

## **North Dakota NCLB Task Force Recommendations September 2007**

In May, Senator Dorgan convened a task force of education and community leaders in North Dakota to make recommendations for how No Child Left Behind can be fixed. The following is a report from the task force.

### **Task Force Members**

- Douglas Johnson, NCLB Task Force Chair, North Dakota Council of Education Leaders
- Donna Brown, University of North Dakota, American Indian Student Services
- Pat Walking Eagle, Four Winds School, Spirit Lake Nation
- Dr. David Gipp, United Tribes Technical College
- Dr. Leigh Jeanotte, University of North Dakota, American Indian Student Services
- Konrad Ziesing, North Dakota PTA
- Jon Martinson, North Dakota School Boards Association
- Laurie Matzke, Director, Title I, North Dakota Department of Public Instruction
- Erin Mowers, Fargo Public Schools
- Leann Nelson, North Dakota Education Association
- Wayne Sanstead, North Dakota Superintendent of Public Instruction
- Paul Stremick, Superintendent, Dickinson Public Schools
- Marlene Srock, Bel Air Elementary, Minot
- Wayne Ulven, Superintendent, Richland Public Schools
- Pauline Wahl, North Dakota Education Association
- Janet Welk, North Dakota Education Standards and Practices Board

### **Task Force Recommendations**

The task force made a number of recommendations for how NCLB could be improved. The recommendations are divided into the following categories: funding, testing, subgroups, highly qualified, Title I and other issues.

<b>FUNDING</b>
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The task force supports efforts to dramatically increase funding for Title I. Most, if not all, school districts in North Dakota are losing Title I funding. It is unreasonable to expect school districts to succeed as we move toward 100 percent proficiency without providing our schools adequate resources.

#### **Recommendations:**

- The federal mandates and requirements included in NCLB should be proportional to the funding that is provided.
- Funding should be provided to reduce classroom sizes to 15 or less. Money for the classroom size reduction is now an option under Title II. Rather than come out of Title II, funding for reducing the classroom size should become a standalone program.

- School districts should be given more flexibility to target federal funds such as the Rural Education Achievement Program (REAP) to programs that most effectively address the unique needs of their schools.
- Congress must live up to its commitment to fully fund the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Although the federal government promised to fund 40 percent of the National Average per Pupil Expenditure for every child in special education, the federal government is only providing 17.2 percent.

## TESTING

NCLB relies on standardized test scores to evaluate school progress. These tests provide a snapshot of how a school is doing, but fail to measure the progress of individual students. Since the goal of NCLB should be to hold schools accountable for individual student progress, the testing model needs to be changed to measure individual achievement.

The task force recommends the adoption of a growth model that would allow schools to measure individual students' progress over time, giving schools credit for improvement from year to year and providing another way to show whether achievement gaps are closing. With the use of growth models, schools could be credited for moving students from below basic to basic as well as for moving students who are already proficient to advanced. Growth models may be particularly helpful in charting the progress of students whose achievement may follow a different path from that of their peers, such as students with disabilities or LEP students.

### **Recommendations:**

- The testing model should be shifted to a growth model, measuring progress of individual students. This is the only way to truly ensure that “no children are being left behind.”
- Children with disabilities should not, in all circumstances, be required to be tested at grade level. Assessment needs to be consistent with services the child is receiving, including grade level, with their Individualized Education Programs (IEP).
- Changes need to be made to ensure fair and accurate assessments of Limited English Proficiency students and needs to be consistent with a child's English proficiency level. A growth model of measurement should be applied as well.

## SUBGROUPS

Under current law, a school could be identified as in need of improvement if different subgroups (subgroups include low-income students, minority students, limited English proficient students and students with disabilities) do not make Average Yearly Progress (AYP) in the same content area for two consecutive years. Students may also be counted more than once if they are part of multiple subgroups. While the task force agrees that it is important to ensure all students are making progress, the current system is flawed and may not provide an accurate picture of how a school is doing. The task force recommends several changes to how subgroups are counted when determining AYP. In addition, the task force

believes that the sanctions included in NCLB are too harsh and the focus should instead be on providing incentive to help schools improve.

**Recommendations:**

- Schools should only be designated as in need of improvement if the school does not make AYP in the same subgroup and same content area for two consecutive years.
- Students should not be counted more than once if they are part of multiple subgroups. Only one score of one of the subgroups should be applied toward making AYP. No recommendation on the determination of which sub-group is to be counted in making AYP.
- An individual learning plan should be required for any student who fails to demonstrate proficiency on their assessments. Involvement of parents for setting this plan is critical.
- The sanctions included in NCLB are too harsh and will not lead to improved schools. It is recommended that incentives be applied rather than sanctions.

