



International Reading Association

A membership organization of literacy professionals

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A Call to Action and a Framework for Change: IRA's Position on NCLB Reform

The International Reading Association (IRA) is committed to strong academic achievement for all children and the elimination of an achievement gap, consistent with the objectives of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). IRA believes components of NCLB, such as renewed attention to teaching and instruction through the High Quality Teacher provisions, assessments that measure progress, and an accountability system with disaggregated data, are of vital importance in assuring an excellent education for all students. Based on experiences with current legislation and feedback from the field, IRA believes the Act should be significantly reformed to ensure

- Support for high quality teachers
- Well-defined criteria for excellent reading instruction
- Assessments designed to inform instruction
- More accurate descriptions of adequate yearly progress
- Funding allocations to students most in need

High Quality Teachers: Strengthening Preparation Requirements for Reading Instruction

IRA believes that the success of educational reform efforts depends on having well-prepared, high quality teachers in every classroom. Excellent teachers motivate children, encourage independent learning, have high expectations for achievement, and help children who are having difficulty. These teachers understand that reading is a developmental process that begins well before children enter school and continues throughout their academic life. These teachers work with colleagues to build a school community where every student receives appropriate reading instruction. IRA's study of excellent reading teachers reveals that they

- Understand children's reading and writing development
- Assess a child's individual progress and relate reading instruction to a child's previous experience
- Use a variety of ways to teach reading
- Provide a variety of materials and texts for children to read
- Tailor instruction to individual students

IRA has articulated standards for five distinct categories of reading professionals responsible for reading instruction:

- **Classroom teachers** at the early childhood, elementary, middle, or high school level develop students' reading and related language arts skills and/or integrate literacy instruction with content area learning. They have an undergraduate or

graduate degree that includes coursework in reading and reading instruction: a minimum 12 hours for preK-grade 5 teachers and a minimum of 6 hours for grades 6-12 teachers.

- **Reading specialists**, who work at the early childhood, elementary, middle, secondary, and/or adult levels, fulfill a number of responsibilities and may have a specific focus that further defines their duties. At a minimum, reading specialists must be prepared to function as
 - Reading intervention teachers who provide intensive instruction to struggling readers within or outside the students' classrooms, and
 - Reading or literacy coaches who focus on professional development for teachers, providing needed support for implementing instructional programs and practices and/or leadership in creating and supervising a long-term staff development process associated with the development and implementation of a school's literacy program over months and years.
 - Reading supervisors or reading coordinators who develop, lead, and evaluate a school reading program from kindergarten through grade 12. The supervisors/coordinators may assume some of the same responsibilities as the literacy coach, but may also focus more on systematic change at the school level. The supervisors/coordinators need experience that prepares them to work effectively as administrators and to design and lead effective professional development programs.

Reading specialists may also

- Serve as a reading resource for paraprofessionals, teachers, administrators, and the community
- Work cooperatively and collaboratively with other professionals in planning programs to meet the needs of diverse populations of learners
- Provide professional development opportunities at the local and state levels
- Provide leadership in student advocacy

Reading specialist become qualified through previous teaching experience, a Master's degree with concentration in reading education, a minimum of 24 graduate credit hours in reading and language arts and related courses, and an additional 6-credit-hours of supervised practicum experience.

- **Administrators**, including principals and superintendents, recognize and support reading professionals as they plan, implement, and evaluate effective reading instruction. Principals (K-12) have a minimum of 6 credits hours in reading and related language arts.
- **Paraprofessionals**, who assist in regular education, special education, or reading and writing education in graded or age-grouped classrooms at preschool through high-school levels, and in after school and summer programs, must have a two-year postsecondary degree with an emphasis on human development and educational processes and, for those paraprofessionals who provide reading instruction, 12 semester credit hours, or the equivalent, in literacy and language development.

- **Reading Teacher Educators**, who provide instruction at the graduate and undergraduate levels, participate in scholarly work, including researching, writing, and professional development. They forge university-school partnerships with other educational agencies to promote the advancement of literacy. They have a minimum of three years' classroom teaching experience including the teaching of reading. They have a terminal degree that focuses on reading and reading instruction.

