
California Teachers Association

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Fed Up California Teachers Announce Statewide Effort Telling Congress to Vote No On Proposal by Rep. Miller and House Speaker Pelosi to Reauthorize Federal ‘No Child Left Behind Act’

NCLB is Hurting Students, Teachers and Public Schools

--- Reauthorization Proposal Makes Law Worse

BURLINGAME – Moving to stop more federal attacks on our students, educators and public schools, the 340,000-member California Teachers Association today kicked off a statewide campaign calling on Congress to vote no on the proposal by California Rep. George Miller and Speaker Nancy Pelosi to reauthorize the failed “No Child Left Behind Act.”

Flanked by the CTA Board of Directors at a news conference, CTA President David A. Sanchez warned that House Speaker Pelosi of San Francisco and Rep. Miller, D-Martinez, who co-authored NCLB with Senator Edward Kennedy, have failed to make any substantive improvements.

California’s teachers “have had enough of the so-called No Child Left Behind Act,” Sanchez said. “It is hurting our students, our schools and our teachers. Unfortunately, the Miller/Pelosi reauthorization plan would only make the law worse. It does nothing to improve student learning and would place even more undue emphasis on test scores, create new sanctions for struggling schools, make it harder to attract and retain teachers, undermine local control, and erode employee rights.”

Sanchez said the proposal that mandates merit pay for teachers based on the test scores of students is insulting. “Test scores alone don’t measure student achievement and shouldn’t be the only method for paying or evaluating teachers.”

Instead of backing changes that punish students, teachers and schools, Pelosi and Miller should be supporting the proven reforms that teachers and parents know will help. CTA is advocating for a law that restores the federal class size reduction program, provides resources for quality teacher training, mentors for new teachers, and provides programs that promote parental and family involvement in our schools.

Sanchez also called on Congress not to repeat the mistakes of the past. “Congress should not rush through this process, as the future of our public schools depends on this law.”

(MORE)

**CTA NCLB Campaign
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Miller and Pelosi have placed the reauthorization on a fast track. Draft language was released just before midnight last Thursday, with the first congressional hearing called today. California's teachers are in Washington D.C. for the hearing. A vote on the proposed legislation could come as early as next month.

No Child Left Behind is the misleading name given to the 2002 reauthorization of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which was approved by Congress in 1965 to help the nation's most struggling schools with federal funding and is renewed every five years. In addition to its unfair sanctions, NCLB has been massively underfunded by President Bush and Congress – by \$56 billion nationwide, and more than \$7 billion in California.

A 2006 study by the Harvard Civil Rights Project found that the law has not helped narrow the student achievement gap and has shortchanged schools that serve mostly disadvantaged, minority students with its overemphasis on sanctions rather than assistance, said Mignon Jackson, a teacher at Paul Revere Middle School in the Los Angeles Unified School District.

“Students at risk deserve better,” Jackson said. “If we’re going to close the achievement gap, we need to give our schools support, not sanctions.”

With its one-size-fits-all approach to learning, NCLB attempts to standardize students by relying too much on teaching to standardized tests at the expense of important subjects like art, music, foreign language and physical education, warned Eric Heins, a Bay Area teacher in the Pittsburg Unified School District.

“The overemphasis that this law puts on testing our students and the time required preparing them for tests takes valuable time away from what teachers really need and want to do to help students learn and think,” Heins said.

“Teachers at my school and in districts around the state work together and support one another,” said Bonnie Shatun, a teacher in the Burbank Unified School District. “All of this benefits students. This proposal would destroy that.”

In coming weeks, CTA members will be contacting every member of the California congressional delegation and urging a no vote on the current proposals. The statewide effort will also include grassroots mobilizing and a public awareness campaign. More information about CTA's new NCLB reauthorization campaign is available at www.cta.org.

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The 340,000-member California Teachers Association is affiliated with the 3.2 million-member National Education Association.

David Sanchez Remarks for Say No to Rep. George Miller and Speaker Nancy Pelosi's NCLB Reauthorization Proposal News Conference

Monday, September 10, 2007

We're here today to announce that the 340,000 members of the California Teachers Association have had enough of the so-called No Child Left Behind Act. We are asking members of Congress to vote "No" on the reauthorization proposal by Representative George Miller and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi. It does nothing to improve the current law and actually makes it worse. CTA is launching a statewide effort to say no to this proposal.

