Back to School, Moving Forward

What "No Child Left Behind" Means for America's Educators.

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Back to School, Moving Forward

What *No Child Left Behind* Means for America's Educators

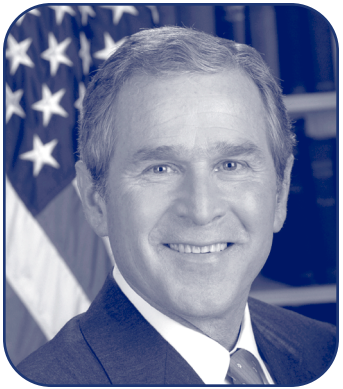
Foreword by President George W. Bush

As the father of two high school graduates and the husband of a teacher, I've learned many lessons about what makes a school good and an education excellent. The more I see, the more I am convinced of one thing: every child can learn. Great schools do great works in the life of a child, and I have watched it happen. But we must do more.

Because I believe every child can learn, I intend to ensure that every child does learn. My Administration put forward a plan called *No Child Left Behind* based on four principles: accountability for results; local control and flexibility; expanded parental choice; and effective and successful programs. We are pursuing these principles because too many of our schools fail to help every child learn.

As our children return to school, we should reflect on how we can improve the schools they attend. It's time to set high standards for what children should know and be able to do, to give our schools the tools they need to help children reach those high standards, and to demand that they reach them. We know that every child can learn; it is time to ensure that every child does learn.

This guide explains the goals and scope of *No Child Left Behind*. I hope it starts a conversation among our dedicated educators about how we can raise expectations for our children and reach those expectations in classrooms everywhere. God bless you for the work you do.



Letter from the Secretary

In 1965, Congress created a role for the federal government in education. Among other things, that role committed the government to helping students from disadvantaged backgrounds receive a quality education and gain access to a bright future.

While states and school districts still bear the lion's share of responsibility for educating our children, the Administration and Congress are working together to ensure that the federal role advances the kind of reform that improves our education system. We know there are excellent schools across the country, and we want to extend that excellence so that every school—and indeed every child—gets an excellent education.

President Bush's Administration is dedicated to lifting up all teachers so that all of you can lift up our children. We are committed to making sure that you have access to high-quality training in order to help your students meet and exceed the new, tougher standards. As a former superintendent, I know the challenges you face every day and I will work to ensure the federal government is on your side. But the best we can do is help. You are the real engines of progress, and your personal attention helps every child learn. This book explains the shape of things to come and shows you some of the resources you can use to make sure no child is left behind.

Rod Paige

Introduction

Teaching has never been an easy profession; but these days it is harder than ever. We are asking our schools and teachers to educate all children to meet high standards. This is no simple task. While many of our nation's schools are excellent, too many children are being left behind by failing schools. To meet our ambitious goal of giving all our youth a first-rate education, our system and our teaching need to change.

As important as government's role in education is, the real magic happens between a teacher and a child as they work together to build knowledge and understanding that will last a lifetime. President Bush's plan gives teachers and schools the tools they need to improve their instruction and to help their students succeed.

At the heart of the President's plan for our schools is a promise to raise standards for all children. Since we cannot know if we are meeting standards unless we measure performance, the

President's plan requires annual tests for all children in grades three through eight in the basic subjects of reading and math. Finally, the President is committed to promoting the very best teaching programs, especially those that teach young children how to read. His plan—which will be implemented in partnership with parents, communities and schools—ensures that every child in America receives an excellent education. The following guide will show you—

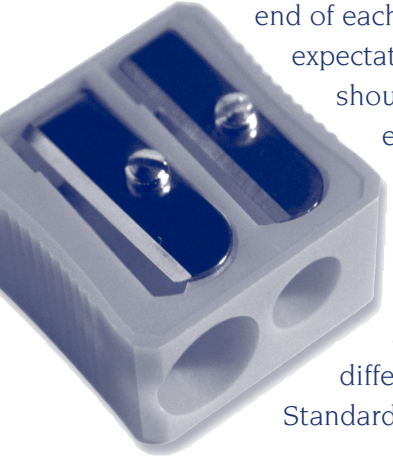
- What high standards mean and do
- The purpose of assessments
- How to use test scores to help every student improve
- How to improve reading instruction and
- Where to turn for help

> *"Some say it is unfair to hold disadvantaged children to rigorous standards. I say it is discrimination to require anything less. It is the soft bigotry of low expectations."*
>
> *President George W. Bush*

Raising Standards, Lifting Children

Everyone who spends time with children learns a vivid lesson: children tend to perform to meet the expectations of adults. If expectations are low, children can miss their true potential. When expectations are high, progress can be amazing. Teachers should challenge children to read well, do difficult math, and excel in all subjects.

Under President Bush's plan, states will set high standards in the core subjects. Well-crafted and thoughtful standards will explain in plain language exactly what students are expected to know and be able to do by the end of each grade. Setting clear expectations for what teachers should accomplish each year can prevent misunderstandings and recriminations that arise when teachers, principals, and parents start with different expectations. Standards leave plenty of room for creativity, because they do not dictate teaching practice. In excellent schools, teachers work together to update their lesson plans and their teaching methods to meet the new standards and help their students achieve them.



Annual Testing: Learning What Works

Raising academic standards is an important first step towards improving our schools. We will never know, however, if we are reaching those standards unless we measure student performance. To get truly useful information that allows teachers to identify individual students who need help, we must test every child every year.

