Focus on Policy

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Taking a Stand on NCLB

Editors' note: One of the most frustrating parts of the No Child Left Behind law for many in education is its singular, authoritarian voice as it mandates one way of teaching and learning for all schools in all communities. To resist this narrow, fixed perspective, we have invited several different scholars to offer their responses to NCLB and their best advice to readers on how to move forward. We asked these contributors to examine the underlying assumptions of the NCLB legislation and to submit a stance (an ethical, informed perspective) on NCLB and literacy education. It is our hope that these statements will inform readers and support you in considering your own circumstances and agency in talking with colleagues, parents, administrators, and legislators about the future of education.

False Assumptions and Misleading Words

Joanne Yatvin

No matter how worthy the intentions of those who created NCLB may have been, many of the law's assumptions, procedures, and uses of language are so badly flawed that the only foreseeable outcome is failure. Failure not only for the law in achieving its goals, but also failure for schools, for teachers, and for children.

Although the basic assumption of NCLB, "All children can learn," is a proposition all serious educators and citizens can agree with, many other of the law's assumptions suggest the creators' ignorance at best and malice at worst. Moreover, the procedures devised by the US Department of Education (USDOE) from these assumptions seem deliberately aimed at crippling public education rather than improving it.

One egregious example of a false assumption is that all students have the same academic, career and personal needs, abilities, and interests. Thus, the action the law prescribes is one level of achievement, one set of teaching methods, and one type of assessment for all. NCLB also assumes—without saying so directly—that the vast majority of teachers do not know how to teach reading, so the procedures written into the law allow the USDOE to pressure states and school districts to use a small number of favored commercial texts, scripted teaching methods, and standardized assessments that take decision making out of the hands of teachers altogether. At the same time, the provision in the law for "research-based" programs makes it virtually impossible for locally designed programs and assessments to gain approval and, thus, to qualify for Federal funds.

Still, the worst aspect of NCLB is its use of punishment as the major stimulus for positive changes. Its way of dealing with struggling schools is to publicly label them as "in need of improvement." When that happens, students are allowed to transfer to other schools, taking public funds with them, while their former schools must pay outside providers to give supplementary instruction to the remaining students who do not meet benchmarks. Ultimately, a school that does not improve its test scores sufficiently can be reconstituted with a whole new faculty and principal.

The law punishes teachers by labeling some of them unqualified to teach their subjects, and by implying that many more are incompetent because their students did not make Adequate Yearly Progress. In a final gesture of vindictiveness, the law puts pressure on schools through its rating system to hold back elementary and middle school students and push out secondary students who have low test scores. Out of some combination of desperation and cowardice, many schools go along with these punishments so that their subsequent overall test scores will appear to indicate improved achievement.

Along with wreaking havoc on schools and children, NCLB attempts to blind the public about what is happening by using language inaccurately. "Achievement," which actually reflects only the standardized test scores, is made out to be synonymous with learning. The term "accountability," which means being responsible for one's actions, is applied only to public schools, hiding the fact that other institutions, economic conditions, and family circumstances also have some responsibility for children's learning. Publicly, NCLB

calls for "rigor" and "high expectations"—the characteristics all parents want in their children's schools. But in its actions, the USDOE has promoted curricula that are months or even years beyond the developmental levels of children and adolescents along with large amounts of instruction and homework that allow no breathing space for students of any age.

Finally, there is the lie in the title of the education law itself: "No Child Left Behind." Unfortunately, American public education has left many children behind in the past through the carelessness, foolishness, or prejudice of those running the schools. But never before has any law purporting to aid poor children, disabled children, immigrant children, and children of color so consciously and cynically barred their way while claiming to do the opposite.

