

10 Changes to NCLB from the Teachers of the Year

- 1) Fully fund all education and assessment programs that are federally mandated.
- 2) Allow all states to utilize a growth model for measuring individual student achievement over time.
- 3) Use multiple methods of assessment to evaluate student learning accurately and report the results to the public.
- 4) Include language that appropriately addresses the unique needs of students with exceptionalities (disabilities as well as gifts and talents) while continuing to set high standards for all students.
- 5) Provide assessment information to teachers in a timely manner and professional development in effectively utilizing such information, so that it can inform instruction that will improve teaching and learning.
- 6) Evaluate current sanctions for failing Adequate Yearly Progress and replace them with proven methods of enhancing achievement.
- 7) Develop and fund programs that promote meaningful parent and family engagement.
- 8) Modify assessments and set realistic goals for English Language Learners.
- 9) Ensure every student is taught by a Highly Effective Teacher who receives ongoing professional development.
- 10) Include programs for school leadership development that addresses the need for administrators to become instructional leaders who conduct regular classroom observations and provide productive feedback to teachers.

Full Funding

Needed change:

Fully fund all education and assessment programs that are federally mandated.

Unfunded mandates create an undue burden on local and state resources. If a program is important enough to be mandated, then it should also be funded.

Why the change is needed:

If our schools are going to ensure each student has success with high expectations and standards that include a rigorous and comprehensive curriculum, Congress should insist on the full funding of ESEA programs at their authorized levels.

NCLB regulations state that “Nothing in this chapter shall be construed to authorize an officer or employee of the Federal Government to mandate, direct, or control a State, local education agency, or school’s curriculum, program of instruction, or allocation of State or local resources, or mandate a State or any subdivision thereof to spend any funds or incur any costs or paid for under this chapter”. We believe that this section of the law should be enforced with vigor equal to that being applied to states and schools to meet Adequate Yearly Progress.

As educators, we have learned that there is a big difference between what is authorized (how much Congress knows we should spend) and actual funding (what resources are provided to meet our students’ needs).

Since its 2002 inception, the President has failed to request and the Congress has failed to appropriate funding levels promised in the NCLB Act. In 2002, Congress authorized \$26.4 billion and only appropriated \$22.2 billion. Each year since, the gap has grown wider. In the current fiscal year, 2007, \$39.4 billion is authorized but only \$23.7 billion was appropriated. President Bush’s education budget for 2008 is no better. Using 2007’s authorization level (NCLB is not authorized beyond 2007) of \$39.4 billion, the President has requested only \$24.6 billion. If Congress accepts the President’s request, it would bring the cumulative shortfall since enactment to \$70.9 billion.

Impact:

Oklahoma school districts struggle with the fact that federal program teachers must be rehired prior to the time they are notified of the amount of funds they will get for the year. School districts are then forced to come up with the money to pay the salary at a time when their federal funds are being cut.

Just this past week, one of the TOYS was told by her principal that their elementary "lost money" because there are a few schools within her district that did not meet AYP and therefore face sanctions--tutoring, transportation--that must be paid with district funds. The money has to be diverted from schools experiencing success in the district to those who are not - "Robbing Peter to pay Paul". Some schools do need additional funds to meet the needs of challenging populations, but to take it away from successful schools within the same district may put other schools at risk. We could ultimately end up in a “ping-pong” match, redirecting of funds to a new/needy source every year.

Growth Model

Needed change:

Develop a growth model for measuring individual student achievement.

No Child Left Behind set out to close the achievement gap. If the law is going to achieve this goal, we need to acknowledge the growth of struggling students while challenging our gifted students, particularly in lower-income schools.

Why the change is needed:

Nearly all the rewards and punishments in NCLB focus on how many students are testing at “proficiency” by the end of the year—a middle-of-the road benchmark determined by each state. If we can focus instead on how much progress each student has made over the course of the year, we do two things:

1. Create an incentive for the best teachers to take on the lowest-performing students. The same applies to the best principals taking on the lowest-performing schools and the best superintendents taking on the lowest-performing districts.
2. Encourage *all* students to continue improving their academic skills. Students who enter the year far below grade level usually need more than one year to become proficient, even when they are provided with an excellent teacher. Affirming their progress toward proficiency is critical to their success. Students who enter the year far above grade level should be pushed just as hard as their peers to excel.