**HIGHLY QUALIFIED**

The No Child Left Behind act requires that all teachers be "highly qualified" as defined in the law. A highly qualified teacher is one who has (1) fulfilled the state's certification and licensing requirements, (2) obtained at least a bachelor's degree, and (3) demonstrated subject matter expertise. The highly qualified requirements in NCLB are very rigid. In most cases, teachers are required to have a major in the subject they are teaching. For example, a French teacher who also has a minor in German would not be able to teach German without going back to school to get a degree in German. While the task force is not recommending lowering the standards, the task force is urging Congress to give states some commonsense flexibility to make these requirements work.

Under NCLB, the effectiveness of teachers is highly subjective and can be measured in a number of different ways. The task force has concerns with using teacher effectiveness as a measure of AYP.

Finally, there are not enough Native American instructors to meet the growing Native American school populations. There should be the opportunity for professional development through Title VII funds to help meet the growing need of Native American instructors.

**Recommendations:**

- Additional funding is needed to help teachers go back to school to meet the "highly qualified" requirements. This funding is to provide additional funding for the Title I & II funds currently in place but should not decrease service to children provided by these funds.
- Teacher effectiveness should not be a measure of AYP.
- States should be given flexibility to set appropriate standards to ensure teaching quality. States should be able to continue to use the High, Objective, Uniform State Standard of Evaluation (HOUSSE) to allow current teachers to demonstrate subject matter

competency and the highly qualified teacher requirements. The HOUSSE model should allow teachers to meet the NCLB highly qualified requirements through a combination of proven teaching experience, professional development, and knowledge in the subject acquired through working in the field. National Board Certification should also be a path to be recognized as a highly qualified teacher.

- Tribal colleges should be allowed to play a greater role with respect to teacher training due to the great need for teachers on Indian reservations. Additional funding for professional development is needed for pre and in-service training of teachers who teach Native American students through Title VII.

## TITLE I ISSUES

**Supplemental Services** – Under current law, NCLB allows all low-income students (those who participate in the free and reduced price lunch program) attending a school identified as in need of improvement to receive supplemental education services. However, these services are not made available to all low performing students since some are not considered to be low-income students. There are also administrative hurdles that prevent schools from effectively implementing supplemental services.

**Early Intervening Services** – Since NCLB is focused on ensuring all students reach proficiency by 2014, additional flexibility is needed to allow Title I teachers to intervene early on and provide services to struggling students. Congress has already recognized the value of this type of early intervention when it reauthorized the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (P.L. 108-446, Sec.613f). IDEA allows services to be provided to students who have not been identified as needing special education or related services but who need additional academic and behavioral support to succeed in a general education environment. This model should also apply to the services provided under Title I.

### **Recommendations:**

- Supplemental services should be offered to all low performing students, not just those in the free and reduced price lunch program. As in Title I, a selection process for determining supplemental services should be applied.
- School districts should be allowed to pay for transportation costs from the 20 percent set aside to implement supplemental education services.
- Title I teachers should be allowed to work with struggling students before they are officially identified for Title I services. This would be similar to the RTI (Response to Intervention) model used for special education placement of students.

## OTHER ISSUES

A greater emphasis needs to be made on getting parents involved and adequate funding is needed for the Parent Information and Resources Centers (PIRCs). There is a positive correlation between parental involvement and student achievement. Involved parents who work together with teachers and demonstrate the importance of an education can make

the difference between a child that succeeds and one who performs poorly. NCLB needs to provide funding for parental education programs that help parents learn how to be effective with regard to their children's education. The PIRC should be the source for disseminating information and materials to parents and facilitating the communication between parents and teachers.

NCLB places too much emphasis on reading and math – other “core” subjects are left out. The lack of adequate funding for NCLB has resulted in schools having to use local funds previously available for other programs.

**Recommendations:**

- A greater emphasis needs to be made on getting parents involved and adequate funding is needed for the Parent Information and Resource Centers (PIRCs). Parents need to be more involved and engaged with all aspects of NCLB through direct communication with their schools.
- Reforms are also needed to improve opportunities for parents, families, Tribes, and other Native communities to participate in the education of Indian children.
- NCLB places too much emphasis on reading and math – other “core” subjects are left out. A balance of course offerings beyond the assessed courses needs to be considered as a part of NCLB for eligible funding sources.
- Additional incentives are needed to help attract and retain teachers in rural areas through loan forgiveness, Pell Grants, etc.