Teachers must be adequately prepared to competently perform these various roles. A careful analysis of the research studies reviewed by the National Reading Panel reveals that research has never shown there to be a single method or single combination of methods that has been successful in teaching all children to read. Reading educators must have specialized knowledge about language, how children learn and acquire literacy skills, and a variety of instructional strategies. To assist teachers, professional development that is classroom-based, well-organized, and on-going is necessary.

Although the NCLB teacher quality provisions recognize the importance of teacher quality for improving student achievement, they allow the states considerable flexibility in designing ways for teachers to be considered "highly qualified." Most states use measurable teacher inputs such as certification, academic degrees, and years of experience. Teacher effectiveness, however, is as important as qualifications.

IRA Recommendations for High Quality Teachers in NCLB Reform:

1. Broaden the definition of a qualified teacher to include experience, performance evidence, and other indicators of teacher quality.
2. Provide federal funding to research student achievement outcomes linked to the instruction of teachers prepared in different preservice programs.
3. Use Title II to address research-based criteria in developing quality reading teacher preparation programs and for assessing the effectiveness of these programs.
4. Require that teacher education institutions align graduate curriculum with NCATE research-based standards for teaching reading.
5. Require that teacher education institutions increase the number of reading courses in undergraduate programs to ensure that every classroom teacher is competent to teach reading from their first day on the job.
6. Require that state-based teacher certification and licensure tests at the elementary level expect teachers to demonstrate a strong working knowledge of literacy development, phonemic awareness, phonics, oral language, vocabulary, fluency, assessment, reading comprehension, classroom organization, differentiated instruction, and how to engage students in learning.
7. Require that state-based teacher certification and licensure tests at the secondary level expect teachers to demonstrate a strong working knowledge of teaching reading in the content areas.
8. Require states and schools to develop comprehensive research-based professional development plans targeted at building teacher capacity to teach reading within all content areas. These plans should have mechanisms for assessing whether teachers are proficient at teaching reading.

9. Require secondary teachers who serve as reading teachers, reading specialists, or literacy coaches to meet IRA standards for reading professionals.
10. Require K-12 literacy coaches to be highly qualified reading teachers who meet IRA standards for reading professionals.
11. Require paraprofessionals, teacher educators, and administrators to meet IRA standards for reading professionals.
12. Require special education teachers to have substantial coursework and experience in the teaching of reading.
13. Require reading certification for teachers of special reading classes for struggling readers.

Scientifically-Based Instruction: Defining Best Practices

The International Reading Association is an advocate for informed public policy and informed educational practice. Accordingly, it has developed clearly defined criteria to ensure quality teaching and learning in reading. These criteria are based on practitioners' experience and researchers' studies of effective reading instruction. While the National Reading Panel provided quality research-based information on five major areas of reading, many important components of reading were not addressed in their report, and research evidence continues to accumulate.

It is important to recognize that the adoption of "evidence-based" or "research-based" programs alone cannot guarantee reading success for all students. Teachers and administrators must evaluate methods and programs to determine if the instructional strategies are a good match for their schools and the children they teach. Programs, no matter how well designed, must be adjusted as necessary when they are not working.

IRA Recommendations for Scientifically Based Instruction in NCLB Reform:

1. Regularly revise and expand the definition of reading through continuous review of scientifically based reading research.
2. Develop a more systematic evidence-based model of what works for quality teaching and learning in reading.
3. Conduct new research that broadens and builds on the work of the National Reading Panel, especially for schools with diverse populations.
4. Add the following items to the current five essential elements of effective reading instruction:
 - classroom organization
 - differentiated instruction
 - expert intensive tutoring
 - motivation and engagement
 - writing, and
 - oral language.
5. Design "evidence-based" programs that are consistent with existing research findings.
6. Conduct research studies of "evidence-based" programs to determine their specific effectiveness.

Assessment: Informing Instruction

IRA believes that important conceptual, practical, and ethical issues must be considered by those who design and implement assessments, including testing programs. IRA supports the use of assessments that measure progress and achievement in multiple ways. The focus on a single interpretation of a single test score can be harmful as it tends to narrow instructional objectives. It can even discourage schools from providing sufficient amounts of teaching to all children.

