALA)
ASPIRA
Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN)
Association of Education Publishers
Association of School Business Officials International (ASBO)
Association of Teacher Educators
Big Picture Company
Business and Professional Women/USA
Center for Community Change
Center for Expansion of Language and Thinking
Center for Parent Leadership
The Center for Policy Alternatives
Change to Win
Children's Aid Society
Children's Defense Fund
Church Women United
Citizens for Effective Schools
Coalition for Community Schools
Coalition of Essential Schools
Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism
Communities for Quality Education
COSN (Consortium for School Networking)
Council of Administrators of Special Education, Inc.
Council for Children with Behavioral Disorders
Council for Exceptional Children
Council for Hispanic Ministries of the United Church of Christ
Council for Learning Disabilities
Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform
Disciples Home Missions of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
Disciples Justice Action Network (Disciples of Christ)
Division for Learning Disabilities of the Council for Exceptional Children (DLD/CEC)
Education Action!
Education Not Incarceration
Episcopal Church
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Every Child Matters
FairTest: The National Center for Fair & Open Testing
Forum for Education and Democracy
Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network (GLSEN)
Gender Public Advocacy Coalition (GPAC)
The Holmes Partnership
Hmong National Development
Indigenous Women's Network
Institute for Language and Education Policy
International Reading Association
ISTE (International Society for Technology in Education)
International Technology Education Association
Japanese American Citizens League
Learning Disabilities Association of America
League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)
Mental Health America
Ministers for Racial, Social and Economic justice of the United Church of Christ
National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)
NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund (LDF)
National Alliance of Black School Educators
National Association for Asian and Pacific American Education (NAAPAE)
National Association for Bilingual Education (NABE)
National Association for the Education and Advancement of Cambodian, Laotian and Vietnamese Americans (NAFEA)
National Association for the Education of African American Children with Learning Disabilities (NAEAACLD)
National Association of Federally Impacted Schools
National Association of Pupil Service Administrators
National Association of School Nurses
National Association of School Psychologists
National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP)
National Association of Social Workers
National Baptist Convention, USA (NBCUSA)
National Coalition for Asian Pacific American Community Development
National Coalition of ESEA Title I Parents
National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education (NCPIE)
National Conference of Black Mayors
National Council for the Social Studies
National Council for Community and Education Partnerships (NCCEP)
National Council of Churches
National Council of Jewish Women
National Council of Teachers of English
National Education Association
National Education Taskforce
National Federation of Filipino American Associations
National Indian Education Association
National Indian School Board Association
National Korean American Service & Education Consortium (NAKASEC)
National Ministries, American Baptist Churches USA
National Pacific Islander Educator Network
National Parent Teacher Association (PTA)
National Reading Conference
National Rural Education Association
National School Boards Association
National School Supply and Equipment Association
National Science Teachers Association
National Superintendents Roundtable
National Urban League
Native Hawaiian Education Association
The Network of Spiritual Progressives
Organization of Chinese Americans
Public Education Network (PEN)
People for the American Way
Presbyterian Church (USA)
Progressive National Baptist Convention
Protestants for the Common Good
Rural School and Community Trust
Service Employees International Union
School Social Work Association of America
Social Action Committee of the Congress of Secular Jewish Organizations
Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC)
Stand for Children
Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc. (TESOL)
United Black Christians of the United Church of Christ
United Church of Christ Justice and Witness Ministries
United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society
USAction
Women's Division of the General Board of Global Ministries, The United Methodist Church
Women of Reform Judaism