

NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND

The Test

■ BY STAN KARP

Under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), the federal government has mandated that all 91,000 public schools in the United States be rated on the basis of standardized test scores. The new law's unmistakable message is *if it's not on a test, it's not worth knowing*.

Accordingly, the following information about NCLB and U.S. education policy is presented in the form today's policymakers seem to love best: objective, multiple-choice questions that leave no room for doubt, debate, or complete sentences.

Your goal is to circle the truth with a number-two pencil. You will have twenty minutes to complete the test. You may not look at any other part of the magazine during that time. Nor may you talk, eat, go to the bathroom, use a dictionary, or have a creative thought. You may sweat. Answers are at the end of each section.

I. Testing, Testing . . .

- Under NCLB the following measure of inequality must be eliminated by 2014:
 - Inequality in school funding.
 - Inequality in child poverty rates.
 - Inequality in access to health care.
 - Inequality in family income.
 - Inequality in standardized test scores.
- The percentage of schools that did not meet NCLB's "adequate yearly progress" targets for the 2002-03 school year included:
 - 5% of Alabama schools.
 - 14% of Wyoming schools.
 - 40% of Illinois schools.
 - 76% of Florida schools.
 - All of the above.
- The reasons for these widely varying results include the fact that:
 - States have very different standards that make comparisons essentially meaningless.
 - The "AYP" targets are so arbitrary and inappropriate that eventually most schools will be on the list anyway.
 - NCLB actually encourages some states to adopt lower standards to keep schools off the list.
 - The threshold size for counting student subgroups—like special education students or English-language learners—varies widely from state to state.
 - All of the above.
- NCLB requires that schools make "adequate yearly progress" in equal increments toward 100% proficiency on state tests by 2014. However, according to testing research:
 - 70% of the year-to-year change in test scores for grade levels or schools is random variation.
 - The larger and more diverse a school is, the more likely it will fail to meet AYP.
 - One study concluded that "the AYP system cannot tell the difference between a learning gain and random noise."
 - All of these.
- Examples of NCLB's impact on classrooms include:
 - In Maine, teacher-made, classroom-based assessments are being replaced by standardized tests.
 - Philadelphia fourth graders read fewer books.
 - Maryland schools are spending 20% less time on social studies.
 - Oregon is cutting foreign-language and music classes and spending more on testing.
 - A significant reduction in arts-education programs, particularly in urban schools with large numbers of students of color.
 - All of the above.

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Answers: 1 E, 2 E, 3 E, 4 D, 5 F



DAVID McLIMANS

II. Show Me the Money . . .

6. Which of the following statements about NCLB funding is true?
 - A. Funding for NCLB has been about \$26 billion below originally promised levels.
 - B. While dramatically increasing expectations for school and student performance, NCLB has increased total U.S. school spending by about 1%.
 - C. Under NCLB, the federal share of total school spending has remained at about 7%, leaving states and local districts to pay the rest.
 - D. All of the above.
7. Studies of the projected costs needed to meet NCLB mandates, even on its own narrow, test-score terms, have found that:
 - A. Annual K-12 education spending would have to increase about 30% over current levels.
 - B. This would require more than ten times the current funding for federal Title I programs serving high-poverty schools.
 - C. The estimated costs of just developing and administering the additional tests NCLB mandates may be more than twice what the law provides.
 - D. All of the above.
8. Which of the following statements about whether NCLB is an “unfunded mandate” is true?
 - A. Section 9527 of NCLB says: “Nothing in this Act shall be construed to authorize . . . the Federal Government to . . . mandate a State or any subdivision thereof to spend any funds or incur any costs not paid for under this Act.”
 - B. 90% of school superintendents have said NCLB requires them to make expenditures NCLB doesn’t provide.

