



**Building on Results:  
A Blueprint for Strengthening  
The *No Child Left Behind Act***

**Secretary Margaret Spellings  
U.S. Department of Education**

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Margaret Spellings

*Secretary*

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## Introduction

Five years ago, Americans united behind a revolutionary idea: Every child can learn.

With these words, on Jan. 8, 2002, President Bush signed the landmark *No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)* into law. Passed by an overwhelming bipartisan majority in Congress, it was designed to end the “soft bigotry of low expectations” so that, as the president said, “all students will have a better chance to learn, to excel, and to live out their dreams.”

The law, which reauthorized the 1965 *Elementary and Secondary Education Act*, signaled a fundamental and common-sense change in American education. Academic standards would be set by states, schools would be held accountable for results, and the federal government would support both with increased resources and flexibility. And it’s working, with test scores rising and achievement gaps narrowing.

All of these results point to the law’s ultimate goal: steady academic gains until all students can read and do math at or above grade level, closing for good the nation’s achievement gap between disadvantaged and minority students and their peers. “This law finally puts muscle behind the attempt to close that gap,” said New York City Schools Chancellor Joel Klein. “We can no longer mask the deficiencies of some students with outsized gains by others.”

The *No Child Left Behind Act* recognizes what truly makes a difference in providing a quality education. It calls for a highly qualified teacher in the core subjects in every classroom; the use of proven, research-based instructional methods; and timely information and options for parents. Schools that underperform are held accountable, providing their students with free tutoring or transfer to a better-performing public school. In other words, children’s education needs are placed first—where they belong.

The law has helped revitalize the states’ constitutional leadership role in education. Before *NCLB* was passed, less than half the states fully measured their students against clear academic standards. Today, every state and the District of Columbia hold schools accountable for improving academic achievement. Every state also participates in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)—the Nation’s Report Card—allowing policymakers and parents alike to compare progress. “The premise of *NCLB* is clear and essential,” said former Colorado Gov. Bill Owens. “All children can learn. Not just children from homes of privilege, children from suburbia or children from a certain ethnic background.”

Federal resources have been increased to match this enhanced role. Total federal funding for *No Child Left Behind* rose 34 percent between 2001 and 2006. Funding for Title I schools serving low-income students rose 45 percent. States and school districts also have unprecedented flexibility in how they use federal funds in exchange for greater accountability for results.

“*NCLB* has helped by setting very clear, very high achievement targets for all students,” said Washington, D.C., public schoolteacher Jason Kamras, the 2005 National Teacher of the Year. “I think that’s an incredibly positive step in American public education.”

## ***No Child Left Behind Is Working***

The *No Child Left Behind Act* is challenging our students to succeed and our schools to improve. Early data comparisons suggest that they are responding.

In the 1990s, reading remained stagnant for fourth-graders nationwide, according to NAEP, while achievement gaps in math grew larger for African-American and Hispanic nine- and 13-year-olds. By contrast, according to several recent NAEP assessments:

- More reading progress has been made by nine-year-olds in five years (1999-2004) than in the previous 28 years combined;
- Math scores for fourth- and eighth-graders and nine- and 13-year-olds have reached new heights; and
- Achievement gaps in reading and math between African-American and Hispanic nine-year-olds and their white peers have fallen to all-time lows.

This progress has occurred as the academic bar has been raised and our schools have become more diverse. In fact, some of the largest gains are being made by children once left behind, including many in big-city public schools. Under *NCLB*, fourth-graders in a majority of sampled urban school districts made greater gains in reading and math than students nationwide on average, according to the NAEP Trial Urban District Assessments. The Council of the Great City Schools also reported double-digit gains in large urban districts for fourth-graders in both subjects between 2002 and 2005.

These positive national results are reflected in state proficiency scores in individual schools:

- **North Glen Elementary (Glen Burnie, Md.)**—In 2003, just 57 percent of students in this high-poverty school rated proficient in reading, while 46 percent were proficient in math. By 2005, those numbers had risen to 82 and 84 percent, respectively. African-American students improved their math proficiency by an astounding 47 percentage points. “They’ve taken advantage of all the aspects of the *No Child Left Behind* law and they’ve been able to raise their scores and make sure that no child is left behind in their school,” said Mrs. Laura Bush.

