



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on August 9, 2011

Wisconsin Seeks Relief from No Child Left Behind

The state of Wisconsin is seeking relief from the No Child Left Behind education reform law after the Obama administration announced it would permit states to receive waivers from the strict testing requirements under NCLB. In an announcement on Monday, Education Secretary Arne Duncan indicated that states would be allowed waivers if they utilize other accountability measures.



Wisconsin State Superintendent Tony Evers and Governor Scott Walker (at left) immediately jumped at the opportunity. They created a task force that represented a number of state education interests in order to find alternative accountability measures that would best suit Wisconsin's interests.

According to Evers, No Child Left Behind — George W. Bush's signature education law — is broken.

Andrew Coulson of the Cato Institute concurs. Citing a study conducted by Jaekyung Lee at Harvard in 2006 using data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress, Coulson [explains](#):

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What Lee found was that NCLB doesn't appear to have helped achievement overall, and it doesn't appear to have narrowed the achievement gaps. Now, this isn't just Lee's finding. There have been other reports that have looked at the NAEP scores and NCLB's effect on them, including one by Bruce Fuller and his colleagues that just came out earlier this year. And once again, they find that NCLB did not improve on preexisting trends in student achievement. There are some continuing gains in math, according to Fuller and his colleagues, but they are slower gains, the rate of improvement in these test scores, is slower than it was before the law was passed. So not encouraging for NCLB supporters.

In general, Coulson contends that federal interference in education has been an expensive and colossal failure:

We have doubled per pupil spending and yet we have flat achievement. We have had a precipitous, fantastic, staggering drop in the productivity of American education. To get a feel for how bad this period has been, you have to imagine buying something that you would have bought in 1969 but paying twice as much for it as people did then. Imagine buying a 1969 car today— no seatbelts, no airbags, no traction control, no antilock brakes — but having to pay twice what you would have paid if you bought it in 1969.

The Cato Institute also indicates that NCLB has cost states approximately \$2 million between 2002 and 2008, and has taken more than 6 million hours of teachers' and administrators' time to deal with the testing requirements.



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A provision of NCLB mandates that schools demonstrate “adequate yearly progress” (AYP) in reading and math, which is measured by state assessment tests. Duncan predicts that less than 20 percent of schools will meet AYP by the end of this academic school year.

Duncan asserts that it is not his goal to “let states and schools off the hook” from achieving the reforms outlined by NCLB, but instead wants to see a greater emphasis on college-ready skills and an increased effort to help struggling schools.

The Appleton, Wisconsin *Post Crescent* explains:

He wants to focus more on recognizing programs that measure and boost achievement of individual students over time and less on the law’s current priority of comparing test scores from one grade to another, year to year.

Duncan feels there is a growing trend of failure in the schools that is “getting in the way” of efforts to assist student learning.

Attempting to address some of these concerns, Wisconsin, along with 13 other states, has sought waivers to be exempted from the stringent testing requirements.

While efforts to address the problems created by NCLB may be well-intentioned, Neal McCluskey of the Cato Institute [notes](#) that an underlying problem still remains:

The Constitution gives the federal government no authority whatsoever to be involved in education (except through the Fourteenth Amendment, ensuring that states do not discriminate in how they provide public education). If you look at Article 1, Section 8, of the Constitution, where the powers of the federal government are laid out, you won’t see education or schooling mentioned.



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