



Education and the Workforce Committee

January 10, 2012

Ten Years Later, A Better Way Forward for K-12 Schools Part 2: Returning Responsibility for Student Achievement to State and Local Leaders

Despite good intentions, there is bipartisan agreement No Child Left Behind (NCLB) needs to be changed. One of the biggest failings of our nation's K-12 education law is its overly prescriptive accountability system, known as Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).

The federally mandated system applies a rigid metric for gauging the progress of schools around the country. All schools that fail to meet target proficiency levels for two or more consecutive years are required to undergo the same series of rigid federal interventions, regardless of the unique circumstances or challenges facing each school. [According to the Center on Education Policy](#), approximately half of all schools failed to make AYP in the 2010-2011 school year. A summary of key findings:

- An estimated 48% of the nation's public schools did not make AYP in 2011. This marks an increase from 39% in 2010 and is the highest percentage since NCLB took effect.
- In 24 states and the District of Columbia, at least half of the public schools did not make AYP in 2011. In a majority of the states (43 and D.C.), at least one-fourth of the schools did not make AYP.
- The percentage of public schools not making AYP in 2011 varied greatly by state, from about 11% in Wisconsin to about 89% in Florida.

If No Child Left Behind isn't changed, these percentages will continue to grow. In three short years, every school in the country will be required to demonstrate 100 percent of its students are proficient in reading and math or risk being labeled as "failing," even if the school has made dramatic improvements in

Clearly, we cannot continue to rely on a one-size-fits-all accountability system to gauge the performance and unique needs of schools and students. Teachers, principals, and superintendents agree the current system often hinders local innovation and progress. As Maryland's Red Pump Elementary School Principal [Blaine Hawley](#) said at an Education and the Workforce Committee [hearing](#):

“There is a disconnect between federal standards and what we are doing [at the local level], which is really looking at individual student progress as opposed to one standard that we hope all children will reach.”

It's time to develop a more meaningful way to measure whether students are learning, and we must be willing to look beyond laws enacted in Washington, D.C. In an effort to raise the bar on student achievement and reduce the federal footprint in education, Republicans recently [released draft legislation](#) to support the development of innovative accountability systems at the state and local level.

The [Student Success Act](#) will call on each state to implement its own accountability system that considers the challenges and opportunities facing local schools and more accurately evaluates student learning. The legislation will also eliminate federally mandated interventions for under-performing schools and allow states to determine the best way to improve student learning. Additionally, school districts will have the freedom to distribute federal funds based on the needs of their own student populations. Superintendents and principals will be able to use federal funding for groups such as English learners, migrant students and Native Americans to support a better classroom experience for all children.

We cannot improve education in America until we make it easier for states and school districts to tailor instruction to meet student needs. The [Student Success Act](#) removes barriers to student achievement and supports flexibility and innovation in schools nationwide.

Throughout the week, the committee will release a series of [documents](#) outlining how the new proposals benefit children and families, protect schools from overly prescriptive federal mandates, and encourage innovation in the classroom.

