

The Civil Rights Project



Proyecto Derechos Civiles

Press Release

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NEW BOOK PROVIDES EXAMINATION AND EVALUATION OF THE NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND ACT

Los Angeles—January 9, 2008—A new book from The Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles (CRP/PDC) at UCLA’s Graduate School of Education and Information Studies evaluates and assesses the efficacy of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) test-based accountability in today’s schools. The book, *Holding NCLB Accountable: Achieving Accountability, Equity, and School Reform* (Corwin Press, 2008), is edited by CRP/PDC senior researcher Gail L. Sunderman.

The pending reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act has generated a spirited debate among educators. In this book, a team of noted education scholars assess NCLB’s performance-based system and discuss options for improving the law. With contributions from Gary Orfield, Linda Darling Hammond, Catherine Snow, Robert Linn, and Daniel Koretz, among others, *Holding NCLB Accountable* examines themes of capacity, accountability, school reform, and the law’s impact on educating all students, especially those from low-income and diverse backgrounds. It responds to critical questions such as the following:

- How do we develop assessments and accountability systems that assist rather than interfere with educational progress?
- How do we press for change without being counterproductive?
- How do we create a viable educational agenda that is mindful of state and local capacity?

Harvard testing expert Daniel Koretz argues that the entire NCLB accountability system is not based on hard evidence. Koretz says, “We know far too little about how to hold schools accountable for improving student performance.”

Jaekyung Lee, associate professor of education at the State University of New York in Buffalo, compares the findings from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) to state assessment results and shows that the federal accountability hasn't improved reading and mathematical achievement or reduced achievement gaps. "Based on the NAEP, there are no systemic indications of improving the average achievement and narrowing the gap after NCLB," says Lee. Other contributors suggest that the nation has not focused on the kinds of serious long-term reforms that can actually produce gains and narrow the huge gaps in opportunity and achievement for minority students.

Throughout the book, contributors provide information on what we know and don't know about educational accountability and what *types* of accountability systems will most improve opportunities for low-performing students while minimizing the negative effects. They provide the groundwork for developing a system of multiple measures, for obtaining evidence on whether NCLB is achieving its aim to increase student achievement and close the racial achievement gap, and tackling the very important issue of whether states have the financial and administrative capacity to meet the law's requirements and turn around low-performing schools. Finally, contributors examine whether NCLB maximizes its potential for fostering reform in low-performing schools. Taken together, these discussions raise important questions about the law's effects and offer strong recommendations for designing workable accountability systems that will lead to coherent efforts to improve schools.

Among the authors' findings are the following:

- We know too little about what types of accountability systems will most improve opportunities for low-performing students.
- The current NCLB accountability system does not provide the information we need to know how students are performing or what to do to advance students' learning and improve instruction.
- Evidence that NCLB is working to improve student achievement and close achievement gaps is not promising.
- State education agencies' capacity to meet the law's requirements and intervene in low-performing schools on the scale demanded by NCLB is limited.
- Many of the NCLB provisions, including the definition of highly qualified teachers, the design of the testing and accountability regulations, and the reliance on mandates impede school reform and make it more difficult for high schools serving low-income students to do their work.
- Only about 40% of the nation's high schools that have high dropout rates are identified as needing improvement by NCLB's core accountability measure (AYP).

The editor and authors of *Holding NCLB Accountable* recommend:

- More needs to be done to develop an accountability system that is fair, yields information that informs and advances student learning goals, and contributes to improving instruction. This includes, but is not limited to, adopting performance

- goals that are ambitious but realistic and obtainable, multiple indicators of performance, and realistic timetables for school improvement.
- The high expectations of NCLB must be paired with adequate support and greater investment in capacity building in low-performing schools and districts.
 - To offset the disadvantages faced by historically lower performing groups of students, in-school programs and reforms need to be complemented with out-of-school interventions and programs that address nonschool conditions such as housing, poverty, health care, and safety.
 - An independent, federally funded analysis of what it takes in administrative and financial resources for states to have a reasonable chance of turning around low-performing schools needs to be conducted.

Published by Corwin Press, *Holding NCLB Accountable* is funded in part by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation. Interested readers can order the book through Corwin Press at:

<http://www.corwinpress.com/booksProdDesc.nav?prodId=Book231916>

Contributors to *Holding NCLB Accountable* include: Robert Balfanz, Linda Darling-Hammond, Walter M. Haney, Willis D. Hawley, Michael Kieffer, Daniel Koretz, Mindy L. Kornhaber, Jaekyung Lee, Nettie Legters, Nonie K. Lesaux, Robert L. Linn, Goodwin Liu, Heinrich Mintrop, Gary Orfield, Russell W. Rumberger Catherine Snow, and Gail L. Sunderman

The Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles at UCLA's Graduate School of Education and Information Studies is a leading, national organization devoted to research and policy analysis about critical civil rights issues facing the nation. Its mission is to bridge the worlds of ideas and action by becoming a preeminent source of intellectual capital and a forum for building consensus within the civil rights movement.

About the Editor:

Gail Sunderman is a Senior Research Associate in K-12 Education for the Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles. She received her doctorate in Political Science from the University of Chicago. Her research focuses on educational policy and politics, urban school reform, and the impact of policy on the educational opportunities for at-risk students. At CRP/PDC, she is project director on a five-year study examining the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and is co-author of the book *NCLB Meets School Realities: Lessons from the Field* (Corwin Press, 2005).

