

LegAlert



10 September 2007



Help Win the ESEA/NCLB Fight

Urge CA Lawmakers to Sign Letter to Speaker Pelosi

CTA is mobilizing members and school supporters throughout the state to stop Congress from enacting a version of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act or NCLB that would harm our students, our teachers, and our schools.

We are urging member of the California State Senate and the California Assembly to sign letters being circulated by Sen. Carole Migden (D-San Francisco) and Assembly Member Mark Leno (D-San Francisco) that would ask Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) and U.S. Rep. George Miller (D-CA) to reshape the measure into something that would help, instead of hurt, our public schools.

Background

The House Education and Labor Committee, which is chaired by Congressperson George Miller, is expected to begin looking at a “mock-up” or draft of a new version of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA or NCLB) as early as Monday, September 10.

The draft contains a number of provisions that are so onerous that they would devastate public schools in California and around the nation.

The current proposed changes would place even more undue emphasis on test scores, create new sanctions for struggling schools, undermine local control, and erode employee rights. It does all of this at a time California needs to recruit 100,000 new teachers into the profession.

To stop Congress from passing such counterproductive proposals, CTA is asking California lawmakers to sign a letter that spells out their opposition to these provisions that would:

- Implement the worst kind of “pay for performance” or merit pay. The proposed provisions would actually cap teacher pay and tie it to student test scores.

(Simply put: The proposal would discourage highly qualified teachers from coming into the profession and staying in the profession.)

- Gut collective bargaining, particularly on issues affecting professional development and career pathing.
- Undercut teachers’ rights to have a say on contractual issues relating to learning and working conditions.
- Implement a simplistic “one-size-fits-all” approach to education and teacher compensation that would make it harder for schools to prepare students to meet the state’s rigorous standards.
- Ignore the role of the physical plant and other outside factors that help create or undercut local learning and teaching conditions.

CTA Members; Here’s How to Help

- *Get in touch with your state Senator and your State Assembly Member immediately.* (Congress is expected to begin looking at these new proposals as early as Monday, September 10.)
- *Urge your state lawmakers to sign the letter to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi. As elected representatives of more than 30 million Californians, they have the power to effect changes in the federal measure.*

(The draft of the letter is attached for your reference. It contains the major arguments you can use to convince lawmakers to sign.)

*Please call and write lawmakers on this vital issue. Use the **link below** to go to the Legislative Action Center, where you can send faxes and e-mails directly to these officials. (If you have trouble using the link, go to cta.org and click on the “Government Action” tab and then the “Contact Your Lawmaker” link.)*

<http://capwiz.com/nea/ca/state/main/?state=CA>

For more information, contact CTA Legislative Advocate Patricia Rucker or GR Communications Consultant Len Feldman at 916.325.1500.

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10 September 2007

The Hon. Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
450 Golden Gate Ave. - 14th Floor
San Francisco, CA 94102

Re: Opposition to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (NCLB)

Dear Speaker Pelosi:

As members of the California Legislature, we appreciate the efforts that you and U.S. Rep. George Miller have undertaken aimed at reshaping the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (the NCLB) into a measure that would help California's schools achieve educational excellence.

At the same time, we must strongly express our opposition to the current proposals, including provisions that, if implemented, would deal a devastating blow to California's public education system, educators, and the more than 6 million students they teach.

Congress has failed to make needed improvements, and current proposed changes would place even more undue emphasis on test scores, create new sanctions for struggling schools, undermine local control, and erode employee rights. It does all of this at a time California needs to recruit 100,000 new teachers into the profession.

Specifically, we find totally unacceptable the provisions that would implement an ill-conceived and counterproductive pay-for-performance or "merit pay" plan. This plan would actually make it harder for California to attract and keep highly qualified teachers.

First, instead of providing an economic incentive to California teachers to work in "high-need" public schools, the proposal would actually cap what a teacher could earn. At a time California and the nation are facing a critical teacher shortage, our federal legislation should underwrite salary increases for this underpaid profession. That economic incentive would do wonders in helping California get the qualified teachers we need.

Second, the proposal wrongly ignores all of the factors that help or hinder California student performance. Instead, it simplistically and wrongly asserts that tying teachers'

salaries to student test scores will provide an incentive to teachers and that incentive will somehow boost student performance on these tests. Worse yet, the tests are a narrow, incomplete and inadequate measure of students' academic growth. Finally, as currently configured, the federal legislation ignores the impact on student learning in California of everything from a student's non-school environment to the influence of other teachers and other courses not currently included in this state's assessment system.

Third, the proposal to create a "career ladder" designed to encourage teachers to stay in the profession wrongly caps teachers' potential earnings. The proposal also wrongly creates a one-size-fits all model for the activities teachers in California should undertake as "development." In point of fact, different teachers working with students with different needs have their own divergent needs. Limiting teachers' options will not help them prepare their students to meet California's rigorous standards.

In addition, we have grave concerns about the legislation's potential for undermining collective bargaining, the vital method the law provides to give the real educational experts – classroom teachers – the power to have their voices heard on key instructional issues. The single-dimensioned proposal ignores the complex interaction of school leadership, teacher practices, teacher performance, and student learning. The federal legislation also ignores the effects of the basic conditions for teaching and learning that have a significant impact on student performance. Collective bargaining makes teachers and their districts accountable for changing these conditions.

Speaker Pelosi, as duly elected representatives of California's more than 30 million residents, we call on you to join us in opposing this flawed legislation. We urge you instead to help reshape this measure into one that would empower districts and local associations. Together, teachers and district administrators can develop proposals that include workable and productive means for recognizing exceptional teachers while improving the professional development of all teachers.

We are confident that our federal lawmakers – working closely with our dedicated teachers – can craft better legislation that will truly help each and every student succeed.

Sincerely,

(Undersigned members of the California legislature)