Seeing through the Spectacle of NCLB

Carole Edelsky

What's wrong with NCLB? Everything. To eliminate the "achievement gap" between minority and white students (its ostensible goal), it pushes uniform one-size-fits-all standards and mandates standardized tests. To hold schools accountable, it demands Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP); i.e., scores on those standardized tests, disaggregated by race, ethnicity, income, special education, and language, must continue to go up. One subgroup failing to make AYP for two consecutive years scuttles the ship; i.e., the entire school is punished ("restructured") for the "failings" of a few. Because a few low scores have more of an impact on a small group, the more diverse the school (i.e., the more small subgroups of students), the more likely it becomes a *failing school.* Parents of children in a *failing school* have access to a simple(minded) remedy: the "choice option." Except that in rural areas, there may not be another "choice" (a *performing school*), and in urban areas, *performing schools* may well have no room. Despite NCLB's demand for "scientific, research-based, evidence-based" practice, there is no research base for provisions of the law itself—no "scientific research" showing that punitive policies result in improved teaching and learning, that standardized high-stakes tests are best for assessing learning or education, that commercial reading programs actually improve general reading proficiency (Allington, 2004). If all that isn't enough, as a result of NCLB, drop-out rates are rising, good teachers are leaving, curriculum is turning into test prep, and cheating (by administrators and teachers) is increasing (Edelsky, 2006). Reading First, a key program within NCLB, has recently been found to be rife with mismanagement, conflicts of interest, and other illegalities (OIG, 2006).

What's wrong with NCLB? Even more. The goal of the original civil rights era law (the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965) was to ensure "disadvantaged students" access to a "quality education." NCLB, the 2002 version of ESEA, changed *quality* to *gap* and *education* to *achievement,* a move that permits education to be what the Business Roundtable wants it to be—standards-based and test-driven. With a test score as the point of education, learning becomes strategizing for test-taking—gaming the test. Gone is any time for learning to think deeply, critically examine the world, think about and value the common good. No wonder. The neo-liberal agenda that created NCLB does not promote critical examination or the common good or even (especially) messy democracy; neo-liberals want schools to serve market interests. "Workforce development systems" (schools) are supposed to create "commodities" (students who become educated workers) to ensure that U.S. corporations compete favorably in the international marketplace (Strauss, 2006). And if public schools do not meet the impossible demands of NCLB (e.g., all schools will make AYP by 2014) (Bracey, 2004), so much the better. They can be justifiably privatized—allowing even greater neo-liberal control over producing the "commodities" the marketplace needs.

Why doesn't everybody understand this? Two reasons: lack of information and erroneous "common sense." NCLB is a classic case of policy as political spectacle (Smith, 2004), with obfuscating rhetoric ("closing the achievement gap," "high standards," "accountability"), a plot with villains (the educational establishment) preying on victims (minorities lacking skills because schools haven't been tough enough), a pretense of being grounded in science (which is actually "junk" science), and the illusion of democracy (citizens as mere spectators while the real action happens backstage). As spectacles do, NCLB bedazzles and mystifies. What might demystify and inform—the media—is owned and run by neo-liberals who are themselves members of the interest group

for whom NCLB was created. So instead of demystifying, the media feature stories that undermine public education, promote "Reading Wars" favoring phonics, fail to investigate evidence pointing to shady practices, and then under-report (if they report at all) the scandals found by others (e.g., the Office of Inspector General's report on Reading First).

Thus, the public doesn't know about the failures of NCLB—the fact that it isn't working, that the achievement gap in fact is not narrowing (Dillon, 2006). It doesn't know about the (perhaps unintended) consequences—students dropping out; teachers leaving; schools dropping art, music, and other programs in favor of test prep; cheating; and so on. The public—along with some liberal politicians—are also confused about what they do know. They applaud the ostensible goal—to right educational inequity—and the attention paid to long-ignored populations. But they don't see that "attention" *per se* doesn't correct injustice. Narrowing the curriculum with programs that require all kids—no matter their different needs—to be on the same page on the same day, tying teachers' hands when they want to improvise for local conditions, preventing kids from passing or graduating because of a score on a single standardized test—this is hardly the kind of attention that helps kids from historically educationally disadvantaged groups. Those kids need *more* alternatives, not fewer; *richer* paths to learning, not more bankrupt ones.