They are also reflected in school districts:

- **Garden Grove School District (Garden Grove, Calif.)**—All but two of the district’s schools met or exceeded their adequate yearly progress (AYP) goals in the 2004–05 school year. Three-fourths of the district’s students spoke English as a second language, and nearly six in 10 were from low-income families. “We use the data behind *No Child Left Behind* to set the targets we want to hit. We align all our actions and resources to hit those targets. And our teachers believe the kids can do it,” said Garden Grove Superintendent Laura Schwalm.

And the results are reflected throughout states:

- **New York**—Fourth-grade math achievement rose 11 points between 2002 and 2004, while the achievement gap for both African-American and Hispanic students narrowed by 10 points. A record 70 percent of New York’s fourth-graders met all state Learning Standards in English in 2005, 22 points better than in 1999—including, for the first time, a majority of African-American and Hispanic students.
- **Georgia**—More than 70 percent of third-grade English language learners scored proficient or better in reading in 2004–05, up 23 percentage points from 2002. Among third-graders with disabilities, 81 percent scored proficient or better in reading, up 26 percentage points.

Of course, test scores do not tell the whole story. Ninety percent of teachers have met *NCLB*’s highly qualified teacher requirements—a bachelor’s degree, state certification and demonstrated expertise in the subject matter taught. At-risk students are getting help earlier, while children with disabilities are receiving more classroom time and attention, according to the independent Center on Education Policy. And students in the groundbreaking Reading First program receive on average 100 extra minutes per week of proven, research-based instruction from teachers, tutors and reading coaches.

With the help of *No Child Left Behind*, and working together as legislators, policymakers and educators, we’ve been able to turn the tide. “*NCLB* called on educators to embrace a new challenge—not just access for all, but achievement for all. Thousands upon thousands are answering that call,” said Kati Haycock, director of the non-partisan Education Trust. “A culture of achievement is taking hold in our schools, and we are better poised to confront the new challenges.”

### **Building on Results: A Blueprint for Strengthening the *No Child Left Behind Act***

In five short years, the *No Child Left Behind Act* has evolved from an idea to a law to a way of life. Today, educators, public officials and the media are engaged in a nationwide conversation, debating whether academic standards are high enough, assessments are fair enough, and enforcement is tough enough. This conversation would not be occurring without *No Child Left Behind*.

As we approach the law’s reauthorization, the conversation must focus on how to turn around struggling schools and improve the academic performance of older students. *No Child Left Behind* has given us the data to see what is working—and what is not. One of the biggest challenges is the performance of late middle and high school students. Between 1999 and 2004, reading scores for 17-year-olds fell three points, and math scores fell one point, according to NAEP. Achievement gaps between Hispanic and white 17-year-olds actually grew wider in both subjects.

Achievement by students requires action by schools. In 1983, the *A Nation at Risk* report called on high school students to take a minimum of three years each of math and science to graduate. A generation later, less than half the states have met this goal. A recent survey found that only one in five high school graduates in the workforce say they were challenged by their coursework while in school.

We also must reward teachers and principals who make the greatest progress in improving student performance and closing the achievement gap. This is especially important in high-poverty schools, where students are less likely to be taught by a credentialed teacher. To speed up our progress, we must work to match the very best teachers with our most challenging schools.

This is critical for America's competitiveness. Our 15-year-olds ranked 24th out of 29 developed nations in math literacy and problem-solving, according to the 2003 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). The U.S. has fallen to ninth place in the world in high school graduation rates among young adults, according to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

Compounding the problem, about 1 million students drop out every year, making the "million-dollar mistake" — the difference in lifetime earnings between the average high school dropout and bachelor's degree recipient. Less than half of the students who *do* graduate are ready for college-level math and science coursework, according to ACT, Inc.

