



NCLB is failing
America's brightest
students

In the News

Suggested
education
books

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Trouble at the Top

*"By forcing the schools to focus their time and funding almost entirely on bringing low achieving students up to proficiency, NCLB sacrifices the education of the gifted students who will become our future biomedical researchers, computer engineers, and other scientific leaders."*¹

A pair of reports released by the Fordham Institute under one title, *High-Achieving Students in the Era of NCLB*, found that while the bottom 10% of American students have made strong academic gains from 2000-2007, the top ten percent of students have stagnated. Taken as a whole, the report applauds the gains of low-achieving pupils, but paints a bleak picture of education for our brightest students.

Part I: An Analysis of NAEP Data, authored by Dr. Tom Loveless of the Brookings Institute, reports that the achievement gap has, indeed, narrowed for 4th grade math and reading and 8th grade math. For example, from 2000 to 2007, low achieving students raised the 4th grade NAEP (*National Assessment of Educational Progress*) reading scores by 16 points; high-achieving student scores rose merely 3 points. Although this pattern was found prior to NCLB in states that adopted similar testing and accountability systems in the 1990's, the report suggests that for *"all youngsters who could already be termed proficient, NCLB's core provisions treat them with benign neglect."*¹

Part II: Results from a National Teacher Survey analyzed responses from 900 third- through twelfth-grade teachers and found that a majority of them believe top students are being underserved and even neglected as low-achieving students receive dramatically more attention. Findings indicate the stunning disparity of the teachers' attitudes toward these two groups of students:

- While 81% of teachers were more likely to give one-on-one attention to "struggling students," only 5% would do the same for "advanced students."

- Although 60% of teachers said struggling students are a "top priority" in their school, only 23% said this about the academically advanced.
- 73% of teachers agreed, **"too often, the brightest students are bored and under-challenged in school – we're not giving them a sufficient chance to thrive."**
- Only 50% of teachers believe high-level classes are "truly rigorous and challenging" – 40% say they are "watered down and lacking rigor."
- Yet 86% of teachers believe that all students deserve equal attention.

Consequences for Students

In 2004, *A Nation Deceived: How Schools Hold Back America's Brightest Students* exposed an education system in which *"schools have held back America's brightest students for all kinds of reasons."*² For high-achieving students, school can be a boring nightmare that leads to frustration, depression, chronic underachievement, delinquency, dropping out, and even suicide.³ This new Fordham report found that the NCLB education model continues to fail many top students.

Consequences for America

Nathan Urban, associate professor at Carnegie Mellon University, perhaps said it best: *"The economic competitiveness of our nation will be severely reduced if the abilities of our best and brightest are not fostered and if they do not learn that they must work hard to achieve their goals. These students can be future leaders in innovations and technology, but only if they are taught how to put their talents to use."*⁴ Over 80% of surveyed teachers concurred - *"advanced students need special attention – they are the future leaders of this country, and their talents will enable us to compete in a global economy."*¹

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Some Solutions

A majority of teachers agreed with several specific survey statements that address ways to create an education environment in which advanced students could thrive:

- Open more specific magnet programs and district wide schools that bring advanced students together.
- Rely more on homogeneous classes (tracking) for advanced students so that they learn faster and in greater depth.
- Create a separate NCLB reporting subgroup for academically advanced students.
- Provide more professional development for teachers.

Dr. Loveless also has a suggestion: Reward schools for improving the performance of students beyond the minimal “proficient” level.

In Pennsylvania, the Pennsylvania Value-Added Assessment System (PVAAS) results could be used to assess the rigor of education for all students. PVAAS is a “value-added” or “growth model” that applies a statistical formula to PSSA scores to plot the academic growth of individual students and groups. Pupils of every ability level should expect to gain at least a full year of educational growth each school year. Other states using similar systems have found top students may appear to be doing well because their test scores are so high, when, in reality, they are not progressing as quickly as they should. PVAAS data could assist educators and parents in determining if school systems are providing an adequate level of education for students of all ability levels.⁵

The call to action is clear: This serious, unintended consequence of NCLB must be addressed. *“Just as a talented budding athlete should be encouraged to play against the best competition, our best students at all levels should be encouraged to ‘play up’ by giving them harder math problems, encouraging them to read more advanced books and enticing them to think about big, important questions from an early age. While educational programs for gifted children may sometimes seem like a luxury,...as a nation we cannot afford to squander the talents of our highest-achieving children.”*⁴ ?



1. “High-Achieving Students in the Era of NCLB,” Fordham Institute, June 2008.
2. Colangelo, Nicholas, et. al. “A Nation Deceived: How Schools Hold Back America’s Brightest Students.” *The Templeton National Report on Acceleration*. Sept 2004.
3. “All Kids are Special.” *Education Advocate*. Nov-Dec 2005. Vol. 6, No. 6.
4. Urban, Nathan. Letter. *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. 3 July 2008.
5. “Power of 2.” *Education Advocate*. Jan-Feb 2008. Vol. 9. No. 1.

In the news...stories you may have missed

Fourth Grade Counts!

The following research finding¹ is especially relevant as Governor Rendell continues to promote mandatory high-stakes graduation tests that will cost millions of education dollars.