Besides being kept in the dark about NCLB, the public is also bamboozled by common sense. In life, Americans disdain paper-and-pencil tests (they know the real driving test is driving, not a multiple-choice test), but when it comes to school, their common sense tells them that tests are the way to show learning. A set of related beliefs follow: Tests not only reflect learning, but also what should be learned; therefore, teaching to the test is desirable. "Objective," machine-scored standardized tests in school are self-evidently meaningful, so policies that rely on testing for accountability are obviously correct. Attaching high stakes to a single test is probably not a good idea because there are too many chances for error, but testing itself is unassailable. And then there's the common sense about reading—that it amounts to decoding first and comprehending later. Therefore, decoding and comprehending should be taught and tested separately. Such beliefs undergird NCLB and also the public's appraisal of it. They complicate efforts to develop deeper public understanding of NCLB.

Why does it matter? A movement to overhaul NCLB—to drastically change its direction, not merely some details—will require a lot of noise in the form of consistent demands from a lot of people. Until the public (actually, various publics) understands with much greater clarity that NCLB erodes the public's own schools, exacerbates rather than lessens inequities, damages kids, and helps corporations while undermining democracy, it is unlikely that enough people can make enough noise to get rid of this oppressive educational policy. Yet readers of *Language Arts* and other educators can comprise one such public voice. We have our job cut out for us: changing the common sense about testing and reading. It's one necessary step in moving beyond educational policies like NCLB that revolve around tests and erroneous beliefs about literacy.

Speaking Truth to Policy

Joanne Larson and Cecilia Rios-Aguilar

Being able to talk to policy makers is something we have been discussing together for a long time. Larson is a qualitative researcher of language and literacy practices. Rios Aguilar is a quantitative researcher of educational policies targeted to minority students; she uses both secondary data analysis techniques and survey methods to collect data on Latino/a students' and families' literacy practices using Moll, Amanti, Neff, and Gonzalez's (1992) funds of knowledge work as a basis for informing the design of her survey instrument. We have wondered why policy makers typically do not use the wealth of existing research on the multiple language and literacy practices of children and families from non-dominant groups to make policy. Instead, they continue to rely on statistics that do not challenge deficit model views of non-dominant groups. Large-scale policy reforms such as NCLB are examples of the use of "folk" knowledge about literacy and how to understand it—knowledge that ignores what research has told us for more than 25 years. We try here to articulate some challenges to the research base upon which NCLB rests and to offer ideas about resistance and action for literacy researchers and teachers facing these unrelenting policies.

NCLB relies on numerous studies (e.g., Snow, Barnes,

Chandler, Goodman, & Hemphill, 1991; NRC, 1998) that offer explanations for why children, particularly poor children, fall behind in literacy performance focusing on: (1) their home environment, and (2) their school experiences (Lee & Croninger, 1994). Some of these studies have adopted a questionable perspective of students and their families. For example, in these studies, students, particularly Latino/a students and their families, are viewed as "abnormal" simply because they are not read to in English every day or because they communicate predominantly in Spanish. Consequently, these studies suggest that some children must exclusively rely on school-related opportunities to develop literacy skills, particularly when home supports are evaluated as weak or ineffectual (Lee & Croninger, 1994). What these studies fail to show is that Latino/a students and their families, as well as many other children and families from non-dominant groups, *do* engage in multiple literacy practices that can have a positive influence on their learning.