Since the passage of *NCLB*, research has shown a convergence in the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in both college and the global workforce. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, about 90 percent of the fastest-growing jobs require postsecondary education or training. Math and science have become the new currencies of the global economy. Our students must have the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in this changed world.

## **Building on Results: The Policy**

To ensure our students' success, we will build on *NCLB*'s results in the following ways:

- **A stronger effort must be made to close the achievement gap through high state standards and accountability.**
- **Middle and high schools must offer more rigorous coursework that better prepares students for postsecondary education or the workforce.**
- **States must be given flexibilities and new tools to restructure chronically underperforming schools, and families must be given more options.**

The Bush administration will continue to work with Congress to give educators, policymakers and parents the tools to get the job done, without straying from *NCLB*'s core principles, including:

- All students reading and doing math at or above grade level by 2014;
- Annual assessments and disaggregation of data to close the achievement gap;
- Qualified teachers in core academic subjects in every classroom; and
- Timely information and options for all parents.

*No Child Left Behind* is a work in progress: every day, we learn what works so students can make greater progress. Five years after the law's passage, we have collected more data than ever before about the academic performance of our students and schools. This information enables us to take action—and act we must.



## **Building on Results: Policy Summaries**

1. ***Every Child Performing at or Above Grade Level by 2014.*** States continue to measure students individually and by student group, and participate in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Information about the results is made transparent and readily available to parents. Schools missing adequate yearly progress goals are held accountable and given assistance to turn around their performance.
  
2. ***Flexibility for Innovation and Improvement.*** States are given additional flexibility to improve student achievement. Innovative methods to measure progress are utilized, such as growth models. Districts can prioritize support based on a school's success. Innovative approaches are permitted for schools making progress in assessing students with disabilities and teaching English to limited English proficient (LEP) students. Essential reforms will support state efforts to ensure the safety of students.
  
3. ***Challenging Our Students and Preparing Them to Succeed.*** States must demonstrate real progress in accurately reporting and improving high school graduation rates. States implement more rigorous standards so that graduates receive a meaningful diploma. Increased and dedicated Title I resources are provided to help at-risk older students stay in school and on the path to graduation. Expansion of Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate programs will improve the availability of rigorous coursework. An Adjunct Teacher Corps composed of professionals from the math and science fields will provide expertise and support in the classroom.
  
4. ***Helping Teachers Close the Achievement Gap.*** A Teacher Incentive Fund rewards teachers and principals whose students make exceptional progress. The President's Math Now for Elementary and Middle School Students programs promote and implement proven, research-based instructional methods. Science assessments are factored into state accountability calculations. The effective Reading First program is strengthened to help more children learn to read by grade three. The Striving Readers program is expanded to help struggling older students catch up academically.
  
5. ***Strengthening Public Schools and Empowering Parents.*** The Title I School Improvement Fund is expanded to help schools create better outcomes for students. Students attending underperforming schools are given new school choice options. New Promise Scholarships are created for low-income students in chronically low-performing schools. Charter school options are expanded. Supplemental Educational Services (SES) is strengthened and expanded, particularly for students with disabilities, limited English proficient students and students living in rural areas.

## Building on Results: Policy Proposals

### 1. Every Child Performing at or Above Grade Level by 2014

#### *Overview*

We remain committed to ensuring that all students can read and do math at grade level or better by 2014. This is the basic purpose and mission of the *No Child Left Behind Act*. According to the 2006 National Assessment of Title I Interim Report, four states are currently on track for meeting the goal—Delaware, Kansas, North Carolina, and Oklahoma. With its Starting Strong Initiative, South Dakota has advanced the timetable, calling on all third-graders to be proficient in reading and math or on track to proficiency by 2010. With high standards, accountability and decisions based on sound data and science, we believe students in all states can achieve similar success.

#### *Summary of Proposals*

##### a. **Maintain Annual Academic Assessments and Accountability**

Information is at the core of *NCLB*. Over the past five years, states have developed the ability to provide regular and reliable reporting about student achievement. Through annual assessments, parents now receive information about how well their child is doing in school and about how well a school is educating all children. To complete the current *NCLB* requirements, states will add science to their assessment systems at three grade levels by 2008.