Impact:

Aaron entered my 2nd grade class as a non-reader. By the end of the year, he had advanced to a level 24 as measured by the Developmental Reading Assessment, just shy of the level 28 designated as “proficient.” His remarkable achievement should be acknowledged as a success on the part of Aaron, his family, his teachers, and his school.

When Maria entered my 2nd grade class, she was already reading on a 4th grade level. In lower-income schools like mine, the staff is often desperate to raise standardized test scores to avoid being put in school improvement—a designation that tends to stigmatize the school as a failure, drive away qualified staff, and strip both resources and autonomy from the school community. A child like Maria will pass with a “proficient” score whether or not she is pushed to achieve her full potential.

In my class of 20 lower-income students, Maria is one of six in the Gifted and Talented program. These gifted lower-income students have the brilliance and the academic skills to go to great universities someday, and they have the first-hand knowledge of their neighborhoods to transform their communities. If they are to develop perseverance, intellectual risk-taking, and joy in their work, these students must be challenged.

A growth model meets the needs of students at both ends of the spectrum, the Aarons and the Marias, by pushing them to achieve their full potential. It provides the most meaningful measure of effective teaching, particularly for teachers in lower-income schools. A growth model also provides the most effective means of attracting and retaining highly effective teachers, principals, and superintendents in our neediest schools.

Multiple Methods of Assessment

Needed Change:

Use multiple methods of assessment to evaluate students accurately and report the results to the public.

We need a more holistic approach to assessing student learning for the purpose of providing accountability-- one that balances qualitative and quantitative analysis. Standardized assessments do provide statistics and data for a baseline that can be used to guide decisions made to improve student achievement on a large and generalized scale. Standardized assessments do little to measure the degree to which students progress in their ability to acquire knowledge, think independently, develop unique, creative solutions to a problem, collaborate with others;, make value judgments, develop new knowledge from old, or any number of other accomplishments we deem as necessary 21st century skills. People on both sides of the standardized test debate acknowledge that these tests measure a narrowed band of learning and marginalize populations of students. Remarkably, even while supporters and detractors alike agree that these indicators do not present a complete picture of learning, standardized testing remains the cornerstone of school accountability. As with the issue of developing growth models that address the needs of different learners, assessment must also be responsive to the variety of ways that students demonstrate their knowledge.

Why the change is needed:

Comparing student achievement globally raises qualitative questions about the intrinsic nature of the social, political, and economic structures of the student populations being compared. Yet we did just that to justify famous educational doctrines such as 1983's "A Nation at Risk". Similarly, although on a smaller scale, we could say that comparing student achievement nationally or even community to community raises similar questions. (For example the equity gap between large urban, small rural, and wealthy suburban populations.) Yet we do just that to create "The Nation's Report Card". When we examine the same premise inside an individual classroom, teachers can answer these qualitative questions easily. You can't rely on a standardized mechanism for assessing holistic achievement because students are not standardized. The idea that "ALL..... WILL.... BY....." becomes a ridiculous premise when accounting for individual learners' needs and ways for demonstrating what they really know and are completely able to do.

Impact:

My school was deemed low performing and non-improving over two consecutive years putting us into the sanctioned position of offering choice while conducting the required improvements necessary to raise student achievement. We were commended two years later by our State's Board of Regents as one of the fastest improving schools in the state. Two years later we are struggling to continue to retain our improving status. Our original success can be tied to implementing a variety of strategies which included intense focus on specific areas of academic content, trying new curriculum materials, and most importantly an openness to utilizing innovative approaches to engaging students in their learning. One of the observations made during this stressful, high stakes time was the collaborative nature our learning community employed in tackling our problems and teaching our students. As testing has been expanded to all grades starting at grade three, we are seeing a negative impact on our ability to sustain and utilize the strategies that enabled our original success.