This limited research base fails to recognize the complexity in studying reading achievement and literacy outcomes among non-dominant students. First, embedded in these traditional figures are notions of "literacy" and "reading" that capture only one aspect of what "literacy" actually entails (i.e., a limited set of skills). Second, the lack of "literacy" and "reading" skills has often been associated with academic, economic, and life failure (Snow et al., 1991; Fedderke, de Kadt, & Luiz, 1999). According to this particular "literacy" model, what it means to be literate is linked to the individual's capacity to master a set of skills that enable a person to "function" in economic, social, and political life. Furthermore, it is implied in this definition that possessing these skills will automatically translate into higher academic achievement and better life opportunities. If this is true, then why have many "literacy" and "reading" interventions and reading programs targeted to non-dominant children and families (such as the Reading First initiative supported by NCLB legislation) failed? Perhaps, as suggested by Street (1997), "literacy not only varies with social context and with cultural norms and discourses regarding, for instance, identity, gender, and belief, but . . . its uses and meanings are always embedded in relations of power" (p. 48). Or perhaps there exist other necessary conditions that, combined with the set of skills, will contribute to students' academic success. Furthermore, we must ask ourselves, is academic success the only measure of literacy?

We are not arguing that academic literacy skills (or school-based forms of literacy) are not important for all students to learn, but we are questioning whether these "skills" are sufficient. We are arguing that a narrow focus on this limited set of skills unnecessarily excludes authentic language and literacy practices students bring from out-of-school contexts. For example, Latino/a students comprehend texts in both languages (English and Spanish) and engage in multiple language-related activities in those languages. Finding solutions to address the literacy learning needs of these students, then, requires researchers to examine the situation from a variety of angles. This is certainly not an easy task, but perhaps, as argued by many researchers (Hamilton & Barton, 2000; Freebody & Luke, 1999; Moll & González, 1999), failure in reading English is not about individual familial skill deficits; rather, it is about not valuing and making use of the multiple resources, skills, and knowledge already available to all children in their homes and communities.

So what can we do to change this policy environment? We believe we must "speak truth to policy" by joining with like-minded colleagues in a systematic effort to be heard in a language that policy makers understand. What if we were able to: 1) build measures that better capture the multiple ways in which all children and families practice literacy; 2) use these measures to show policy makers the relationship between multiple forms of literacy practiced by children and families from all backgrounds, ethnicities, and languages and children's cognitive and noncognitive outcomes; and 3) report findings carefully, since methodologically there are enormous challenges to taking this new approach? Would legislation change? Would policy makers start asking schools and school districts to report these measures to provide evidence of their success? At this point, there is little to no evidence in the databases commonly used by policy makers of the multiple skills that children and families do have. In fact, some researchers have questioned the narrow view of literacy used by many policy makers. Hamilton & Barton (2000) provide a clear example through their claims that the well-known and widely used International

Adult Literacy Survey has serious methodological concerns, treats culture as an error, and uses a very narrow view of what literacy really means to adults. In spite of these efforts, we have yet to find research that uses the same approach to question federal and local educational policies as those embraced by NCLB.

There is some research that documents how a variety of literacy practices are used by children and families from non-dominant groups. And, as we mentioned earlier, there are studies that use large-scale datasets to provide evidence of the "lack" of literacy skills that are deemed necessary to succeed in a global economy. However, what we lack is, perhaps: 1) a willingness among policy makers to find alternative measures of literacy and its relationship with other social, economic, emotional, and educational outcomes; 2) a willingness among researchers to collaborate and to design studies that attempt to remedy existing weaknesses; 3) research methods that address these issues; 4) a willingness to help local educators (e.g., administrators and teachers) to address these issues in their particular contexts. What if we just start collaborating to develop and use authentic measures? We may be able to articulate and fight for an alternative "evidence base" for use in resistance and change strategies. To *not* do this is to sit by and watch our children suffer needlessly.

Failing "Those Poor Children"

JoBeth Allen

"No Child Left Behind" does just the opposite. More and more children are being failed by their schools, or in local parlance, being "left behind." He flunked. They failed. She didn't make her pass. He's a repeater. These are the terms *we* use to describe our children and *they* use to describe each other as we shun them, banish them from the community of friends to which they thought they belonged. Failing children, punishing them because they do not meet an arbitrary testing standard that, by design, has an "acceptable failure rate," means we think some children are disposable. It is no secret who those children are: they are overwhelmingly poor. "Those poor children" who fail really are, too often, those children who are poor.