Two critical components of *NCLB*—measuring achievement and holding schools accountable for results—must continue. First, states will continue to assess students in reading / language arts and math in each of grades 3–8. To help states ensure they are reaching towards high standards and to provide a comparative benchmark, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) will continue to be administered in the fourth and eighth grades in reading and math, with all states participating. Second, in keeping with current law, states will report student assessment results to parents and hold schools accountable for improving the performance of all students. The disaggregation of achievement results and the required 95 percent participation rate, hallmarks of *NCLB*, will continue to ensure that students in critical subgroups (race, ethnicity, English language proficiency, disability, and socio-economic status) remain the focus of attention.

##### b. **Promote High State Academic Standards**

The administration will maintain its commitment to local control as states continue to establish the required academic standards and assessments for students. To support greater transparency, states must report the proficiency rates for state and NAEP assessments on the same public report card. Further, the Department of Education will support cross-state comparisons by providing a platform for states and the general public to analyze and compare standards across the nation.

## 2. Flexibility for Innovation and Improvement

### *Overview*

The real work of educating America's students does not happen at the federal level. It happens in the states and schools. States and localities have the primary responsibility to direct and manage education. They should have the opportunity to innovate and show creativity as they work to meet the fundamental goals of *No Child Left Behind*.

Additional flexibility, options and tools will be offered to help states improve their accountability systems and demonstrate gains in student achievement. These include the use of growth models to measure progress and the ability to focus interventions and resources on students who have yet to reach grade level.

### *Summary of Proposals*

#### a. Greater Use of Growth Models

One clear benefit from *NCLB*'s focus on transparency of information—and from increased federal resources for that purpose—is improved data systems in the states. Many states can now implement more sophisticated accountability systems to measure and follow the progress of individual students. A growth-based accountability model is one of those systems.

For those states with well-established assessments and robust data systems, growth models will be permitted in their overall accountability systems. Growth models allow states 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. They may be particularly useful 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. This information can be used to identify not only struggling students seeking to master state standards, but also proficient students at risk of stalling and falling behind. It is important to point out that a growth model is a tool to achieve proficiency by 2014, not a loophole to avoid it.

For a growth model to work under **Building on Results**, it must follow these core principles:

- **Growth Toward Standards**—The growth model must ensure that all students are proficient by 2014 in reading / language arts and math while setting individual student progress measures to ensure that achievement gaps are closing for all student groups. The annual goals must be based on grade-level proficiency, not on student background or school characteristics.
- **Assessments and Data**—Schools and districts must be held accountable for the performance of each student subgroup in reading / language arts and mathematics in grades 3–8. Student participation rates and one other academic indicator must be included as separate academic indicators in the state accountability system.

The use of these principles to design a state's growth model will ensure that accountability has a clear and defined meaning—accelerated growth toward the 2014 goal, not just an arbitrary amount of progress.

b. **Flexibility Through Prioritized Support for Schools**

Another result of improved data systems and rigorous accountability mechanisms is the opportunity to treat schools appropriately based on their record in meeting accountability targets. Capitalizing on improved state data systems, states will be able to prioritize their school improvement activities based on the specific needs of the school.

To make the accountability provisions of *NCLB* more meaningful, states will have more flexibility to precisely focus their technical assistance, interventions and direct resources to schools identified for improvement, corrective action or restructuring. This flexibility will help states do what is necessary to enable all students to read and do math at grade level or better by 2014 in a more effective and efficient manner.

For example, schools will be able to focus their choice options and SES resources on students not yet proficient, so long as the “all-students” group meets the state’s proficiency target and the school meets the 95 percent participation requirement for assessments. This would apply to schools in both school improvement and corrective action status. Schools undergoing restructuring, on the other hand, still must offer choice and SES to all currently eligible students. To ensure parents are properly informed of their choice and SES options on a timely basis, only school districts that notify parents of their choice and SES options no later than 30 days prior to the beginning of the school year will be permitted to prioritize their support activities.

c. **Provide More Flexibility in Use of Federal Funds**

Current state and local flexibility provisions are too limited to provide significant, meaningful flexibility to states and districts. Under **Building on Results**, states’ ability to efficiently and effectively direct federal resources will be expanded. We will streamline the application process for federal support and afford states greater flexibility in allocating federal funds throughout the state.

