

Questions about the *No Child Left Behind Act*

Suggested questions for candidates for the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives

As Congress prepares to debate the reauthorization of the *No Child Left Behind Act* in 2007, here are suggested questions about the law for candidates for the Senate and the House of Representatives. We have created one overall question and then one question for each of the “Ten Moral Concerns in the Implementation of the *No Child Left Behind Act*,” a resource of National Council of Churches you may find at <http://www.nccusa.org/pdfs/LeftBehind.pdf> .

Overall Question: As a person of faith I do not view our children as products to be tested and managed but instead as unique human beings to be nurtured and educated. What will you do as our (representative) (senator) to help change the focus of federal policy to emphasize our civic obligation to enrich our children’s lives through education?

1. The *No Child Left Behind Act* requires schools to bring all students to a level of proficiency by 2014. Many people believe this goal, while worthy, is unattainable. As more schools are rated “failing,” how can support be maintained for the institution of public education?
2. The *No Child Left Behind Act* measures the average achievement of each subgroup of children against set score thresholds. How can the law be reformed to give children credit for their progress even if they have not yet reached the law’s bar for proficiency?
3. The *No Child Left Behind Act* blames demographic groups of children who have failed to make “adequate yearly progress,” blames their schools, and punishes their schools through sanctions. The law has increased incentives for schools to focus on children whose scores are very near the test score thresholds and to “push out” adolescents who are unlikely to pass tests. How can “blaming” be reduced and incentives be developed for schools to support learning among very vulnerable children?
4. What changes can be made in testing special education students so that testing requirements are consistent with their Individual Education Plans (IEPs)?
5. Currently the *No Child Left Behind Act* requires testing in English before students have had the opportunity to learn English. What would be a more reasonable strategy?
6. Many people agree on the stated goals of the *No Child Left Behind Act*—to proclaim that every child can learn, to challenge every child to dream of a bright future, and to prepare all children to contribute to society. But many of us also realize that public school teachers and schools alone cannot overcome all of the challenges posed by poverty and by racial and class discrimination. What do you think should be changed in the law to strengthen the capacity of schools to support students and teachers?
7. Studies demonstrate that the pressure of standardized testing under the *No Child Left Behind Act* has narrowed the curriculum in many places. What should a school curriculum cover? Which skills are important for schools to develop— academic, physical, social or ethical? Why?
8. Under the *No Child Left Behind Act*, Title I funds, formerly earmarked for academic support for children in poverty, must now be set aside for transportation to move children to another school, for supplementary tutoring, and for major interventions like converting schools into charter schools. First, how do you think Title I funds should be used? Second, when private tutoring firms, charter schools, and private management companies are receiving federal dollars, should the school itself, the school district, the state, or the federal government be required to regulate these outside services?
9. In many places, the rankings assigned by the *No Child Left Behind Act* to schools and school districts are published in the press, supposedly to help the public compare the quality of services. First, do you believe standardized test score rankings are an accurate indicator of school district quality? Second, do you worry that publishing such rankings exacerbates racial and economic segregation across city and suburban districts in metropolitan areas?
10. How can federal education funding be reformed to improve achievement in public schools? Do you believe the federal government is responsible for funding the mandates of the *No Child Left Behind Act*, and do you think the U.S. Department of Education should undertake a costing-out study to learn what resources are needed to realize the goals of the *No Child Left Behind Act*?