The beginning of a school year is a critical time for setting the stage for an exciting and dynamic environment for learning and for establishing a momentum for engaged and active participation. It is also a time for setting expectations, goals and support for a wide range of young learners. With the looming pressure of testing in October, many classrooms hunker down immediately to the task of reviewing test type questions and test taking strategies. This is not the same as teaching to the test, but it is essential in preparing concrete learners for a specific type of task. As a school community we were asked to postpone certain activities until after the testing period had passed. Many of the activities on this list included some of the collaborative and integrated “outside the box” strategies we had found successful in engaging students in learning, particularly effective in reaching at-risk, disconnected, passive, and non-compliant learners.

Many teachers in the building feel that the school year now begins in November because this is when the “real” teaching can begin. How can we be improving learning and raising authentic achievement by cutting into dynamic instruction by two months each year?

Special Education

Needed Change:

Include language in No Child Left Behind that appropriately addresses the unique needs of students with exceptionalities (disabilities as well as gifts and talents) while continuing to set high standards for all students.

The reauthorization of NCLB should implement the following changes:

- Provide IEP teams with the authority to determine *how* individual students with special needs will participate in state-mandated assessments (whether through general assessments, assessments with accommodations, or alternate assessments), rather than insisting on 1% and 2% rigid caps on the number of students allowed to take alternate and/or modified assessments;
- Implement state assessment systems that track individual students' academic growth, and allow multiple measures of assessment to determine student progress;
- Regarding the Highly Qualified Teacher provisions in NCLB, multiple measures should be used to determine a Special Education teacher's professional competence;
- Authorize additional funding to support and expand gifted education programs.

Why the Change is Needed:

As educators we strongly support NCLB's efforts to ensure that students with exceptionalities are being held to high academic standards and are included in public accountability measures. The current legislation's mandates, however, run contrary to some of the premises in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA), which calls for individualized curriculum and assessments that determine success based on progress toward goals and objectives in a student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

Changes in the current law are needed for the following reasons:

- Some students who meet the eligibility criteria for receiving special education services cannot, by definition, meet grade level proficiency expectations at the same rate as their non-disabled peers;
- Many students with disabilities are being blamed for their school's inability to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), which increases negative perceptions and discrimination toward an already vulnerable population, and is reversing some hard-won inclusion efforts;
- Allowable state assessment accommodations do not always match IEP accommodations;
- High-stakes standardized testing has in some cases increased the level of dropout rates and retention of students with disabilities;
- Curriculum for students with disabilities is being narrowed to increase remediation efforts in reading and math while eliminating diverse learning opportunities such as vocational/career readiness, functional life-skills, and electives that keep special learners engaged in school and prepare them for life after graduation;
- There are an estimated three million children with gifts and talents in the U.S. whose educational needs go largely unaddressed.

Impact:

I have witnessed too often the hurtful consequences of a rigid law that does not adequately address the needs of students with exceptionalities. Higher dropout rates, lowered self-esteem, lack of interest in a narrowed curriculum, and humiliation of students with special needs are merely a few of the

unintended effects of NCLB. The recommendations outlined above have the potential to improve educational outcomes and facilitate engaged learning opportunities for all students with special needs.

Timely Test Results

Needed change:

Provide assessment information to teachers in a timely manner so that it can inform instruction that will improve teaching and learning.

NCLB reauthorization frameworks must address the amount of elapsed time between each state's standardized testing window and the date when student performance data is received. The timely delivery of test results must be an essential norm of standardized testing practice if educators are to effectively use student performance data to assess curricular programs, implement standards-based instruction, and report "Adequate Yearly Progress" as mandated by the current law.