Transferability, a useful tool that helps states and districts tailor federal programs and funds to meet local needs, will also be expanded. The amount of funds that may be transferred will be raised to 100 percent. Currently, states and local education agencies making adequate yearly progress may transfer just 50 percent of applicable funds. *Perkins Act* funds will be included in the pool of funds that could be transferred. Furthermore, the transferability provisions will be revised to make it easier for local education agencies (LEAs), in consultation with private schools, to consolidate and transfer funds reserved for private school students and teachers.

The secretary of education will be permitted to respond comprehensively when there is a natural disaster or other major emergency (as was the case following the 2005 Gulf Coast hurricanes). Finally, additional rural districts will be given flexibility that is currently available only to the smallest rural districts.

d. **Improved Assessments and Accountability for Students with Disabilities**

*NCLB* is committed to the academic achievement of students with disabilities. Therefore, students with disabilities must participate fully and meaningfully in state assessments. To ensure districts receive credit for their work in helping these students make academic progress, states will have the option of assessing a small group of students with disabilities based on alternate and modified achievement standards. These standards must meet high quality standards and promote challenging instruction so students with disabilities can reach the highest possible levels of achievement.

e. **Accelerate English Language Acquisition for LEP Students**

By disaggregating achievement data by student subgroups, *NCLB* has focused attention on the academic achievement of our nation's more than 5 million-strong and growing population of LEP students. **Building on Results** will maintain a strong commitment to assessment and accountability for all LEP students in the content areas as a driving force for improving instruction and outcomes. More attention will be focused on English language acquisition as the foundation for academic achievement. To acknowledge the close relationship between the development of English language proficiency and academic content proficiency, as well as to create incentives to accelerate the learning of English, state accountability systems will include a provision to recognize schools making significant progress in moving LEP students toward English language proficiency.

f. **Support Innovation in the Safe and Drug-Free Schools Program**

Many schools and education agencies have made great strides toward creating safe and drug-free learning environments. The 2006 Indicators of School Crime and Safety found declining crime rates in our nation's schools. But we must do more. The Safe and Drug-Free Schools (SDFS) grant program was designed to support the creation of positive and safe learning environments through education and prevention activities. To ensure this objective is carried out, states will be given funds to provide school districts with training, technical assistance and information regarding effective models and strategies to create safe, healthy and secure schools. In addition, the current SDFS national programs will be consolidated into a single, more flexible discretionary program focused on four areas: Emergency Planning, Preventing Violence and Drug Use, School Culture and Climate, and Emerging Needs.

### 3. **Challenging Our Students and Preparing Them to Succeed**

#### *Overview*

When 90 percent of the fastest-growing jobs require postsecondary education or training, it is unacceptable that almost a third of incoming high school students—and about half of African-American and Hispanic students—do not make it to graduation day on time. Many are not challenged by their coursework; others fall behind in earlier years and do not catch up in the more fast-paced high school environment.

Since the National Governors Association held its National Education High School Summit in 2005, many states have worked to increase the rigor of high schools. The reauthorization of *NCLB* must set a national expectation of real high school reform. **Building on Results** establishes the expectation that every high school student graduate on time with a diploma that indicates readiness for success in postsecondary education and the 21st-century workforce.

## *Summary of Proposals*

### a. **Improve Graduation Rates**

There can be no debate about the need to increase the number of high school students who graduate with a meaningful diploma and relevant skills. All 50 governors have agreed to use a more accurate graduation rate calculation in the National Governors Association's Graduation Rate Compact. By no later than 2011–12, all states must report school-level, disaggregated results of their four-year cohort graduation rates in state accountability calculations. In the meantime, all states must report district-level disaggregated results of the Average Freshmen Graduation Rate (AFGR) in state accountability calculations.