The No Child Left Behind Act is not working. It is hurting our students, our schools and our teachers. Unfortunately, the Miller/Pelosi reauthorization plan 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 when California needs to recruit a 100,000 new teachers into the profession.

Since No Child Left Behind's enactment five years ago, the California Teachers Association has worked to help teachers, students and schools deal with the myriad of new requirements under the law.

The "one-size-fits" all approach taken by No Child Left Behind is counter to everything teachers and parents know about making education work for all kids. The extreme emphasis on test preparation and judging students based on a snapshot of two standardized tests given on the same day has robbed classrooms of hundreds of hours of more valuable instruction, and it has decimated subjects like music, art, PE, and social sciences.

The law's emphasis on sanctions rather than support has demoralized teachers. It has unfairly labeled good schools as failures. It has not given schools the support they need. And federal funding shortfalls have left local districts holding the bag for \$55 billion that was originally promised when the law was passed.

Earlier this year CTA launched a campaign to "Erase, Rewrite, and Reauthorize" NCLB...hoping for a new version of the law that could truly help schools and improve student learning. But when the final draft proposal came...and let me add here that it came in the middle of the night on Thursday and Congressman Miller rushed it to a hearing in Washington today...we were very disappointed.

The Miller/Pelosi plan continues to measure student and school success based on standardized test scores and fails to include multiple measures like attendance rates, graduation rates, a rigorous curriculum, and the number of students participating in honors or advanced placement courses.

Rather than providing assistance, the Miller/Pelosi proposal continues to punish lower-performing schools creates four new levels of sanctions for struggling schools.

The Miller/Pelosi NCLB reauthorization plan will make it harder to attract and retain quality teachers in California classrooms. It creates a new federal mandate to pay and evaluate teachers based on student test scores. Test scores don't fairly measure student achievement and cannot be used to accurately evaluate and pay teachers.

As I said, we are facing a teacher shortage in California, this proposal will make it harder to get the quality educators we so desperately need in our classrooms.

Paying teachers based on student test scores will result in more teaching to the test and could end up driving teachers away from lower-performing schools—the very schools that the law is supposed to help. Teachers and parents know that this overemphasis on test scores is hurting kids. Why don't our congressional leaders get it?

The reauthorization proposal by Miller and Pelosi imposes new federal mandates that undermine local control and erodes employee rights. It imposes hundred of federal government mandates on California schools rather than allowing local teachers, parents and school districts to decide what's best for their students.

California teachers work for local school districts, not the federal government. Its attempt to mandate a particular evaluation or compensation process is an unprecedented federal infringement on our rights. It's offensive and disrespectful to all educators. Local school districts should be run by and for the people they serve, not by the federal government.

CTA supports reforms that teachers and parents know work. Congress should restore and enhance the federal class size reduction program--with priority given to schools of greatest need--rather than wasting billions of dollars on more bureaucracy, paperwork and more testing. It should provide resources for quality teacher training, mentors for new teachers and programs that enhance parental and family involvement in our schools.

And Congress should also not rush through this process as the future of our public schools depends on it. That is why we call on all members of Congress to vote NO on the current Miller/Pelosi reauthorization proposal.

Now, I'd like to ask a few classroom teachers from across the state to speak.

Bonnie Shatun of Burbank.

(Bonnie speaks – then introduce Mignon)

Mignon Jackson of Los Angeles.

(Mignon speaks – introduce Eric)

Eric Heins of Pittsburg.

Bonnie, Mignon and Eric are just three of thousands and thousands of teachers throughout California who have seen first hand how No Child Left Behind has been hurting schools.

Our students were let down by Congress five years ago. We can't let history repeat itself this time. The California Teachers Association today is mounting a statewide effort to reach every member of the California delegation. Teachers are contacting their representatives and urging them to vote no on the Miller/Pelosi reauthorization bill. In fact teachers are meeting with their representatives in Washington today. We will be mobilizing with events and other actions across the state. And we'll be raising public awareness through internet and other advertising.

We've lost half a decade under this law; for our kids' sake we can't afford to lose another five years.

I'll take any questions.