*“As early as fourth grade, students who will be at risk of failing the high school exit exam...can be identified based on grades, classroom behavior and test scores, according to a new study. The findings...call into question the effectiveness of aiming significant efforts and tens of millions of dollars at struggling high school seniors and older students to help them pass the exam.”*²

1 The California Policy Institute report, “Predicting Success, Preventing Failure: An Investigation of the California High School Exit Exam” by Andrew C. Zau and Julian R. Betts, can be found at www.ppic.org

2 Mehta, Seema. “Students likely to fail high school exit exam can be identified as early as 4th grade, study says.” *Los Angeles Times*. 11 June 2008

Good by, Mr. Girton!

At the request of Governor Rendell, Karl Girton has resigned as Chair of the State Board of Education, effective August 1. The reason cited: new leadership is needed because of the recent turnover of eight of the 22 State Board seats. However, could the quick change of leadership be related to the public outcry over the proposed high-stakes graduation tests (GCAs) and the subsequent legislative decision to stall implementation of these tests? Mr. Girton and Governor Rendell say “no.”

Unfortunately, with or without Mr. Girton, the graduation exit exams have not gone away. The Pennsylvania Department of Education is now going through the back door by developing a model state curriculum as well as “voluntary” exit exams that will be available for the 2009-2010 school year.

Raffaele, Martha. “Chairman of Pa. Education board resigns.” *Philly.com*. 23 July 2008.

Pay to Participate

The New York Times reports high energy costs and soaring teacher salaries and benefits are forcing school districts to make some tough choices. *“Cash-strapped school districts across the nation [plan to] scale back sports programs or try to pass on part or all of their costs to students and parents.”* Other extracurricular programs, including chorus, orchestra, band, clubs, and intramurals, are also being targeted.

Hu, Winnie. “For many student athletes, game over.” *The New York Times*. 28 July 2008.

Suggested readings

*How can a child be raised to love learning?
How can parents advocate for their ADD or ADHD child?
What is the best education environment for bright children?*

The answers to these questions and much more can be found in the suggested education books listed below. While these books contain helpful information, CEO does not endorse every statement made in each book.

The ABCs of School Success (2000)

Elaine K. McEwan

This book is a common sense resource for instilling a love of learning beginning in babyhood.

Attention Deficit Disorder (Guides for Parents and Educators Series) (2000)

Elaine K. McEwan

A wealth of information on ADD and ADHD, this book helps parents understand what their child is going through and how they can better advocate for them.

Making Sense of Research: What's Good, What's Not, and How To Tell the Difference (2002)

Elaine K. McEwan and Patrick J. McEwan

This book "brings together the best of two worlds--the 'real' world where education is practiced daily and the 'ivory tower' world where research is ongoing." Written for "practitioners at all levels," the authors "outline and explain how quality research can inform, enlighten, and provide direction to educators that will save time and money, as well as make schools more effective and increase opportunities for students."

Excerpts from book description on elainemcewan.com

FYI: CEO is hosting Elaine McEwan this September to provide professional development programs for Pittsburgh-area schools. Call CEO for more information.

A Nation Deceived: How Schools Hold Back America's Brightest Students, Vol. I & II (2004)

Nicholas Colangelo, Susan G. Assouline & Miraca U.M. Gross

Research findings presented in these volumes support and validate teachers and administrators in their "attempt to provide high-ability students the flexibility to move at the pace of their talents." The authors' desire is that these educators will "understand that acceleration is a highly effective intervention for bright students."

From "Message to Schools," Vol. 1, p. xi.

(Quoted in "Trouble at the Top" on page 1)

The Academic Achievement Challenge: What Really Works in the Classroom? (2002)

Jeanne Chall

"The teacher training curriculum in most schools of education does not teach how to conduct, evaluate, or employ research findings to improve classroom instruction...Chall provides a clear presentation of the relevant research that relates to improving achievement and the historical context in which certain beliefs, independent of supporting research, gained ascendancy over empirically supported practices...Chall has made a strong case for the effectiveness of teacher centered approaches to educational practice as compared to student centered approaches."

From School Psychology Quarterly

Knowing and Teaching Elementary Mathematics: Teachers' Understanding of Fundamental Mathematics in China and the United States (Studies in Mathematical Thinking and Learning.) (1999)

Liping Ma

"Chinese students typically outperform U.S. students on international comparisons of mathematics competency. Paradoxically, Chinese teachers receive far less education than U.S. teachers...This book describes the nature and development of the 'profound understanding of fundamental mathematics' that elementary teachers need to become accomplished mathematics teachers, and suggests why such teaching knowledge is much more common in China than the United States. The studies described in this book suggest that Chinese teachers begin their teaching careers with a better understanding of elementary mathematics than that of most U.S. elementary teachers. Their understanding of the mathematics they teach and--equally important--of the ways that elementary mathematics can be presented to students, continues to grow throughout their professional lives."

From amazon.com

For children age 11 and up:

Deb & Seby's Real Deal on Global Warming (2008)

Al Sonja Schmidt

"In and out of the classroom children are bombarded with graphic images of earth's destruction and drowning polar bears due to global warming. They worry that we must all fix the problem FAST! Or they worry that it's already too late and we're all DOOMED! But is man-made global warming really settled science, or the last environmental scare?"

From amazon.com.



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