### b. **Ensure That Students Graduate Ready to Succeed**

In this global economy, it is critical that the K–12 and higher education communities work together to build common expectations for high school students so they are fully prepared to enter college or the workforce with the skills they need to succeed. Under **Building on Results**, states must develop by 2010–11 course-level academic standards for two years of English and math that will prepare high school graduates to succeed in college or the workplace. By 2012–13, states will administer assessments aligned to these standards and publicly report the extent to which all students are on track to enter college or the workplace fully prepared.

While these college-ready standards and assessments will not be required to be used as part of the accountability system, states will continue to use their current *NCLB* high school assessment for accountability decisions. States will receive technical assistance to improve their high school content standards and assessments.

### c. **Promote Rigor in High School Coursework**

Rigorous coursework in high schools is critical to ensuring that students are learning the skills they need to compete in the global economy. Low-income students who complete a rigorous high school course of study are eligible for an Academic Competitiveness Grant (ACG) to help with college costs. The ACG program provides additional grant aid to low-income first- and second-year college students who complete a rigorous program of study in high school. Through **Building on Results**, we can increase academic rigor and simultaneously increase the number of students who may receive those grants by making Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate classes available to more students and by training teachers to lead them. To promote student participation in courses required for success in college, states will report completion rates of these college readiness courses by relevant subgroups.

### d. **Increase Funding for High Schools That Serve Low-Income Students**

To ensure that high schools have the resources to help low-income students, there will be a substantial increase in funds for Title I high school students. Currently, Title I funds tend to be primarily allocated toward elementary schools. Districts will have to give their high schools at least 90 percent of the high schools' proportionate share of the increased funds. A corresponding funding increase will ensure that elementary schools' Title I programs are not negatively affected.



e. **Provide Specific Expertise Through a New Adjunct Teacher Corps**

Many schools, particularly in low-income areas, suffer from a lack of qualified or expert instructors. The Adjunct Teacher Corps will offer an opportunity for talented and dedicated professionals from outside the teaching profession to share their expertise in core academic subjects, especially math and science, in middle and high school classrooms. Competitive grants will be provided for school districts to engage in partnerships with other public and private organizations and institutions to take advantage of the expertise in their communities.

#### 4. **Helping Teachers Close the Achievement Gap**

##### *Overview*

The academic progress made by states and students in the last five years is testament to the fact that the achievement gap is not intractable. However, while we have narrowed the gap, we are a long way from closing it. Teachers are instrumental to this effort. They must be equipped with the most current, research-based instructional tools to help them do their jobs. We need to find ways to get our best teachers into our neediest schools. And we must offer more intensive instruction and tutoring to help children catch up and keep pace.

##### *Summary of Proposals*

a. **Reward Exceptional Teaching**

Bringing every student up to grade level demands high-quality teachers. The Teacher Incentive Fund will provide resources to help states and school districts develop compensation systems that reward teachers and principals who make progress in raising student achievement and closing achievement gaps. Teachers and principals who choose to work in the neediest schools can also be rewarded.

b. **Focus On Mathematics Achievement**

According to a 2004 Department study, only a small fraction of mathematics coursework in our nation's middle schools has scientific evidence of effectiveness. To strengthen the teaching of math in elementary and middle schools, President Bush has proposed the Math Now program, which will provide resources to help teachers use scientifically proven practices, including those soon to be recommended by the National Math Panel, so that students enter high school ready to take challenging and advanced coursework.

**Math Now for Elementary School Students** will provide competitive grants to improve math instruction for elementary school students so that they learn the skills necessary to take and pass algebra in middle school.

**Math Now for Middle School Students** will provide grants to improve the instruction of middle school students who are performing significantly below grade level so that they may learn the skills necessary to take and pass algebra and other challenging courses.

