

# Accountability

### What does NCLB say?

Under NCLB, each state sets academic standards that all schools are expected to meet. Accountability means that educators take responsibility for teaching all students up to these standards.

If schools don't meet the state standards, NCLB requires the state to set up a system for helping to change what's going on in that school.

- The NCLB Act requires all students to take their state's test in reading/language arts and math once a year from grade 3 through grade 8, and at least once during high school.
- States must set goals for what constitutes Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) based on the results of these tests. (see Fact Sheet on "Adequate Yearly Progress.")
- If a school doesn't make Adequate Yearly Progress for two consecutive years, it is identified as a school in need of improvement. In that case, the school, district, and state must develop a plan for raising student achievement. In addition, parents must be notified and given the option to send their children to a higher performing school in the district.
- If a school continues to not meet goals, different strategies must be considered. The aim is to help the school more successfully educate its students. Ultimately, after six years of not meeting goals, the school community must decide on a plan for "restructuring" the school. The state, school district, and local community are responsible for choosing the restructuring plan.

### Why is this important?

For too long, our society has blamed children and their families

when children have not done well in school. Of course parents and children have to meet their educational responsibilities; however, schools must be held accountable for teaching students well, and NCLB goes further than any other law in making sure that will happen.

Public schools in the United States have consistently put the least amount of educational resources into areas where they are needed the most. Schools serving low-income and minority students usually get the fewest qualified teachers; they are issued the oldest textbooks and other resources and are generally housed in the worst facilities. This creates an "opportunity gap."

No Child Left Behind accountability helps advocates who want to challenge these opportunity gaps. All schools have to make sure that all students are taught to high standards. And states and school districts need to own up to their responsibility to provide the support and assistance schools need to improve teaching and learning. **No excuses. No exceptions.**

It is important to know that there are no financial penalties in NCLB for schools that fail to make AYP. In fact, the law requires states to set aside a portion of funds received under the federal Title I program to provide additional assistance to schools that have been identified for improvement. In 2003, \$234 million dollars will be given to states to assist schools in the improvement process. Because of a formula in the law, that amount should double for 2004 and succeeding years.

NCLB does not penalize schools for low student achievement—but it does require states to measure stu-

dent achievement, hold schools accountable for results, and help struggling schools to improve.

### What can I do?

NCLB pushes all schools to improve, but parents and community leaders have a responsibility to help as well. Public schools are public institutions, and we all must get involved to make sure our schools meet their responsibilities to our children.

- Get the data and know what's going on in your school.
- Make sure that when a school is identified as needing improvement that the process is taken seriously. Demand that real changes be put into place.
- Find out how the state and district will support improvement efforts. Advocate for more help and more resources from the district and state.
- Be an active participant in the school improvement process. It is a lot easier to write a plan than to change what has been going on in a school, so stick with it. Go to Board of Education meetings and ask whether the Board is getting updates on the improvement process.
- Help your school identify successful strategies for improving teaching and learning. Call or visit schools that are having more success in raising achievement. (You can find them on the "Dispelling the Myth" website at [www.edtrust.org](http://www.edtrust.org).) Share what you learn with others who are concerned with school improvement.
- Work in your community to organize outside services—tutoring, counseling, and the like—that can help struggling students improve.