



Statement from the Alliance for Excellent Education: Congress Must Reauthorize the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) Now

There is a crisis in our nation's high schools that can no longer be ignored.

Forty years ago, the United States was number one among industrialized nations in the percentage of the population with a high school diploma. Today, we rank thirteenth. Only about a third of the students who enter ninth grade each fall graduate four years later prepared for college or the contemporary workplace. About 70 percent of all students—and only slightly more than 50 percent of African American and Hispanic students—graduate on time with a regular diploma. The approximately 1.2 million students who drop out each year face serious personal economic challenges throughout their lives, costing the economies of their communities, states, and the nation more than \$300 billion over the lifetime of each class of dropouts.

Clearly this crisis demands a national response, and Congress must take immediate action by ensuring high school reform is included in a reauthorized No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).

With NCLB—the most recent version of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965—up for renewal in 2007, Congress had an opportunity to help stem the dropout tide. Despite the efforts of some education leaders, this opportunity was missed; now, critical policies that would improve our nation's secondary schools remain on hold. Proposals to turn around low-performing middle and high schools, to hold schools accountable for increasing graduation rates, and to ensure that all students can read well enough to tackle a rigorous high school curriculum were among those with significant bipartisan support. Absent action by Congress to make such changes, the current law and unsatisfactory status quo will remain in place, likely for years to come.

The nation's high school students have already waited too long for the country's leaders to act on their behalf. Every school day, another 7,000 students drop out; putting off action until next year or the year after is unacceptable. It is time for Congress to reauthorize the No Child Left Behind Act, including in it the following policies to move the nation from the rhetoric of 'no child left behind' to a reality of 'every child a graduate':

- Leverage higher standards and better assessments aligned to college and work readiness;
- Ensure meaningful accountability for high schools, including graduation rates;
- Support state and local systems of high school improvement;
- Target new funding to turn around low-performing high schools;
- Invest in longitudinal data systems and professional development to use data to improve policy and practice;
- Ensure students have the literacy skills to succeed in middle and high school;
- Support innovation and research in secondary schools; and
- Create support for turning around low-performing middle schools.

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 set important goals to ensure that all students succeed and to turn America's low-performing schools into schools that effectively served all their students. But that legislation was focused on the elementary grades; it does not address the needs of America's middle and high school students

Whether one loves or hates NCLB, missing the opportunity to improve it makes no sense. As legislators return to Capitol Hill for the last session of the 110th Congress, it is critical that they use the reauthorization of NCLB as an opportunity to advance high school reform. Neither the students nor the nation can afford to wait any longer.