Why the change is needed:

On a national scale, large disparities exist in the "timely" delivery of standardized test results to individual State Departments of Education, local school districts, and classroom teachers. In current practice, contracted and in-house scoring companies deliver test results to some states within thirty days of their respective testing windows while others await data for up to six months. States testing in October generally receive results between February and April; those testing in March receive results between July and September. Several states have cancelled scoring contracts due to a lack of timeliness and/or inaccuracy in scoring. Others have reluctantly opted to remove most or all written responses in order to shore up reporting schedules, thus possibly limiting higher-level thinking components of their assessments.

Delayed reporting of test results also compromises the ability of state and local educators to utilize the data in proactive decision making. Evaluations of curricular programs, school improvement plans, and individualized student learning goals are subsequently devalued when any piece of the performance picture is missing. Classroom teachers know that frequent, accurate feedback promotes effective educational growth. Delayed feedback leads to learner apathy and inaccurate assessment of instructional practices. Although a systematic testing schedule is not needed in order for states to effectively utilize student performance data, timely reporting of such data is essential.

Impact:

Each year I encourage my students to do their absolute best on state standardized tests, yet many remain unmotivated by assessments results that remain a mystery to them until well after the school year has ended. As my students set goals for academic improvement, their enthusiasm wanes if these performance "snapshots" lack the appropriate visibility when compared to classroom or district assessments. My students invest in the here and now. In order for a test to be taken seriously, feedback must be timely and reinforce or redirect individual goals. My students are empowered to take charge of their education by understanding and utilizing their individual performance data. My colleagues and I take the time to help them own the results and to recognize that standardized tests depict only one aspect of their academic portrait. Once students are well-informed, they become increasingly vested in their overall growth.

Timely, accurate test data enables students, parents, and educators to make sound educational decisions. Regardless of state testing schedules, data reporting must be delivered to state and local educators in a timely manner in order to advance collaborative decision making and ultimately student performance.

Replace Sanctions

Needed Change:

Evaluate current sanctions and replace them with proven methods of enhancing achievement

NCLB must develop an intervention model for schools that fail to meet AYP that is consistent with current research. If we are to close the achievement gap in our country, we must create a network of assistance and leadership for students, teachers and administrators in schools of need. We must also recognize that failure to meet AYP benchmarks may stem from various circumstances, none of which will be remedied through punitive sanctions. Rather, challenging educational environments can best be overcome with focused goal setting, encouragement and monitoring of individual student growth, and professional development and support.

Why the change is needed:

Should schools be held accountable? Of course! Should they be penalized and demoralized in the process? Of course not! We must begin to address the socioeconomic and cultural issues of why schools are not meeting AYP. Sanctions need to be replaced with funding for prescriptive improvement, celebration of growth, empowerment of teachers, and opportunities to attract staff with leadership and exemplary teaching skill-sets. Sanctions are reactive measures that have shown little to no improvement in school performance. They often undermine school efforts by creating a powerless environment. Rather than spend funds to fix a problem, funds should be focused on prevention and development.

Present NCLB School Improvement Sanctions for Schools Receiving Title I funds are intended to motivate schools to improve academic performance of those students/subgroups failing to meet AYP. But rather, they are humiliating punishments that further drain an already taxed system. In accord with current brain research, we need to strive to create schools for students and teachers that possess a balance between challenge and low threat. "Excess stress and threat in the school environment may be the single greatest contributor to impaired academic learning." (Jensen, *Teaching with the Brain in Mind*) Sanctions are threatening: to districts, which filters to administrators, then to classroom teachers and unfortunately to students. Schools failing to meet AYP are provided with no incentives to encourage improvement. Families in schools failing to meet AYP are offered Transfer/School choice options the third year of failing to meet AYP and tutoring provided by an outside source the fourth year with the sole financial burden for providing transportation and tutoring falling on the under performing school. Per the Gallop Poll four out of five respondents (80%) prefer offering help to students in schools in need of improvement. Only 17% prefer transferring those students to a different school. Schools with more sub-group populations also are at a higher risk of these sanctions simply by the make-up of their school, while other environments are rewarded with no sanctions simply as a result of a population that is more homogeneous. When an extremely diverse school boasting 25 sub groups fails to meet AYP in just one of those sub groups, the sanctions are the same. There is no mention of the growth and achievement of the students and staff in reaching AYP for the other 24 sub groups. The employment of these sanctions reeks of "placism": discrimination against people based on where they live. This is not to suggest lower standards for sub groups or challenging learning environments, but rather flexibility, time and support in realistically attaining them rather than punishment and shame through sanctions that do not address the issues. We can recommend that every child reach minimum competency, but it is foolish to think they will all do it at the same rate given the disparity that exists in communities across our country.

