

## **WISCONSIN STATE READING ASSOCIATION PERSPECTIVES ON NCLB**

The Wisconsin State Reading Association believes in the spirit and goals of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). We believe, however, that aspects of this law along with the interpretation and implementation of NCLB are extremely problematic and subsequently will not lead us to the goals that we all agree are critical for our children's future.

WSRA has identified three critical areas that lead us away from accomplishing the goals of NCLB. Because the ramifications of the law touch every public school district, every public school, and most importantly millions of students across our nation, we ask that you carefully review these areas:

### **1. Lack of Research**

A **lack of research** to support critical areas of the law and its implementation reduces this law to an experiment on our public schools and its children.

- a. Where is the research demonstrating that a punitive model improves student achievement? The sanctions, as prescribed by the law, lack a clear theoretical base and the research to support it.
- b. Where is the research that proves that supplemental service providers improve student achievement? Under NCLB, supplemental service providers are not mandated to hire highly qualified teachers or be held accountable for an improvement in the student achievement of the children they tutor. There is no precedent in federal law for this provision and no body of research that provides clear and consistent evidence that supplemental educational services improve learning outcomes for low performing, particularly low income and minority students.
- c. Where is the research that one high stakes test should be used to make important decisions about students, schools, and districts? In fact, test experts agree that important decisions about an individual or groups should not be based on the results of a single test. In addition, NCLB sanctions are based on a single test.
- d. Where the research to suggest that annual high stakes testing is sufficient to demonstrate student growth? There is no evidence to show that annual testing using high stakes tests is a preferable measure of student, school, or school district achievement. And yet, Annual Yearly Progress is based on this one test measure.
- e. Where the research that shows that performance of subpopulations is best served by administering high stakes tests? Federal accountability rules have had little or no impact on racial and poverty gaps, according to research studies.

### **2. Restore Local Control**

For centuries, our country has held a long-cherished belief: **Local control of schools is best.** Under NCLB, local control is well on the way to being eliminated in favor of federal control. Our country has produced leaders in government, business, science,

and education through our system of local control of schools. Our country has reached the pinnacles of success in medicine, space travel, business, and in almost every phase of life based on local control of schools.

- a. “Nothing in this section [Section 9526 Part B of PL 107-101] shall be construed to: 1) authorize an officer of the federal government to mandate, direct, review, or control a State, local educational agency, or schools’ instructional content, curriculum and related activity.”
- b. “However, the prescriptive nature in which those principles are delineated in the federal law has taken the sovereignty of public education from state and local districts.” Elizabeth Burmaster, Superintendent of Public Instruction, State of Wisconsin; head of Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO).
- c. “The U.S. Department of Education threatened yesterday to take enforcement action against Virginia if any school districts defy a federal mandate to give reading tests to thousands of immigrant students.” *Washington Post*, 2/1/07.

### 3. Restore Integrity

Aspects of the NCLB Act, its interpretation, and its implementation reflect a lack of integrity. While this discussion is difficult, it is a **moral imperative**.

- a. The stipulation that all students will achieve proficiency by 2014 will occur only if standards are set low.
- b. Although test experts conclude that important decisions should not be made about an individual or groups based on one high stakes test, this knowledge is being ignored for political purposes.
- c. Reliance on the results of a single high stakes test leads to curricular reductionism, which is the exact opposite of what parents, businesses, and the greater community expect for our children. For example, the International Baccalaureate Program uses performance assessments, which are aligned to rigorous goals; this program does not make use of a single high-stakes test.
- d. Many students are suffering from emotional anxiety over their performance on an annual high stakes test. There are well documented examples across the country of this unfortunate phenomenon.
- e. The amount of high stakes testing significantly diminishes critical instructional time for all students but especially for the very students who are most in need of additional support. Resource educators, such as reading specialists and Title I reading teachers, are being used for testing and test preparation rather than helping the very students who need their expertise the most.

WSRA implores legislators to carefully investigate the full ramifications of the law, the problems that have been documented by state departments, professional and civic organizations, school districts, schools, parents and educators, and to consider the recommendations from over 100 professional and civic organizations to improve the law. WSRA asks this for the sake of all our children.

**“These are all our children, and we benefit or pay for what they become.”**

**James Baldwin**