The Future of NCLB

No Child Left Behind is a monument to what we can accomplish when we bring accountability, high standards, and unprecedented funding to our schools. And as all your analysts ultimately agreed, it is a monument we must stand behind (“Do We Repair the Monument?” Forum, Spring 2005).

NCLB starts with the premise that all students, regardless of race, income, or special need, can and should achieve high standards. If you believe every child can learn in school, then it makes perfect sense to expect every child to be proficient in reading and math by 2014. To call this goal unrealistic is to abandon millions of children to what President Bush has so aptly termed the soft bigotry of low expectations.

While we want to be as flexible as possible, we will not backtrack and lower standards. If we do, children will fall behind, and our monument will stand for nothing but an empty promise. That would be a terrible shame because we can already see that this law is making a difference. Across the country, scores are rising, and the achievement gap is closing.

It is like the saying, what gets measured gets done. We must continue to assess every student every year. But let me be clear: We do not believe in a federal test. No Child Left Behind calls for each state to set its own academic standards in the best interests of its own students. We simply provide the funds for these assessments and ask for accountability for results in return.

Already we are seeing the states make real progress. Pennsylvania has gone from 61 percent of schools meeting their academic goals to 81 percent; California, from 54 percent to 64 percent; and Georgia, from 64 percent to 78 percent.

Now we want to bring the benefits of this law to our high schools by expanding on its principles of accountability, flexibility, choice, and research-based practices. Using those pillars, we can help ensure that a high-school diploma once again represents a ticket to success.

We face serious challenges. Just 68 out of every 100 9th graders will graduate from high school on time. And the vast majority of these students are unprepared for higher education. As a result, out of those 100 original 9th-grade students, only 27 are still enrolled in college in their sophomore year. With 80 percent of the fastest-growing jobs requiring some postsecondary education, we face a crisis.

That is why the president has proposed a $1.5 billion High School Initiative to ensure every student graduates ready for college or the workforce of the 21st century. We need to annually assess our high-school students, so we can intervene before a problem sets a student behind for life.

Now is not the time to chisel away at No Child Left Behind. We need to build on its foundations and extend the promise of high standards and accountability to all of our students. Together, we can give every child a quality education.

Chris Doherty
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NCLB is scheduled to be revisited by Congress in 2007 and I don’t believe it should be “reopened” before that time. Doing so would give lobbyists and reform opponents the opportunity to water down the accountability that is the heart and soul of the law.

When it is ultimately revisited, however, Congress will have a chance to shape NCLB’s parental choice requirements and make them more useful and valuable to parents and children. That’s not to say that I believe for a moment the parental options in the current law are not useful or valuable. In fact, what makes NCLB the most important education legislation in a generation is its recognition that in the hands of caring parents and concerned taxpayers, information itself can be a powerful tool for reform.

For instance, parents with children in schools identified as underachieving for two or more consecutive years are guaranteed the right to obtain supplemental educational services such as private tutoring, paid for with their children’s share of federal Title I funds. This provision—private tutoring—has proved to be far more popular than the other choice option in the law, transferring to another school. But during the NCLB drafting process, Senator Judd Gregg and I both wanted the supplemental services options to kick in immediately for parents, as soon as a school was identified by its state as needing improvement. We ended up with a law that came close, but didn’t go quite as far as we personally preferred.

NCLB’s supplemental services provisions are significant because they offer real options to some parents who previously had none and because of the precedent it sets: true Title I portability—the first time the federal government has formally established in law that “the money follows the child.” Under NCLB, federal Title I dollars can legally flow to private, even faith-based education providers when selected by parents.

I believe parents should have total control over their children’s share of...
Bill Damon is certainly right to point out that schools have always had a moral purpose, and American public schools avowed this purpose from their inception ("Good? Bad? or None of the Above?" Features, Spring 2005). I also agree with him that teachers—all teachers—are inevitably involved in moral education. The question is what sort of job they will do on this important task. Too many teachers today are discouraged from engaging students in moral dialogue by the incessant pressure to raise test scores. I agree, too, that teachers should instruct students explicitly on matters of right and wrong, where matters are clear enough for such instruction. There should be room, however, for the discussion of ambiguities.