Impact:

Painted Stone, one of the most diverse elementary school in Kentucky, has increased their AYP from 13/14 subgroups to 18/19 subgroups in a one-year timeframe. This school is tailoring their services to meet the needs of their increasingly unique population. They are on their way to meeting the needs of all students in their school. Rather than celebrate the fruits of their labor, they incurred NCLB sanctions. It is defeating to school leaders, teachers and students who work so hard to make progress to be humiliated in district reports and local newspapers as failing. It also confuses parents and the community who are pleased with the education their children experience at that school. In addition, funds have been rerouted from other schools within the district that are meeting AYP to Painted Stone to enable the school to increase services. This weakens successful learning environments in the process.

A neighboring district, less than 10 miles from Painted Stone Elementary in Kentucky, boasts the highest per capita income in the state and has no significant populations to report as subgroups. The media gave them front-page headlines reporting that they have been successful in meeting NCLB standards in their schools. That is deceiving to the public, who has little knowledge of how scores are reported.

The fifth year of failing to meet AYP requires the school be restructured with one option being to replace all or most of the school staff, including the principal. The TOY from Illinois recently met a young man who attends Southern Illinois University and attributes much of his success to his teachers at Sherman Elementary School on Chicago's South Side. He credits them with having a direct positive influence on his life, keeping him on the straight and narrow. He ascertains that he was able to find a way out because of his teachers. Should he return to Sherman Elementary, he would not find his teacher there. They were the first school in the US to remove every faculty member and administrator from its payroll. NCLB and sanctions incurred from not achieving AYP are all about numbers, but any successful educator (or parent) knows that learning occurs through relationships, which unfortunately cannot be quantified into AYP data.

Parent Involvement

Needed change:

Develop and fund programs that promote meaningful parent engagement.

There is an irrefutable positive correlation between parental involvement and student achievement. The influences of the home are fundamental to a child arriving at school ready to learn. Parents plant the seeds for all future learning and instill in their children attitudes which will help them in their school careers. Involved parents who work together with teachers and demonstrate the importance of an education can make the difference between a child who succeeds, and a child who performs poorly. Teachers know that parents are doing the best they can with regard to raising their children and being advocates for education with the resources that they have available. No Child Left Behind needs strengthen this important home/school connection by funding parental education programs that will help children thrive. Furthermore, legislation needs to be developed which will provide working parents with paid time off for school visits, parent conferences and for volunteer activities in the schools their children attend.

We realize that, as professionals, we need to find new ways to reach out to parents. Spanish immersion programs for teachers must be funded to increase the number of bilingual teachers. Attendance advocates can help parents get truant students back in school by overcoming the obstacles that too many families face (transportation issues, daycare for younger students, lack of medical care). Family rooms in schools would provide educational materials, access to community resources, and even educational programs (such as English classes) to parents.

Why the change is needed:

There is great emphasis in America on teacher quality, and on how teacher quality is the single biggest factor impacting student success in the classroom. Parent effectiveness is no less important. Parents who read to their children, help with homework, attend parent conferences, demonstrate positive attitudes about schooling and education, volunteer to work in their child's school and encourage hard work, ensure their child's success in school, and ultimately in life. American parents work hard. Parents of disadvantaged students often work more than one job, thus making it difficult to attend school events and reinforce learning in the home. Children whose parents do not value education have no reason to value it themselves. Programs need to be funded which will provide parents of struggling students the information and strategies they need to be effective parents. Parental involvement needs to begin at birth and continue through high school. After all, children do not come with instruction booklets. Parents, particularly those of struggling students, need to learn how to be effective with regard to their children's educations, so that our nation does not have to pay the price later in the form of welfare or incarceration.

