

No Child Left Behind

On January 8, 2002, President Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act into law. This legislation represents a fundamental change in the education of our students and is built on the notion that every struggling child can learn and every struggling school can rebound. The law, originally placed on the books 35 years ago to help low-income children, was well intentioned but has not worked to achieve the goal of improving academic achievement.

No Child Left Behind reforms the old law by providing a roadmap—and the resources—for even the most troubled public schools in America to pull themselves up, creating opportunities for local school districts, states, and especially parents to use their federal dollars to create a more effective way of educating children.

One of the key strengths of this law is that it gives states and local communities significantly more flexibility over the management of federal dollars. This means that local school districts finally have the power to concentrate federal dollars in areas where they need them most. In return for this flexibility, schools must demonstrate that children in their classrooms are making substantial progress. We must demand meaningful academic achievement from children of all backgrounds, and if students are not learning schools must discover why and make appropriate changes so that no children are left behind.

Another primary goal that the law accomplishes is to improve teacher quality. Overall, the bill requires that 95% of the funds for teacher quality go directly to local school districts, allowing them to use funds as they see fit for the purposes of hiring teachers, improving professional development, or finding innovative ways to reward and retain high quality teachers.

No Child Left Behind significantly changes accountability standards with the goal of assuring that low-income students are provided learning opportunities equal to that of their non-disadvantaged peers. In accomplishing this, the law specifically prohibits federally sponsored national testing of every child or federal control over curriculums and, in fact, sets up a series of requirements to ensure that any evaluation of the states' academic performance is fair and objective.

This is an exceptionally positive piece of legislation for our students, and it is comprised of measures that afford local school districts unprecedented power and flexibility to ensure that every child has access to a quality education. I am pleased to have played an integral role in the enactment of this historic legislation.