**c. Focus On Science Achievement**

In introducing the American Competitiveness Initiative in 2006, President Bush announced his commitment to improving student achievement in math and science in order to maintain our nation's competitive advantage. Including science in *NCLB* accountability determinations will encourage a greater focus on this critical subject and ultimately lead to greater science achievement. Beginning in 2008–09, disaggregated results from science assessments at three grade levels will factor into state accountability calculations. The reauthorized law will incorporate an expectation that all students achieve proficiency in science by the 2019–20 school year.

**d. Build Expertise in Reading Instruction Through Reading First**

The administration is committed to ensuring that every child can read by the third grade. To meet this goal, the administration will continue to invest in and expand Reading First, the largest, most focused and most successful early reading initiative ever undertaken in this country. The program applies scientifically based reading research and instructional tools and assessments to help teachers improve student achievement. To date, more than 5,600 schools in 1,600 districts nationwide have participated in Reading First. State programs funded by Reading First have served approximately 1.8 million students, and more than 100,000 teachers have benefited from its professional development.

The early results are extremely promising. For the 2004–05 school year, students in Reading First schools demonstrated increases in reading achievement across all performance measures. The percentage of second-grade students who met or exceeded proficiency in reading on Reading First outcome measures of fluency increased from 33 percent in 2003–04 to 39 percent in 2004–05 for economically disadvantaged students; from 27 to 32 percent for LEP students; from 34 to 37 percent for African-American students; from 30 to 39 percent for Hispanic students; and from 17 to 23 percent for students with disabilities.

**e. Offer Teachers Tools to Reach Older Struggling Readers**

The Striving Readers program, which serves students in grades 6–12, will fund school-level instructional strategies designed to increase reading achievement through targeted, intensive intervention and quality literacy instruction throughout the curriculum. The program will measure its impact and success through a rigorous experimental research evaluation process. On the strength of the program's success, Striving Readers will expand its reach to serve a greater number of struggling readers.



## 5. Strengthening Public Schools and Empowering Parents

### *Overview*

Before the *No Child Left Behind Act* was passed, parents—especially those of modest means—were often relegated to the education sidelines. When their child’s school did not improve, they were given few alternatives. *NCLB* has empowered families with new options, including the choice to attend a better-performing public school or a public charter school. The law also provides free tutoring and after-school help, called Supplemental Educational Services (SES), to qualified low-income students. Hundreds of thousands have taken advantage of this opportunity. Finally, *NCLB* enables teachers, parents and community leaders to work together to turn around chronically underperforming schools. Together, these policies provide an incentive to public schools to improve or lose their customers.

We remain committed to restructuring and fixing troubled public schools. But we must also provide more parents the opportunity to make appropriate choices for their children. To that end, we support the spread of charter schools and new Promise Scholarships to meet the growing demand.

### *Summary of Proposals*

#### a. **Invest in the School Improvement Fund**

Funds will be targeted to ensure improvement in some of the nation’s most challenging schools. School Improvement Grants will support implementation of the schools’ improvement plans and will assist states’ efforts to closely monitor and review those plans for each school while providing technical assistance to turn around low-performing schools.

#### b. **Strengthen School Restructuring**

Some schools that are subject to restructuring for chronic underperformance are simply not pursuing the quality and depth of reform that will lead to adequate yearly progress. Current law permits these schools to implement only minor reforms as corrective actions even when they are in the fifth year of program improvement. Under **Building on Results**, the menu of actions authorized under restructuring will commit these schools either to make substantial changes in staff or to reconstitute the schools’ governance structure, except in special circumstances (e.g., when a school is in restructuring status only because of the performance of one subgroup).

Additionally, consistent with state law, the reauthorized law would permit operation of a school in restructuring status to be turned over to an elected official such as a city mayor, in addition to a state education agency as allowed under current law.

#### c. **Enhance Choice Through Public and Private School Scholarships**

The administration strongly believes in public education. We also believe that private schools are an important and effective alternative for many parents, especially those whose children attend chronically underperforming schools. Parents deserve the opportunity to have their child attend a quality school. Public schools that go into restructuring status will offer Promise Scholarships, which would allow low-income students in grades 3–12 to attend a private school or an

out-of-district public school, or receive intensive tutoring. Federal funds will follow the child to his or her new school. This money will be supplemented by a federal scholarship of \$2,500, for an average total scholarship of approximately \$4,000. Students attending a private school under these provisions would take their state's assessment or a standard national assessment in the same grades and subjects assessed in their original school. Students selecting intensive tutoring would receive scholarships of up to \$3,000.