IRA favors the use of diagnostic assessments to guide teachers in the improvement of learning outcomes. High-quality classroom assessments encompass a variety of ways to demonstrate knowledge that fit with how children really learn. Assessments should be used to support rich academic instruction and provide information that improves student learning. Children have a right to reading assessment that identifies their strengths as well as their needs. The classroom teacher, the one closest to the child, should be the central decision maker in determining how effective instruction is provided.

Multiple assessments should be used when crucial decisions with long-term consequences are being made. This is the standard for virtually every professional body with expertise in assessments, including the American Psychological Association, American Educational Research Association, National Reading Council, and the International Reading Association.

IRA Recommendations for Assessment in NCLB Reform:

1. Design assessment plans at the state and local level that reflect the complexity of teaching, learning to read, and the teaching of reading.
2. Construct rigorous classroom assessments at the state and local level that will demonstrate the effectiveness of instructional techniques to outside observers. Base instructional decisions on multiple assessments and multiple interpretations of the same assessments (such as providing average level of attainment, amount of growth, proportions of students in the various quartiles or quintiles, and proportions of students who are meeting state standards).
3. Build assessments at the state and local level around daily educational tasks that teachers use to collect data specific to the content and strategies they are teaching.
4. Provide multiple, up-to-date measures of student performance at the state and local level.
5. Avoid using test scores as a basis for rewarding or punishing schools or teachers.
6. Include measures of student performance that assess higher order thinking skills and understanding.
7. Educate parents, community members, and policymakers about classroom-based assessment as a means of improving learning outcomes.

Accountability: A More Accurate Description of Adequate Yearly Progress

One of the most important aspects of NCLB is the public release of disaggregated student subgroup performance. The law requires Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for all demographic groups. IRA supports the concept, but there are difficulties in applying and implementing the specifics of the Act.

One problem with the current law is that all subgroups are expected to have the same degree of success. Schools with diverse populations have more subgroup targets to meet. Lower performing schools and districts must make larger gains to accomplish AYP. They may suffer sanctions even when they are markedly improving student achievement. To determine adequate yearly progress there needs to be a broader accountability system that relies on multiple forms of evidence about schools and student learning. This evidence should be used to support comprehensive improvements in teaching and learning.

The current concept of AYP is based on the assumption that each annual cohort of students should be equivalent to the last. AYP should take into account the starting point for each school or district and acknowledge growth of mean proficiency within schools. School populations can differ from year to year, and this makes the AYP estimations unreliable. Schools should meet high standards, and the accountability system needs to recognize their success in increasing rates of learning.

IRA Recommendations for Accountability in NCLB Reform:

1. Use a value-added/student growth system which credits schools for longitudinal growth in student achievement, such as how students in a particular grade or cohort have improved from the beginning of the year to the end of the year, or how a group of students have improved as they advance in grade level. Include benchmarks to measure increased achievement and disaggregate by subgroups. This would be a more accurate measure of school and student performance, and allow states to focus limited resources on the students and schools most in need.
2. Provide a comprehensive picture of students' and schools' performance by moving from an overwhelming reliance on standardized tests to using multiple indicators of student achievement in addition to standardized tests.
3. Broaden the definition of what counts as evidence of success and replace the law's arbitrary proficiency targets with ambitious achievement targets based on rates of success actually achieved by the most effective public schools. This might mean, for example, examining the largest average improvement in Title I schools and using that as a benchmark for developing performance targets.

Making a Difference Means Making It Different: A New Model for Funding

In 1988 Title I funding was available to schools serving 75% of children in poverty. Under NCLB, Title I serves only 40% of children in poverty. This reduction has diluted the impact of intervention services to students most in need.

Meeting our obligation to provide excellent reading instruction to every child means that classrooms need to be reformed, sufficient financial investments must be made, and communities must wholeheartedly support school and instructional reform efforts. IRA believes the classroom teacher, in collaboration with colleagues, should be the central decision maker in determining how instruction is provided, what materials are used, who needs and gets extra services, and how time is allocated.

IRA Recommendations for Funding in NCLB Reform:

NCLB funding be reallocated based on the number of students needing intervention at four different levels of intensity, with the majority of resources targeted at Level 4.

