

Guidelines for Communication about the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Legislation

An Overview

The communication challenges regarding the No Child Left Behind Act are really threefold:

- First, ensuring that stakeholders, including School Board members, teachers and administrators, other staff members and parents, are aware of the provisions of NCLB and its implications;
- Second, complying with the numerous notification and public reporting requirements of the law; and
- Third, helping students, parents, staff and the general public what it means if a school is found “in need of improvement.”

In communicating about NCLB, or any complex issue, keep the following in mind:

1. Be factual. Don't get bogged down in the “what if's.”
2. Avoid using acronyms OR educational jargon, and, if you must use them, explain.
3. The language used to communicate the provisions of NCLB is important. If educators speak only in terms of “requirements,” as opposed to “opportunities” or “improvement,” the message will be that the positive aspects of the legislation, in terms of continuous improvement and accountability, are being forced on the public schools, rather than embraced. This runs counter to public expectations.

Talking Points

1. No Child Left Behind is a significant piece of federal legislation – perhaps the most significant federal law since the passage of the Elementary and Education (ESEA) Act in 1965 and the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) in
 - No Child Left Behind was a bipartisan bill, with support from both conservative Republicans and liberal Democrats.
 - The bill includes more than 1,200 pages and will have implications in many areas of public education, including testing, parental rights and staff qualifications.
2. As educators, we want ALL children to succeed. That's the focus of the No Child Left Behind legislation.
 - The goal of the legislation is to have all students proficient in reading and mathematics by 2013-14.

- The law recognizes the important role parents and teachers play in the education of children by emphasizing parental involvement and parental rights and by setting criteria for highly qualified teachers.
3. Wisconsin is ahead of most other states in implementing the accountability and quality provisions of NCLB.
- Wisconsin has statewide academic standards, which the _____ school district has (adopted or adapted in setting its own standards).
 - Wisconsin already tests students in grades 4, 8 and 10 in reading and math, as well as language arts, science and social studies. Wisconsin also tests all third graders in reading. Under NCLB, we will need to do even more testing, adding tests at grades 5, 6, and 7, as well as math in third grade.
 - Wisconsin has had annual reporting requirements for school districts for more than 10 years. Districts throughout the state report achievement, attendance, graduation and disciplinary data for their schools each year.
 - Wisconsin new teacher licensing law (PI34) improves an already strong teacher preparation and certification program in the state. The vast majority of teachers in Wisconsin's public schools meet the highly qualified teaching standards of NCLB. *(Do we want to enumerate the requirements for a highly qualified teacher?)* In the _____ district, all (or ___ percent of our teachers are highly qualified.
 - Wisconsin, on average, is among the highest performing states academically. Wisconsin ranks #1 on the ACT college entrance tests.
4. Wisconsin has set high academic standards for its students.
- NCLB allows each state to set its own standards.
 - Wisconsin has more than 1,500 academic standards and is working to identify power standards that will focus on the most important knowledge in each curricular area.
 - Some examples of standards in reading are:
 - * Fourth grade: Identify and summarize main ideas and key points from literature, informational texts, and other print and nonprint sources.
 - * Eighth grade: Identify the defining features and structure of literary texts, such as conflict, representation of character and point of view.

* Twelfth grade: Apply tests of logic and reasoning to informational and persuasive texts.

- The higher the standards a state sets, the more difficult it may be for students – and, thus, schools and districts -- to reach those standards. Thus, in 2001-02, Michigan had 1,500 schools identified as in need of improvement, Wisconsin had 156 and Arkansas had zero.
5. This district, like most school districts in Wisconsin, has been working on the type of improvement called for in NCLB. It's part of our (goals/strategic plan/continuous improvement model).
- Our scores on the statewide tests are higher (at, lower) than the state average. We are working to continue to improve academic achievement by ... (cite some initiatives).
 - NCLB specifically requires schools and districts to look not only at overall test scores but also how specific groups of students perform, based on their ethnicity, economic status, English proficiency or disability. Our own data analysis has shown an achievement gap among certain students, and we are working to address that gap. Locally, we are: (cite examples)
Elementary:
Middle School:
High School:
 - Gathering these types of data help us identify where we need to target our efforts and provide additional support. Reporting the data to our public creates more incentive for improvement, because we know our communities want strong public schools.
6. There are many ways to measure academic success.
- The tests required by Wisconsin and, now, as part of NCLB, provide one type of evaluation.
 - The day-to-day classroom activities and evaluations of our students provide an ongoing look at student progress.
 - (As appropriate: In addition, our district has developed benchmarks that measure student achievement at a particular point in time in a specific subject area. This helps us determine if students are acquiring the essential knowledge and skills and if our instruction and curriculum is appropriate to help students achieve.)
7. We do/do not expect to have any schools (or district) identified as being in need of improvement.