Impact:

In Omaha, the Family Room at Gomez Heritage Elementary school is always buzzing with parents reading to younger children, making educational games, or talking with a family advocate.

Parent conferences occur throughout the year in all public schools, however many parents do not or cannot attend a conference. Too many parents come to conferences and can't even talk directly to teachers because they don't speak the same language. Teachers report having conferences with high achieving students' parents, but seldom see the parents of students who aren't achieving. In addition, homes of disadvantaged students are often being run by just one parent whose time is very limited due

to work and household responsibilities. Many parents of struggling students were struggling students themselves, and need support and encouragement with regard to helping their own children be successful in school. Parents need to know what is happening in our public schools, yet they often do not attend school events or volunteer to help out in their child's school. They just cannot find the time or do not know what to do. Parents who are granted paid time off from work would be able to form the home/ school connections successful students are fortunate to enjoy. In addition schools need the funding and support to offer tutoring classes to parents whose children can not demonstrate basic skills. This measure will significantly improve student achievement in America's public schools.

English Language Learners

Needed Change:

Modify assessments and set realistic goals for English Language Learners.

As a result of a large number of ELLs performing poorly on standardized assessments, many schools fail to make AYP and are subject to a series of corrective actions. By definition, ELLs are not proficient in English. Consequently, ELLs will struggle with any assessment that is written in English. Also, very few ELLs are represented in the norm sample of state standardized assessments. Moreover, ELLs exit the subgroup once they attain English language proficiency. For AYP calculations, these students are counted for only two additional years in the ELL subgroup. Demonstrating improvement on annual standardized assessments for ELL subgroups is extremely difficult due to the constant ingress and egress of group members.

Why the change is needed:

Understanding how students acquire a second language can help explain the poor performance of ELLs on standardized assessments. NCLB mandates ELLs to be assessed in reading and writing after just one year in U.S. schools. Second language acquisition research shows it can take the average ELL five to seven years (or more depending on the student's formal education in his or her native language) to develop full academic language proficiency in English.

We propose including ELLs in the NCLB accountability system in a more appropriate manner. First, allow states to use AYP growth models that acknowledge progress in student achievement within the year or over time. Second, permit the use of alternative measures to provide a multidimensional perspective of student growth such as performance-based or holistic assessments. Third, increase research and investment in reliable and valid assessments for ELLs, including native language assessments. Additionally, until a normed and field tested English Language Arts assessment (with representative samples of ELLs) is developed, allow states to use the English Language Proficiency test to meet federal requirements. Lastly, states should also be allowed to incorporate additional measures into an accountability index to assess ELL performance in schools (NEA 2005). Such measures could include attendance, graduation and dropout rates, percentage of students taking honors and AP classes, and results from other state and local assessments (NEA 2005)

Impact:

I watched a third grade ELL who has only been in this country a little more than a year struggle with the reading passages on the state assessment. As per his accommodation, I orally translated each lengthy passage in Spanish. He was unable to employ good reading strategies such as underlining key information and referring back to passages to answer test questions. His responses included some written words in English with many linguistic errors. To a certain degree, his responses were a measure of his English proficiency rather than his academic aptitude. Additionally, a test section that would normally take an English native speaker two hours to complete, took this ELL student an entire day. It is important to note that ELLs are not guaranteed accommodations. For example, if a school is unable to find a translator for a particular language, the ELL is required to take the assessment without translation. Moreover, if a student does not receive a passing score on the assessment he will suffer academic consequences.

Highly Effective Teachers

Needed change:

Ensure every student is taught by a Highly Qualified Teacher who receives ongoing professional development.