We can talk about NCLB high-stakes testing that fails children in terms of higher standards, increased accountability, an end to social promotion, or a return to academic rigor, but the result is that children's lives are being ruined as early as 8 years old. This is not hyperbole; this is a statistical reality. A wide variety of studies and meta-analyses over time, age, and place tell us that children who are left behind once are up to 50% less likely to graduate from high school. If they are failed twice, they are 90% less likely to graduate than their peers. We know the statistics for adults without a high school degree—lower income, substandard living conditions, poorer health. With increased poverty comes further social class segregation exacerbated by the public shaming of "failing schools"; at least one national realty company boasts that they provide NCLB report card data to prospective homebuyers. To tie the cycle up with a neat bow on the perpetuation of poverty package, the children of those who have been failed by schools and who subsequently fail to graduate are more likely to continue the cycle of poverty and low educational achievement.

Teachers are forced into complicity in harming the very lives they are dedicated to enriching. One teacher reported that administrators told teachers in his high socioeconomic status (SES) school to "make sure those students you believe will fail the [state] exam fail your class so that there is no discrepancy between grades and standardized test scores." An English teacher in a low SES school reported, "This year 97% of our students passed the [state] Graduation Test. At a recent meeting, we were told that the state feels that so many students are passing this test that it is probably too easy and they plan to 'ratchet up' the test. Are the children not supposed to pass the test? Are we deliberately trying to fail students, and in the process teachers and schools?"

The enforcers of NCLB policy are not finding new answers to how to teach poor children because they are not looking for them. They thought they knew; they thought by forcing teachers into uniform methods and children into particular textbooks they were being scientific. They thought that threats and punishment would make those poor, lazy, children work harder. They thought that by cementing the pole-vaulting bar into the standards and giving everyone the same pole and 12 steps to the box, we'd all become award-winning athletes.

Legislators may have the best intentions, but they are not educators. Educators may have the best professional knowledge, but we are not infallible. Parents may know their children best,

but we do not write policy. Our only hope—and there is hope—is to work together to design policies that ameliorate the root causes and perpetuation of poverty in our society—perhaps a No Family Left Behind law as proposed by *New York Times* education analyst Michael Winerip (2006)—and simultaneously find effective ways to teach students whose educational opportunity is severely limited by poverty. As David Berliner (2006) concluded in his well-documented analysis of the effects of poverty on schooling, "Poverty places severe limits on what can be accomplished through school reform efforts, particularly those associated with the federal No Child Left Behind law"; however, "small reductions in family poverty lead to increases in positive school behavior and better academic performance." Until the day when we actually reduce poverty in this country, the onus falls on educators and educational policy makers to leave no child behind. One immediate step we must take is to stop failing "those poor children."

Lessons from the Inspector General's Report and Its Mission to Help the Poor

Patrick Shannon

Despite the sincere commitment of many involved with NCLB, the Inspector General charged that the Reading First Initiative is rotten at its core. The crux of the charges is that the leadership stacked the panels for review of state proposals for reading programs, leading to advocacy of one particular approach through a limited set of commercial programs. The Inspector General found that the panel members benefited financially from the enforced adoptions, which is, of course, against the law; in addition, he objected because the bias in favor of one approach was not in the original legislation. The leadership's deliberate intention is clearly demonstrated in the email exchanges among the Reading First leadership. In one such email, for example, Director of Reading First Chris Doherty wrote about a company that was not favored at the department: "They are trying to crash our party and we need to beat the [expletive deleted] out of them in front of all the other would-be party crashers who are standing on the front lawn waiting to see how we welcome these dirtbags" (Department of Education Inspector General's Report, 2006, p. 24).