Tests have been around as long as schools have. What is new about today's tests is that they are much more sophisticated in their ability to diagnose problem areas in student achievement.

The medical field provides an apt analogy. For years, doctors used X-rays to diagnose broken bones and other ailments. They worked fine much of the time. But then came the MRI, a much more powerful diagnostic tool. Suddenly doctors could identify a whole host of illnesses at earlier stages and make better recommendations for courses of treatment.

In much the same way, today's state-of-the-art tests can help educators identify the specific learning problems that a student may be experiencing. Because these tests are directly

linked to academic standards—a very important change from the past—we can find out whether students are learning what they need to learn. These new tests do not simply measure basic skills; they measure important content knowledge too.

People complain that testing causes schools to emphasize "teaching to the test." Each state, however, must design tests that match what children are expected to learn. That means "teaching to the test" is really teaching those

things we have already decided every child should know and be able to do.

A good testing system that takes test data and breaks it down by student and classroom, as well as by school and by school district, can empower teachers to tailor their teaching to their students' needs. With tests aligned to state standards, the testing system can be designed to identify and then to help the children who are in danger of being left behind.

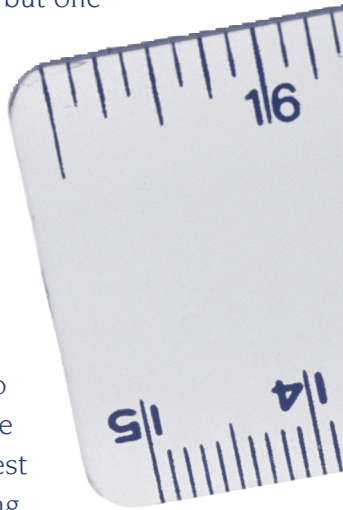
Looking at Progress

Another benefit of annual testing is that it allows us to identify successful schools. We previously could look only at a school's average test scores. These scores gave us some information about school performance, but not the complete picture. Thanks to annual tests that are linked to academic standards, we can look at the progress each student at each school makes each year. We can consider where students are starting, as well as where they end up, and we can identify and reward schools that are helping their students make the most progress.

Using Data to Improve Instruction

Communities with high standards and challenging tests have teachers and school leaders who use achievement scores to identify specific objectives that their students are—or are not—mastering. Teachers in these communities can then focus on filling in the gaps.

For example, in Tennessee, Professor Bill Sanders helps teachers analyze test score results to identify their own strengths and weaknesses. If a teacher is aiming instruction at his or her slowest students (but does not realize it), the data will show those students making some progress, but other students will lag. Perhaps another teacher's students score well on every learning objective but one (say, adding fractions with different denominators). This teacher can take the information and be sure to give more attention to fractions the following school year.

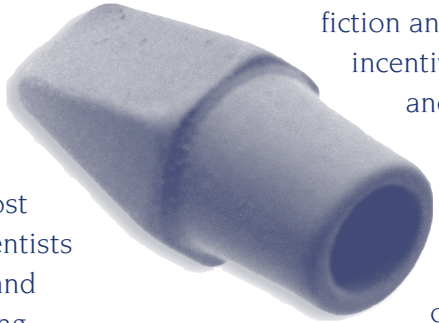


Test score data can also help schools, as a whole, to improve. For example, some schools might learn from test scores that they are teaching math effectively but are struggling with teaching writing. This information can help schools decide to spend their money on staff training in effective writing instruction. Test score data

allow schools to make decisions based on facts rather than guesses.

Doing What Works: Evidence-Based Reading Instruction

Teaching children to read is the most important thing our schools do. Yet, for too long, schools have been embroiled in bitter debates about how to teach this most basic skill. Thankfully, in recent years, scientists have evaluated good reading instruction and curricula to determine how to teach reading skills most effectively to young children. The researchers tell us that 95 percent of all children will learn to read if they are taught using—



- Systematic and explicit instruction in phonics, decoding, comprehension and literature appreciation
- Daily exposure to a variety of texts, both fiction and nonfiction, as well as incentives to read independently and with others
- Vocabulary instruction that emphasizes the relationships among words and among word structure, origin and meaning
- Instruction in comprehension that includes predicting outcomes, summarizing, clarifying, questioning and visualizing
- Frequent opportunities to write

These guidelines have proven effective in even the toughest of classrooms. Many students once considered "hard to teach" are now reading confidently, so we know it can be done. Now that we know what works in our classrooms, we must do what works in every classroom. At the same time, the U.S. Department of Education will continue to help educators and the public know the important pre-reading and language skills that our youngest children need to learn in order to be ready when they reach the classroom.

Resources

Interested in learning more about *No Child Left Behind* and related school improvement resources? If you have access to the Internet, go to **www.ed.gov** for Department of Education resources plus links to other organizations. If you don't have a computer, you can call **1-800-USA-LEARN**.

For general information on back to school, and to order copies of this booklet, visit **www.ed.gov/backtoschool/**

The *National Reading Panel* produces objective reports about what works and what doesn't in reading. **www.nationalreadingpanel.org**

The *National Institute of Child Health and Human Development* offers health and education information for parents. **www.nichd.nih.gov/publications/health.htm**

FREE offers hundreds of teaching and learning resources from across the federal government. **http://www.ed.gov/free/**