

No Child Left Behind Leaves West County and California Behind



The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) is a flawed law that threatens to close schools in the West Contra Costa Unified School District (WCCUSD). Under NCLB, a certain percentage of students must score proficient on state end-of-year tests. The law does not set a national standard for proficiency; it leaves it up to individual states to set their own standards. California has imposed on its students some of the strictest standards for proficiency in the country.

NCLB does not account for where students start in relation to the proficiency standard, and it does not reward students for making progress towards that standard. If a school fails to have the required percentage of students at the proficient level, sanctions are imposed on the school and, eventually, that school can be taken over by the state.

Because of the standards imposed on our children by the federal and state governments, schools throughout West County and the Bay Area face sanctions despite the fact that they are making steady progress on the state of California's index for academic improvement, the Academic Progress Index (API).

- Three-quarters of the schools in the Bay Area that are “failing” under NCLB actually improved on the state API.
- Ten schools in WCCUSD (Richmond and Kennedy High, Adams Middle, Chavez, King, Nystrom, Peres, Riverside, Stege, and Verde Elementary) are approaching the deadline for serious sanctions under NCLB. If these schools do not make impossible gains this year on their end-of-year tests, they can be taken over by the state and potentially shut down. Of these ten schools, eight improved on the API in 2002-2003.
- NCLB requires schools to jump from the bottom of a ladder to the top without climbing the rungs. “The California system says a school is successful if most students manage to reach a new rung each year. By contrast, the federal system says a school is successful only if a predetermined percentage of students reaches the top rungs of the ladder each year” regardless of where the school starts on the ladder. (S.F. Chronicle, 9/1/10).

What Can You Do?

The Richmond Progressive Federation of Teachers urges you to discuss NCLB at parent clubs, PTAs, Site Councils and with members of your community. You can also attend March 4 Education meetings to learn more about these issues.

Please visit the March 4 Education website at www.march4education.org in the coming weeks for the date and location of our November community forum on NCLB.