- Under NCLB, a school that fails to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) for two or more years is identified as “in need of improvement.” *(NOTE: DPI estimates that approximately 20 percent of the state’s schools may fail to meet adequate yearly progress this year.)*
 - In Wisconsin, for 2002-03, schools and districts will meet the state goal for adequate yearly progress if:
 1. 95 percent of all students and of students in each subgroup with at least 40 students (50 for students with disabilities) took the state tests;
 2. 61 percent of the students taking the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Examinations score at the proficient or advanced level in reading and 37 percent score proficient or advanced in math. These standards apply both to the entire district or school at each grade level, as well as to the identified subgroups based on ethnicity, economic status, English proficiency and disability; and
 3. Attendance rates in elementary and middle schools and graduation rates in high schools are 90 percent of the state average (81.7% for attendance and 85% for graduation)
 - The standard for proficiency will increase over the next 10 years, with the goal to have ALL students proficient in reading and math by 2013-14.
 - Schools identified as in need of improvement face sanctions. If the school receives Title I federal funding, the progressive sanctions outlined in the NCLB legislation range from the ability for students to transfer schools and receive supplementary services to change in governance and replacing school staff.
-

Use the following talking points as appropriate to the occasion.

In response to questions about why Wisconsin’s scores appear to be higher this year:

8. Wisconsin sets high standards for its students and will continue to do so. The benchmarks for proficiency on the state test were recalculated this year to be more realistic and to align better with benchmarks of other states.

If a school fails to meet adequate yearly progress:

9. _____ school/district failed to meet adequate yearly progress as defined by the state this year. However, we are confident that we continue to do a good job of educating our students and we will continue to work hard to ensure student success.

- The vast majority of our students exceed state standards in both reading and mathematics.
- We will continue to make every effort to improve. We hope our parents and other community will consider this one indicator in the context of our entire school (success/improvement effort).
Cite examples: Award-winning students and activities; successful programs that have helped struggling students reach proficiency; how students do on other indicators of both academic and other types of success.
- *Deal with individual school/district circumstances, i.e.:*
Where we failed to make adequate yearly progress was with our students who have disabilities. Of the ____ students in this group, we tested ____ percent. ____ of these students have cognitive disabilities, and ____ have learning disabilities which require specially designed instruction. Both our special education staff and our classroom teachers work with these students daily to maximize their learning. However, it is extremely difficult for some of our students, especially those with cognitive disabilities, to meet the proficiency standards set by the state. Based on the students' progress from year to year, we can assure you that these students are learning and mastering life skills that will enable them to function independently within our community.

NOTE: If this is the second year or more in which a school has failed to meet adequate yearly progress, it will be identified as a school in need of improvement and subject to sanctions, which vary dependent on whether or not the school is receiving funds under Title I. If identified as a school in need of improvement, administrators will need to identify what that means, including the right of student transfer and the need to develop a school improvement plan.

If a school is identified as a “persistently dangerous school:”

10. _____ school has been identified as a persistently dangerous school under the provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act. However, we feel it is exactly our strong stand on discipline – and the subsequent expulsion of students who endanger others – that has put on this list.
 - The state’s definition of a “persistently dangerous school” is one where the expulsion data, for three or more consecutive years, showed either that the school expelled one percent of its pupils or expelled five or more pupils, whichever is greater, for assault, behavior endangering self or others, or weapons-related offenses.

- In 2002-03 _____ school expelled _____ students. Of that number, _____ were for the types of incidents cited in the law. *(If possible, explain circumstances, i.e., One large fight resulted in assault charges against _____ students.)*
- We believe we acted in the best interests of our entire study body in recommending these students for expulsion and, following due process, removing them from our school. We think that makes the school safer, not dangerous.

H:mpp/word/principles of NCLB