But I strongly disagree with Damon that emotional awareness and feeling states have little to do with morality. The example he cites of an exercise in self-esteem is indeed silly, and such nonsense should be eliminated. However, thoughtful social/emotional content is vital in moral education. Self-understanding should not be regarded as "therapy," but as a fundamental element in both the acquisition of knowledge and the growth of moral sensitivity. Centuries ago, Socrates advised us, "Know thyself."

Children should be invited to ask themselves questions such as, Why do I sometimes act like a bully? Why do I do mean things? When am I tempted to lie or cheat? How do I feel at such moments? And teenagers need to reflect on the kinds of experience that corrupt us morally: Why do otherwise good people do horrible things in war? What does it mean to lose one's moral identity? When does emotion (or feeling) bring out the best (or worst) in me?

A whole philosophical school of thought puts feeling—the moral sentiments—at the heart of moral life and conduct. Of course we have to learn what is right—gain moral knowledge—but this knowledge, without feeling, may have little effect. David Hume, one of our greatest moral philosophers, said that moral truths must "take possession of the heart"; otherwise, "they can have no influence on conduct and behaviour."

This suggests that schools should give far more attention to the education of affect than they do at present. Not only is such education livelier and more likely to maintain students' attention, but it is also the key to moral motivation. To act morally, we have to be moved; we have to feel something. Affective education and moral education should work together to produce good people.

A Mandate to Teach Character

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correspondence

performance systems for teachers similar to those used in other occupations.

Economists have long held that restrictions on the free movement of price in a market will result in disequilibrium between supply and demand. So, the cause and effect that Hoxby and Leigh demonstrate is not an unexpected outcome in the education labor market. It is striking, however, that wage compression seems to have a stronger effect than the standard explanation—increase in job opportunities for women.

From my experience, however, there is another factor, not discussed in the article, which may have a comparable impact on the supply of high-quality teachers: The ease or ability to enter the teaching profession.

Historically, at the same time that collective bargaining exerted downward pressure on salaries, excessive regulations and requirements for teacher certification inserted barriers and restricted entry to the teaching profession. The teaching profession has long confused increase in regulations with promoting higher standards. Unfortunately, limiting access had the opposite effect on teacher quality. As other jobs were opening doors for high-achieving female graduates, the teaching profession closed them.

It was in response to the issue of entry to the market that alternative certification programs have been developed. For example, the American Board’s Passport to Teaching certification program allows talented, motivated college graduates to demonstrate mastery of subject matter and knowledge of teaching through a series of rigorous examinations. Opening access has been a big step forward to recruiting high-achieving female graduates, the teaching profession closed them.

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**Kathleen Madigan**
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**Rules for Breaking the Law**

I was alarmed to learn from James Lopach and Jean Luckowski (“Uncivil Disobedience,” Features, Spring 2005) that some high schools are recommending a thoughtless embrace of civil disobedience in their civics classes. The authors are right to remind us that civil disobedience is a dangerous tool, one that needs to be carefully thought through before it is justified or praised.

I would only add that nonviolence is even more central to justified civil disobedience than is “accepting punishment openly and respectfully.”

Consider that Thoreau was quite happy to avoid punishment during the years he refused to pay his poll tax. And when he was put in the Concord lockup, he was happy to walk free after a single night, when a friend paid his tax for him. He did not publicly walk into Town Hall and announce that he was refusing to pay his tax and insist on punishment. Martin Luther King, in some sense, wanted thousands of protesters to go to jail since this would bring publicity to the protest. And Socrates—who in the Crito refused to escape Athens to avoid the death penalty—had argued in his trial that he did not deserve punishment at all, but rather deserved to be treated like an Olympic hero!

It seems okay for those who protest injustice to avoid punishment (in legal ways) if they can, to defend themselves assiduously, to hire lawyers, to take the easy way out as Thoreau did, or to argue that they should be spared punishment entirely, as Socrates did. True enough, they have to “face the consequences.” But this does not mean they should accept punishment respectfully. What it does mean is that they cannot meet punishment with violence—say, by shooting at the police officer who comes to arrest them. To protest a law or a policy or a practice while also communicating that one accepts the rule of law and the legitimacy of government means keeping things peaceful.

What if the government one protests is not legitimate? Should protesters still restrict themselves to nonviolence? Thoreau eventually came to endorse violence in the protest over American slavery. Perhaps Gandhi would have been justified in doing the same. Moral self-righteousness can invite civil disobedience to slide into violent protest. It is because of this tendency that nonviolence should be at the very core of any understanding of justified civil disobedience.

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