

## Questions on the *No Child Left Behind Act* for Candidates in the 2008 Federal Elections The National Council of Churches Committee on Public Education and Literacy

In this election year and now that the reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act has been delayed, here are suggested questions about the law for candidates for President and the U.S. Senate and the House of Representatives. These questions are coordinated with another resource from the NCC Committee on Public Education and Literacy, "Ten Moral Concerns in the *No Child Left Behind Act*."

1. The *No Child Left Behind Act* requires schools to bring all students to a level of proficiency by 2014. Many people believe this utopian goal is unattainable. What is a more realistic way to articulate high expectations and what will you do to maintain support for public education?
2. The *No Child Left Behind Act* tests children each year and has measured the average achievement of each subgroup of children against set score thresholds. Do you support the use of additional measures and what is your view of growth models for tracking student achievement?
3. The *No Child Left Behind Act* blames demographic groups of children who have failed to make "adequate yearly progress," blames their teachers, 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 to ensure assessments are consistent with what each child has been taught and that each child's Individual Education Plan (IEP) Team has a role in these decisions?
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. Many 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 public schools and what other supports must society provide for children in poverty?
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 public schools to develop—academic, physical, civic 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 privatized supplementary tutoring, and for major interventions like converting schools into charter schools or turning them over to private management firms. First, how do you think Title I funds should be used? Second, when private tutoring firms, charter schools, and private management firms 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? What should be the federal government's role in funding the mandates of the *No Child Left Behind Act*? What do you think of requiring the federal government to undertake a cost study as part of the reauthorization?

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