- C. The nonpartisan General Accounting Office concluded that NCLB did not qualify as an “unfunded mandate” because states could refuse to accept federal funds if they didn’t want to comply with its provisions.
D. All of the above.
9. The approximately \$130 billion spent so far on the war in Iraq is:
A. About 4 times what the federal government annually spends on K-12 programs for all 50 states.
B. Enough to hire 2.4 million elementary school teachers.
C. Enough to provide Head Start slots for an additional 18 million children.
D. Enough to provide full four-year college scholarships for more than 3 million students.
E. Each of the above.
10. According to the Children’s Defense Fund:
A. States spend on average almost three times as much per prisoner as per public school pupil.
B. 9.3 million children lack health insurance.
C. Three million children live in households suffering from hunger or “food insecurity without hunger.”
D. All of the above.
11. When parents were asked, “If there was more federal money available for your school, which one of [five choices] would you want it to go to?” they replied as follows:
A. 52% chose smaller classes.
B. 12% would restore arts programs.
C. 11% said after-school programs.
D. 10% said increased professional development for teachers.
E. 10% picked “implementing the No Child Left Behind Act.”
F. All of the above.
12. While Title I funds will increase by about \$650 million for the 2004-05 school year, new formulas for allocating the money to the poorest schools will mean:
A. More than 55% of Title I districts will receive lower funding despite NCLB’s increased mandates.
B. Ten states will lose up to 10% of their Title I funding: Kansas, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, New Hampshire, New Jersey, North Dakota, and Pennsylvania.
C. Some urban districts, like San Francisco and Oakland, will lose significant Title I funds.
D. Despite recent increases in federal spending, the Title I program still serves only about 60% of the children who meet its eligibility requirements.
E. All of the above.
13. Which of the following does NCLB specifically provide funds for:
A. Smaller class sizes.
B. Multicultural education.
C. Full-day kindergarten.
D. Test research.
14. Which of the following provisions is NOT contained in the NCLB legislation:
A. Greater access to school records for military recruiters.
B. Greater access to school facilities for groups like the Boys Scouts that discriminate against gays and lesbians.
C. Greater access to bilingual programs for English-language learners.
D. Guarantees of “constitutionally protected” prayer in schools.
E. Greater access to school funds for faith-based and religious groups.
15. In which area has the Bush Administration mandated strict adherence to “scientifically proven” research?
A. The teaching of evolution.
B. Global warming.
C. Phonemic awareness.
D. Stem-cell research.
16. Which of the following NCLB sanctions has a proven record of success as a school improvement strategy?
A. The imposition of private management on public schools.
B. The wholesale replacement of school staff, called “reconstitution.”
C. The transfer of students and resources out of “failing schools.”
D. State takeovers of local school districts.
E. None of the above.
17. A 2003 Gallup poll on NCLB showed that:
A. 76% of the public knew “nothing” or “very little” about the law.
B. 66% said a single statewide test was not a fair measure of whether a school needed improvement.
C. 84% said that determining “reasonable improvement from where [students] started” was a better measure of school performance than a fixed test-score target.
D. 71% thought it was important to close gaps in test scores among different racial groups.
E. Only 16% thought these gaps were caused primarily by the quality of schooling they received.
F. All of the above.
18. A U.S. Department of Education survey of private schools found that:
A. Two-thirds said they would refuse vouchers if they had to accept students randomly.
B. Over half would refuse vouchers if they had to administer the same tests that public schools do.
C. Three-quarters would refuse to accept special-needs students or English-Language learners as voucher students.
D. All of the above.
19. The U.S. Department of Education has responded to widespread calls for more flexibility in its NCLB regulations by:
A. Allowing districts to exclude not more than 1% of