Lesson 1: The stacking of panels undermines the truth claims of science. Rather than a dispassionate commitment to evidence, science becomes a discursive struggle over definitions of science, reading, and learning, enabling the winners to eliminate entire bodies of evidence despite their demonstrated utility. Think about the scientific vote over whether Pluto would remain a planet. Scientists agreed to change the definition of a planet and *poof!* Pluto disappeared. With the stacked panels for Reading First, members met to determine definitions and *poof* Shirley Brice Heath's, Luis Moll's, Perry Gilmore's, Arlette Willis's (and other) research could not be considered in the design of reading programs for the poor and working classes because those researchers seek to identify strengths within poor communities rather than to pit one instructional method against another in order to determine which will raise test scores higher.

Lesson 2: The conflict of interest demonstrates the role of business in NCLB. Commercial publishers hire experts to represent their programs in order to increase their market share. When those experts make decisions about which materials can be used, it distorts the market. Note that the Inspector General's investigation began after repeated complaints from some commercial publishers that they were being excluded from consideration. They were correct. Yet, reading instruction as an open market is still a market in which children's literacy futures are bought and sold in order to maximize profits for publishers and their non-publishing corporate owners. In woefully underfunded schools that cannot afford to purchase real books to supplement the "required material," the poor suffer the most from the market mentality.

Lesson 3: Checks and balances within government do not deter zealots. The Inspector General's report provides many examples of Reading First officials who were willing to subvert oversight regulations in order to jealously protect their beliefs that gaps in test scores are markers of a lack of individual effort and not historical artifacts of political, social, and economic inequalities among classes and races in the United States. Acting on this belief, Reading First officials employed any means necessary to ensure that states would offer scripted direct instruction materials and tests as technological solutions to teachers' and students' inefficiencies. In their minds, the ends would justify the means. According to Civil Rights Project

Harvard University (Lee, 2006), these scripted materials have not achieved their aims because reading scores have neither improved significantly nor have gaps narrowed—even in first generation reform states (e.g., Florida, North Carolina, and Texas) where the Reading First "solution" was mandated before 2002.

The NCLB label is meant to give the impression that the federal government is doing all it can for children of the poor. They have required high standards and accountability for students and teachers. The Inspector General's report evinces, however, that the NCLB officials have not upheld high ethical standards and have precious little accountability—at this point, no Reading First official has been prosecuted or brought before Congress. Moreover, the federal government is *not* doing all it could to support the learning of poor students, and we have evidence about what could be done. From the 1960s to the 1980s, the achievement gaps between poor and middle classes narrowed continuously (Berliner, 2006). During those decades, schools were understood to be one of several social programs necessary to address inequalities. Income protection for families, housing, food stamps, childcare, affirmative action, and medical benefits were programs expected to work in tandem with better schooling in order to improve the prospects of the poor and their children. Since the mid 1980s, federal officials have framed poverty as personal failure and retreated from supportive social programs, leaving schools and teachers solely responsible for addressing poverty in America.

If citizens hope to remedy poverty through education, then they must reconsider the underlying conception of poverty encoded in NCLB, reinvent those social programs as a legitimate role for the federal government, and redirect the forces exposed in the Inspector General's report.

Overhauling NCLB: What Do We Want and How Will We Get There?

Bess Altwerger

Most educators know that "No Child Left Behind" is a drastically revised version of the ESEA act of 1965. Although both the original and current forms of the legislation specify the process whereby states and local schools are granted federal funds, there are significant differences in the social and economic contexts and goals underlying the two acts. ESEA arose within the context of the civil rights movement and the war on poverty. Its goal was to end the cycle of poverty and inequality by providing federal support for schools in need.

The social and political context surrounding NCLB is quite different. In the age of globalization, trade "agreements" with third world countries have replaced the industrial workforce of unionized, middle class Americans with exploited and underpaid foreign workers. What the corporate sector needs now is a new generation of American service and technology workers with narrowly defined literacy skills that will ensure efficiency and uniformity (not critical response!). A privatized and regimented public school system (and reading curriculum) will supply such functionally literate workers. The private and elite public schools will satisfy the need for a smaller number of creative and analytic innovators, scientists, and corporate leaders of the future. So the goal of NCLB, despite political rhetoric to the contrary, is to provide business with an insurance policy for future global corporate profitability. It will not end social and economic injustice, nor create a more democratic, humane society, though these are precisely the goals that motivate many NCTE members to teach.