This model should include these components: commitment to all students, the ability to manage and monitor student learning, and capacity for reflection. Effective teachers need to model lifelong learning by engaging in professional research, development and learning communities. Let us look to teachers **demonstrating** their effectiveness in the classroom rather than just the qualifications for entering it. Teacher effectiveness should be measured on two key indicators: improved student achievement **that is measured by individual growth model assessments** and evaluations by their principals or peers.

Why the change is needed:

Current NCLB legislation focuses on a teacher having the right certification to enter the classroom. This focus leaves little room for evaluating a teacher's current effectiveness based on multiple forms of assessment. In continuing to meet the diverse needs of our students, including students in special education and English Learners, we have to go beyond content knowledge to a teacher's proven effectiveness in raising student achievement.

Impact:

Susanne Frensley is an amazing teacher who was selected as Tennessee's 2007 Teacher of the Year. We have so many dedicated teachers across our country that to be selected as the best in your state is an incredible and humbling honor. Put yourself in Susanne's mindset several years ago. Because of her dedication to reach all students and her commitment to find alternative ways to make that happen for students who aren't "turned on" in some of the traditional course offerings, Susanne pursued coursework to be able to offer art history classes as an alternative fine arts course for the students at her high school. As students took the course, they found a teacher that could communicate with them, who demonstrated enthusiasm, a commitment to learning, and the ability to create a welcoming and safe environment for all. As a result of her efforts, the courses have been offered for several years with waiting lists to get in.

Now fast forward to today and put yourself in Susanne's classroom. You will see a teacher who is no longer considered a certified or highly qualified teacher under the current NCLB definitions as interpreted by her state. Just a few months after having been selected as the top teacher in her state, she has had to have two letters sent to the parents of her students letting them know that their child's teacher is no longer considered certified or highly qualified. All but two of the courses she is teaching will need to be dropped for the following year. When sharing her experience, she says, *"The real loss is experienced by the students. They thrive in these classes, and there is a place for all children in my classroom and I can now no longer offer them that opportunity."*

The current NCLB teacher quality section states that each individual state must have a plan to ensure that all teachers of core academic subjects are highly qualified. If a teacher is deemed not to be certified or highly qualified, parents are to be notified. The school has to establish annual, measurable objectives to ensure that they meet this requirement and report that information to the state. We would agree that being highly qualified is essential for valued results in the classroom, but Susanne's story demonstrates that the intent of the law is currently at odds with its application when it comes to

determining a highly qualified teacher. The opportunity is at hand to embrace the changes needed so that Susanne's story doesn't get repeated and our children are not cheated of what they deserve.

Effective Leadership

Needed change:

Include language in NCLB that addresses the need for administrators to become instructional leaders who conduct regular classroom observations and provide productive feedback to teachers.

No Child Left Behind will close the achievement gap if the law recognizes the importance of outstanding administrators. Their quest will be to lead our nation's educators to challenge all students to utilize their higher order thinking skills to reach their maximum potential. The new legislation must address the lack of wording in the current document to develop a definition of both a highly qualified and highly effective administrator. The law must also construct a mechanism that will provide continued support in both training and time that will provide administrators with the resources necessary to create an environment that is conducive to learning. NCLB legislation should include the development of a national certification program for administrators.

Why the change is needed:

Current NCLB legislation is focused solely upon the educator. The importance of having an effective teacher in the classroom cannot be under valued. Teachers are in direct contact with the students on a daily basis, and should be held to the highest standards. However, the most important central figure in the learning community remains the administrator. An administrator has the ability to change the climate of an entire building or district in either a positive or negative manner. Administrators do have a direct impact on the lives of the student population. Schools require strong leadership to thrive.

The role of administrator is challenging. Schools are filled with students who require an enormous amount of personal attention. In many cases, it is the school administrator who shoulders the brunt of that responsibility. This leaves little time for administrators to focus upon instructional leadership. Much less time is available to develop programs or relationships that will foster the growth of a positive and productive learning environment. As a result, educators work as individuals instead of a team. Equations like this yield negative results. Administrators become burnt out and unproductive. Teachers are more likely to become frustrated and ineffective. In the end, it is the students who suffer the most.