The need to offer low-income parents the option of private schools for their children is intensified by a lack of real public school choices in some districts. Nationally, only around 1 percent of eligible students have exercised *NCLB*'s public school choice option and transferred to a higher-performing public school. This low participation rate is often due to districts' inability to accommodate parents' transfer requests because high-quality local public school options are lacking.

For communities that want to expand local options for parents, the administration will provide additional resources through a competitive grant program known as Opportunity Scholarships, with preference given to areas with large numbers of schools in improvement status. Modeled after the Washington D.C., choice program that the federal government has funded since 2004, this program would enable students to attend a private school through a locally designed scholarship program. Families could also seek additional tutoring for their children. The scholarship amount provided to a student would be the sum of the tuition, fees and costs, including any necessary transportation expenses, for the school they would attend, or an amount equivalent to the average per-pupil expenditure in public schools in the state in which the recipient resides, whichever is less. To be eligible for Opportunity Scholarships, students must be from low-income families and be assigned to schools identified for improvement, corrective action or restructuring.

**d. Provide Additional Staffing Freedom at the Most Troubled Schools**

Schools that are required to be restructured will be authorized by Title I law to remove limitations on teacher transfers from their collective bargaining agreements, similar to contract revisions permitted under bankruptcy law. Removal of these provisions will provide these schools with greater freedom to pursue aggressive reform by ensuring that the school leadership has the right staff in place. This provision will apply only to schools in restructuring, not to all schools in the district.

**e. Augment Charter School Options**

In order to enhance charter school availability and performance, the federal charter school program will now support all viable charter applications that can improve outcomes for students. Charters will also have a greater degree of flexibility to use their grants in executing planning and startup activities. Similarly, we will support local decisions to reopen schools identified for restructuring as charter schools, even if state law limits the number of possible charter schools within that state.

The development of new charter schools would help states and school districts address the primary challenge many districts face in implementing public school choice: insufficient seats at schools where students could transfer. Additional public charter schools could resolve capacity problems in both urban school districts, where quality schools are often over-enrolled, and in rural school districts, where the establishment of virtual charter schools would provide a practical new option for families living in isolated areas.

f. **Enhanced Supplemental Educational Services (SES)**

The SES provisions of *NCLB* are designed to help students achieve or exceed grade-level standards by providing extra support such as tutoring. Larger SES per-child amounts for students who live in rural areas or who have disabilities or limited English proficiency will be permitted. As the cost of tutoring these students is on average higher than for other students, SES funding will increase by an appropriate amount or proportion. This change should also increase the pool of SES providers with the capacity to serve these students.

Additionally, greater flexibility in the use of Title I funds to implement SES programs will be allowed. To provide further opportunity to students, SES will be offered to all low-income students who attend a school in program improvement status from the first year forward, a year earlier than before and concurrent with the offer of public school choice as an option. School districts will be allowed to set aside funding to conduct quality parent outreach campaigns.

We will also remove the disincentive to support SES and choice programs by requiring that districts spend all of their SES and choice funds each year or risk forfeiting the balance of their 20 percent set-aside for these activities. Enforcement mechanisms will be strengthened to further ensure that parents and students are given proper and timely notice of their SES and choice options, and that high-quality SES services are provided.

g. **Provide Equitable Services to Private School Students and Teachers**

“At-risk” students should have access to academic services regardless of where they attend school. We propose extending the longstanding requirements for equitable participation by private school students and teachers to new programs and initiatives where appropriate, as well as to existing programs such as Striving Readers and Troops-to-Teachers. Service providers affiliated with a religious organization should not be restricted from providing services so long as those services are secular, neutral and non-ideological, as required under *NCLB*. Additionally, we support greater private school flexibility in the use of federal funds and improved communication between private and public schools.



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