- Level 1: The regular classroom teacher serves the majority of children in whole class and small group settings.
- Level 2: The classroom teacher has assistance from literacy coaches, reading teachers, or special education teachers to modify groupings and increase the amount of differentiation of instruction.
- Level 3: Children receive specialized intervention with a reading specialist in small group instruction.
- Level 4: Children most at-risk receive the most intensive interventions from reading specialists. Instruction may be one-to-one with additional time allotted. Specific instructional materials and differentiated approaches may be used. Instruction may take place outside the classroom. Ongoing collaboration among the classroom teacher, reading specialist, special educator, and other support personnel should occur. Services at this level should be expanded to include quality preschool programs, smaller classes, reading specialists, and more aides.

Conclusion

IRA believes that significant reforms of NCLB are necessary for all children to succeed, for teachers to excel, for schools to be effective, and for communities to receive the promised return on the investment made to public education. The International Reading Association's 90,000 members recognize that the best chance for overall improvement in reading achievement starts locally. Teachers who are fundamentally connected to the classroom must lead the way. Their initiatives must rely on the support of broad communities willing to invest in each classroom in America, so that children receive the resources they need to succeed. Only then will our highest aspirations for our children's futures be attainable.

Resources

International Reading Association

www.reading.org

High Stakes Assessments in Reading
Making a Difference Means Making It Different
Standards for Reading Professionals
Multiple Methods of Instruction
What Is Evidence-Based Reading Instruction?
Excellent Reading Teachers

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development

www.ascd.org

“Does Highly Qualified Mean High-Quality?”

Center on Education Policy

<http://www.cep-dc.org/pubs/nclby3/>

“From the Capital to the Classroom: Year 3 of the No Child Left Behind Act.”

The Civil Rights Project, Harvard University

<http://www.civilrightsproject.harvard.edu/research/esea>

“Listening to Teachers: Classroom Realities and No Child Left Behind.”

Education Commission of the States

<http://www.ecs.org/html/special/nclb/reporttothenation/reporttothenation.htm>

“ECS Report to the Nation: State Implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act.”

Education Policy Analysis Archives

<http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v13n33/>

“Conflicting demands of No Child Left Behind and state systems: Mixed messages about school performance”

The Education Trust

<http://www2.edtrust.org/NR/rdonlyres/8810CC63-EA22-4881-832D-78F51C525A56/0/TeacherQuality.pdf>

“In Need of Improvement: Ten Ways the U.S. Department of Education Has Failed to Live Up to Its Teacher Quality Commitments.”

Education Week

www.edweek.org

Research Center on Teacher Quality

Learning First Alliance

<http://www.learningfirst.org/publications/nclbguide/>

“A Practical Guide to Talking With Your Community About No Child Left Behind and Schools in Need of Improvement.”

National Center for Education Statistics

<http://nces.ed.gov>

“Who Teaches Reading in Public Elementary Schools? The Assignments and Educational Preparation of Reading Teachers”

The National Center for Fair & Open Testing

http://www.fairtest.org/Failing_Our_Children_Report.html

“Failing Our Children: How “No Child Left Behind Undermines Quality and Equity in Education.”

National Conference of State Legislatures

http://www.ncsl.org/programs/educ/nclb_report.htm

“Task Force on No Child Left Behind: Final Report”

National Schools Boards Association

<http://www.nsba.org/site/docs/33100/33080.pdf>

“Ensuring the Goals of No Child Left Behind: Recommendations for Legislative and Regulatory Changes.”

North Central Regional Educational Laboratories

www.ncrel.org

“Improving Reading in America: Are Teachers Prepared?”

Northwest Evaluation Association

www.nwea.org

"Individual Growth and School Success"

Public Education Network

http://www.publiceducation.org/portals/nclb/hearings/national/Open_to_the_Public.asp

“Open to the Public: Speaking Out on No Child Left Behind.”

Southeast Center for Teaching Quality

www.teachingquality.org

“Unfulfilled Promise: Ensuring High Quality Teachers for Our Nation's Schools”

The Teaching Commission

<http://theteachingcommission.org>

“Teaching at Risk: A Call to Action”

U.S. Department of Education

www.ed.gov

P.L. 107-110, the No Child Left Behind Act