



## **Moving Toward a Common Agenda to Transform Public Education**

### ***Research Identifies Key Areas of Consensus Among Over 30 Education, Civil Rights, Parents, Intergovernmental and Business Organizations***

This year Congress will reconsider the controversial No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act when it reauthorizes the Elementary and Secondary Education (ESEA) law. In light of this action, Communities for Quality Education (CQE) undertook a comprehensive review of the primary NCLB and related policy positions of 31 leading national education, civil rights, parent, intergovernmental and business groups.

Since NCLB's passage in 2001, 131 advocacy organizations have united around specific policy changes to NCLB. The "Joint Organizational Statement" focuses squarely on how to make the current NCLB work.<sup>1</sup> This research conducted by CQE identifies additional areas of consensus and looks beyond NCLB. Despite the diversity of groups examined, the findings reveal a surprising level of agreement on policy solutions to raise student achievement and improve schools. The results illustrate where the focus on public education should be -- the issues that unite key stakeholders rather than the polarizing areas of disagreement.

The following summary highlights key themes identified within the research on seven key priorities that could form the basis for a common agenda for public schools:

- Strengthening accountability systems
- Providing more help to struggling students and schools
- Finding new ways to recruit, reward and retain quality teachers
- Ensuring that students learn the skills needed to succeed in work and life
- Providing more individualized learning and supports in the classroom
- Making it easier for parents and communities to get involved in schools
- Providing adequate resources to support school improvement

Each of the key policies and themes identified reflect significant support by multiple organizations.

#### **I. Strengthen Accountability Systems**

The Commission on No Child Left Behind believes "that the nation has a responsibility to ensure that every child achieves at proficient levels linked to high standards. At the same time, we cannot ignore the significant progress, often under extraordinary circumstances, made by some schools in raising student achievement. We believe a more accurate and fair method would give credit to schools that are indeed making substantial progress, even if they are not yet at proficiency, as long as their students are on track to reach that level in a reasonable time. Therefore, the Commission recommends improving the accuracy and fairness of AYP calculations by allowing states to include achievement growth in such calculations." *Aspen Institute, see page 3*

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<sup>1</sup> The Joint Organizational Statement can be found online at [http://www.edaccountability.org/Joint\\_Statement.html](http://www.edaccountability.org/Joint_Statement.html).

“Great care should be taken to ensure that the testing process does not become a demoralizing factor for students, parents, teachers, and administrators. Performance standards should not be limited to standardized testing but should also include broad measures of outcomes such as employment and participation in higher education.”

*National League of Cities, see page 17*

### **Key Themes:**

- Measure the progress of every individual child and school based upon academic growth
- Invest in better data systems to measure each child’s progress
- Improve the use of testing, assessments, and other school performance measures
- Accurately measure school performance by relying on multiple indicators of progress
- Guarantee the publics’ and parents’ right-to-know that schools are improving and students are making progress

## **II. Prioritize Help for Struggling Students and Schools**

“For too many communities, the school improvement process has felt like an exercise in labeling and public humiliation, without accompanying help or support.”

*Kati Haycock of The Education Trust, see page 25*

“To genuinely improve the educational opportunities for students under the law, parents want the option to select supplemental education services before transferring their children to another public school.” *Public Education Network, see page 31*

### **Key Themes:**

- Reward progress instead of punishing struggling schools
- Help students by offering high quality tutoring and other services

## **III. Ensure Teacher Quality**

“Federal, state and local educational agencies should make strategic use of stronger financial and professional incentives to attract and keep effective teachers, especially in schools that have large numbers of minority students.” *NAACP, see page 31*

“The U.S. Conference of Mayors calls for mayors to work with their public school system to create policies, programs and supportive strategies that encourage the retention of quality experienced teachers in urban schools.” *U.S. Conference of Mayors, see page 34*

### **Key Themes:**

- Reward teachers
- Attract quality teachers to low-performing schools
- Support quality teacher preparation and ongoing professional development programs

#### **IV. Teach Children Skills Needed for Success in Work and Life**

“Increase opportunities for high school students to participate in Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, honors and appropriate industry-recognized certification courses.” *Business Coalition for Student Achievement, see page 41*

“The institution of the American high school must undergo sweeping improvements in order to prepare all students for today’s economy. High schools must reject the notion that students with different abilities should be prepared for different futures. They must be willing and able to prepare all students to achieve both in postsecondary education and in the workforce without remediation.” *National Association of State Boards of Education, see page 42*

##### **Key Themes:**

- Ensure all students are fully prepared for jobs, college, or military service
- Promote high standards

#### **V. Provide More Individualized Learning and Support in Classrooms**

“NBCSL has assessed the various programs available to help improve the education of African American students, we have reached the conclusion that reducing class size and focusing on reading makes the biggest difference for African American students.”  
*National Black Caucus of State Legislators, see page 47*

“The quality of our nation’s school buildings is one area in which the lack of funding is most readily apparent. Despite clear evidence that students taught in safe, secure and structurally sound learning environments tend to perform better academically, too many of our children spend their days in sub-par facilities.” *Center for American Progress, see page 49*

##### **Key Themes:**

- Reduce School and Class Sizes
- Support Safe and Modern Classrooms

#### **VI. Promote Parental and Community Involvement**

“The President and Congress should increase federal support for Parent Assistance Programs. Testing and accountability are at the heart of NCLB, but parents are the backbone of the law. Yet, many parents are largely unaware of the rights and responsibilities they have under NCLB, and the Administration has requested zero dollars for Parent Assistance Programs every year since enactment of the law. NCLB simply cannot work unless it provides parents the supports they need to take advantage of the opportunities NCLB presents and to fulfill their responsibilities under NCLB.”  
*National Council of La Raza, see page 53*

“Parents must be empowered to be effective advocates for their child. Parents need specific tools, training and other technical assistance in order to make informed and appropriate decisions about their child’s educational needs. Parents with children in low performing schools must be informed and educated about options available under NCLB, including the availability of supplemental educational services or transferring to higher performing schools.” *Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities, see page 51*

**Key Themes:**

- Support parent and community involvement
- Make schools the centers of communities by linking social services
- Increase access to preschool
- Forge business-school partnerships

**VII. Provide Adequate Resources to Support School Improvement**

“Education is in the national interest and merits continued federal financial support. NACo supports full funding and flexibility to negotiate achievement measures for meeting the federal goals of the No Child Left Behind Act.” *National Association of Counties, see page 64*

“Congress should support full funding for the real costs of achieving proficiency for all children...Federal policy and funds should focus on supports and incentives for raising student achievement; federal funds should not be withheld from struggling schools or their states, as this would reduce financial resources at a time when additional assistance is necessary.” *National Governors Association, see page 65*

**Key Theme:**

- Deliver adequate federal resources