With this in mind, I'd like to propose three directions that I believe should frame our work in advocating for a complete overhaul of NCLB when it comes up for reauthorization:

1. *Make equity, not test performance, the basis of federal funding.*

   Both the 1965 ESEA and the 2001 NCLB depended upon standardized test data at some level of the federal funding process to determine a student's and school's eligibility for or termination of Title 1/ Chapter 1 services. (Under ESEA, Title 1 reading teachers like myself actually lost their positions when rising test scores disqualified their schools.) NCLB added a punitive approach by withdrawing funds for schools that repeatedly fail to achieve AYP. We need to advocate for an overhaul of the entire funding process in order to achieve equity across individual schools within each state and throughout the nation. A federal funding system that makes standardization and high-stakes testing the "price" schools must pay to receive funds is simply setting up a smokescreen to hide the government's shameful failure to

make education funding a budget priority. We must demand that our federal tax dollars be used to level the playing field in education, and to end funding formulas based upon the local tax base. This means federal support for equitable (not equal) funding so that poorer, more troubled schools have a chance to achieve the quality of education available in richer schools. (See Kozol, 2005.) NCTE could work with other organizations to develop criteria and processes for determining the level of support a given school would need in order to provide a quality education for its students. The government should then be held accountable for providing that support. Until then, it has no right to hold teachers and students accountable for success.

2. *Eliminate corporate control of education policy.*

   Public education should support the rights of our children to realize their personal potential within a democratic and just society. Though this certainly should include the right to a broad range of future career opportunities, this does not mean turning schools into corporate boot camps. We must neutralize the role business plays in formulating and controlling public education and literacy instruction and assessment (Altwerger and Strauss, 2002). As educators and parents, we have a responsibility to become activists within a "new civil rights movement" that asserts the rights of all our children to a critical and life-enhancing education. We must work together for education policies that are based on the goal of developing citizens with the critical reasoning and civic courage needed to reverse destructive societal trends—the growing chasm among economic classes, racism and the resegregation of schools, erosion of our natural environment. Nothing can be more important to our children's future than to make this goal a national priority, encoded as law into any new legislation. NCTE and other professional organizations, not corporate CEOs, should work together to formulate such an education policy and develop programs and curricula to support it. Pedagogies based upon the goal of achieving a just and sustainable future would look radically different from the mind-numbing, test-driven corporate model currently in place.

3. *Build a long-term, independent coalition to publicly advocate for true education reform.*

   The midterm election results have given many educators and parents some hope for change, and may have the effect of diffusing activism. This would be a mistake. Every piece of harmful legislation over the last decade (including The Reading Excellence Act and NCLB) has had strong bipartisan support. We cannot depend on either party to reverse the current educational policy or achieve more than minimal, superficial changes to NCLB and Reading First. Though it would be nice to believe that simply educating our more liberal legislators would be sufficient to achieve the overhaul NCLB claims to support, we must remember that both of the majority parties are heavily influenced by and dependent on the support of the corporate sector (the main beneficiaries of the current policy). It is unlikely that congress would consider a major shift in the goals underlying education legislation without pressure from a strong and vocal coalition of parent, educator, and community groups that demand change. NCTE has taken the first steps in this direction by signing the Joint Organizational Statement on No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act (www.fairtest.org) (though I would like to see a much stronger set of demands). Now NCTE and other member organizations need to devote resources to educate and mobilize the public through local community forums, mass actions (demonstrations, marches, walkouts), symbolic gestures (armbands, T-shirts, bumper stickers, art and music events, etc.), and other peaceful means. We have facts about the rising dropout rate, resegregation, flat achievement patterns, teacher retention problems, and even conflicts of interest in the Reading First award process that can help us turn the tide in educational policy.

In order to achieve the goals I've outlined, we need to acknowledge that the work of an educator must be carried out both inside and outside of the schoolhouse door.

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