Answers: 6 D, 7 D, 8 D, 9 E, 10 D, 11 F, 12 E

III. Policy Follies

13. Which of the following does NCLB specifically provide funds for:
A. Smaller class sizes.
B. Multicultural education.

- special education students from state tests.
- B. Insisting that any state that gives parents the option of withdrawing their children from state assessments must count such students as missing from AYP participation rates.
- C. Insisting that districts implement NCLB's transfer provisions even where alternative placements do not exist.
- D. All of the above.
20. NCLB obligates schools that don't make "AYP" for two years to allow students to transfer to other schools. Which of the following was NOT a result of this provision?
- A. A lottery system in Chicago that rationed 1,100 available seats to the 270,000 students eligible to transfer.
- B. Overcrowding in many of New York City's more successful small schools, which were required to absorb many of the 8,000 students allowed to transfer (out of a total of 300,000 eligible students).
- C. The transfer of students and resources away from schools most "in need of improvement."
- D. The opening up of suburban districts to transfers from urban districts.
21. NCLB obligates schools that don't make "AYP" for three years to provide "supplemental tutoring" services. Which of the following was a result of this provision?
- A. States have identified more than 1,400 "approved providers" of supplemental services.
- B. 63% of these providers are private companies.
- C. Some districts have had to eliminate their own supplemental tutoring programs in order to pay for more expensive private programs that serve fewer kids.
- D. One example of this is Southtown, Ill., where the district eliminated a tutoring program that served 250 students with certified teachers in small classes of 10 and replaced it with a more expensive program where Sylvan Learning Center will serve 50-60 students.
- E. Tutors for private supplemental-service providers do not have to meet the same "highly qualified" standards as public school teachers.
- F. All of the above.
22. The U.S. Department of Education has implemented NCLB's parental involvement provisions by all EXCEPT:
- A. Giving millions to pro-voucher groups to encourage parents to use the transfer and tutorial provisions of NCLB.
- B. Directing schools to send letters home to parents telling them their children's teachers don't meet "highly qualified" status.
- C. Encouraging state and local parent groups to "spy" on schools and "expose" their failures.
- D. Encouraging parents to attend school board and site council meetings to advocate for school improvement that serves the needs of all children.

Answers: 13 D, 14 C, 15 C, 16 E, 17 F, 18 D, 19 D, 20 D, 21 F, 22 D

IV. Words of Wisdom

Match the quote (23-28) with the source (A-F below):

23. "The results are unambiguous. In all 14 factors, the gaps in student achievement mirror inequalities in those aspects of school, early life, and home circumstances that research has linked to achievement."
24. "All things equal, I would prefer to have a child in a school that has a strong appreciation for the values of the Christian community, where a child is taught to have a strong faith."
25. "I believe that any new programs developed on the federal level should provide states and local school boards with as much freedom from prescriptive or onerous mandates as possible."
26. "This almost reads like our business plan."
27. "The scientific evidence we do have about teaching and learning to read is now being selectively reviewed, distorted, and misrepresented by the very agents and agencies who should give us reliable reports of what the research says."
28. "NCLB declares that education should be scientific. It mentions 'scientifically based research' 110 times. Yet it has zero scientific basis for what it prescribes. Nothing that it forces on the states has been tried. It does turn our kids into lab rats."
- A. Richard Allington of the University of Florida, one of the nation's leading researchers on reading and a member of the Reading Hall of Fame.
- B. Educational researcher Gerald Bracey.
- C. Former Pennsylvania Secretary of Education Eugene W. Hickok, testifying before the Committee on Education and the Workforce, March 30, 1998. Today Hickok is U.S. Deputy Secretary of Education, responsible for implementing NCLB.
- D. Parsing the Achievement Gap, a report from the Educational Testing Service, October, 2003.
- E. Rod Paige, U.S. Secretary of Education.
- F. Peter Jovanovich, chief executive of Pearson Education, a multibillion corporate publisher of tests and education materials, describing President Bush's education policies.

Answers: 23 D, 24 E, 25 C, 26 F, 27 A, 28 B

SCORING: *Send your answers to Rethinking Schools, along with your race, class, and gender and we will send you a list of the slots in society for which you seem qualified.*

Sources and footnotes available at www.rethinkingschools.org.

Rethinking Schools Online

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(Listed by question number and, where appropriate, by answer letter)

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