Presently, many new administrators are unprepared to take the jobs they are filling. A degree from a graduate program is not enough to prepare them for the rigors of an administrative position. There is a definite need for a formalized mentoring program that will give administrative prospects the foundation they need to find success. Additionally, there is the need for ongoing training and the time to develop programs that will lead to the creation of a positive climate at the building level. It is imperative that both administrators and educators be included in the development of this model. Their experience and input is crucial to the effectiveness of the implementation of the final product.

Impact:

The development of legislation that helps produce strong instructional leaders will have an immediate impact on the learning environment. Administrators will have both the ability and the tools required to help all members of the learning community create a focus and a vision that will challenge our children as never before.

Teaching for Tomorrow

To this point, we have discussed how No Child Left Behind must change to better meet the present needs of the students, parents, teachers and schools who make up our educational system. We'd like to close our statements by taking a moment to discuss how all of us – families, educators and policy makers alike – must work together to shape our children's future.

Thomas Jefferson wrote that “institutions must go hand in hand with the progress of the human mind” and advance to keep pace with the times. To prepare our children to meet the social, political, economic and environmental challenges of *their* times, education needs to expand its vision beyond traditional constructs. Policy and practice must reflect our need for responsiveness, vision, innovation, and collaboration. The curricula and methodologies we choose, the teaching we practice, and the assessments we use to measure our success must all work toward this goal.

Teaching for tomorrow means going beyond the core curricular focus of the industrial age. Success in the 21st century will require a flexibility of thought, an ability to identify problems and create solutions, and a willingness to change on personal, professional, and societal levels. Our curriculum must enable our students to think creatively as well as critically about their ever-changing status as civic participants, family members, and workers. It must foster the entrepreneurial spirit needed to thrive in a rapidly changing global market. It must engender a willingness to tackle complex social, political, and environmental challenges. It must develop information and communications literacy and corresponding ethics – critical areas in a global society whose every means of thinking and knowledge building are already being transformed by technology. Finally, our curriculum must teach the health, wellness and life skills necessary to become personally and socially responsible global citizens.

Already, we as teachers incorporate these new elements into our practice. Our work itself reflects the change we seek. We collaborate. We question our assumptions and challenge our own beliefs. We incorporate the development of artistic and creative thinking into all areas of teaching. We create curricular models that respond to the needs of our communities. We embrace technology as a tool, and study its effect on thought and communication. We view education as a lifelong process of growth in response to ever-changing needs.

We are educators. We know how to create the conditions for successful teaching and learning within our schools. To teach in the way we must, however – to ensure that all children, schools, and communities are equally prepared to face the challenges which lay before them -- we must also work to achieve Jefferson's vision of holistic *institutional* change. This can only be done in full partnership with leaders and policy makers. Today, we invite our leaders and policy makers to join our effort.

For No Child Left Behind to truly help prepare all children for the world before them, it must rise with us to this challenge. Education policy must embrace a broadening of content, and assessment systems must measure learning and growth comprehensively. They must assess the development of creative thought, interpersonal and intercultural communication, collaborative knowledge building, cross-contextual awareness, and other skills areas not readily measured by today's standardized instruments. They must enable communication of knowledge in a broad spectrum of media. As a whole, they must be *authentic* – as closely connected as possible to the learning context and purposes.

We cannot afford to hesitate. Our global competitors have already begun developing and implementing curricular models and assessment systems which acknowledge this 21st century need for flexibility and creativity. In a sense, these conditions highlight the very need we're describing – to address our weakened global standing in education, our educators, leaders and policy makers must think creatively, flexibly, and collaboratively about what we teach, how we teach it, and how we measure achievement.

To be sure, this is a tremendous challenge to all of us in education. But it is a challenge which plays directly to our strengths as a nation – a challenge to respond to a critical national and global issue with the vision, innovation, and creative spirit. America has always been at its best when responding to such challenges. We believe that by working together, we can become the change we seek.