

WHAT UTAH TEACHERS THINK ABOUT “NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND”: AN INDEPENDENT SURVEY

RESPONSIBLE CITIZEN SUMMARY

Background

- Utah has participated in the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) since 2002. This federal education law instituted a national system of standards, accountability, and assessment. Congress is holding hearings with the intent to reauthorize NCLB in 2010.
- A survey of 1,020 Utah public school teachers reveals that 14 percent of teachers view NCLB favorably, whereas 81 percent view it unfavorably. Most teachers believe that though NCLB was written with good intentions, it is unrealistic and burdensome and overemphasizes testing.

What’s at stake?

- The role of the federal government in Utah education.

What’s next?

- These survey results will be informative for members of Congress as they debate the reauthorization of NCLB and for Utah government officials as they determine whether or not to participate in the revised version of the law.

Responsible *Citizenship*[™]

A new survey shows that 81 percent of Utah teachers have an unfavorable opinion of the No Child Left Behind Act.

INTRODUCTION

In 2002, the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was signed into law. Since then, Utahns have engaged in vigorous debate about whether or not the program is effective and appropriate for Utah schools and students. In 2004, for example, state legislators nearly opted out of NCLB but, instead, chose to pass a bill that gives state education policy preference over federal policy.

Meanwhile, President Obama has pledged to work with Congress to revise and reauthorize NCLB. A House panel has already convened to begin discussions on overhauling the law. If and when the law is reauthorized, Utahns will need to decide whether or not they want to participate in the revised version.

In making this decision, Utah lawmakers will examine the past eight years to determine which NCLB policies have worked and which have not, and how the revised law would impact Utah students. Amidst all the debate then and now, one significant voice that seems to have gone unheard is that of the people laboring “in the trenches” – of those most familiar with the impact of NCLB requirements on Utah schools and students: the voice of teachers.

To help make the opinion of teachers known, Sutherland administered a brief survey to Utah public school teachers. The results of the survey are clear – Utah teachers overwhelmingly view No Child Left Behind unfavorably. As Congress continues to debate NCLB reauthorization and state officials determine whether or not to continue participating in the federal program, we believe the results of this survey will be informative.

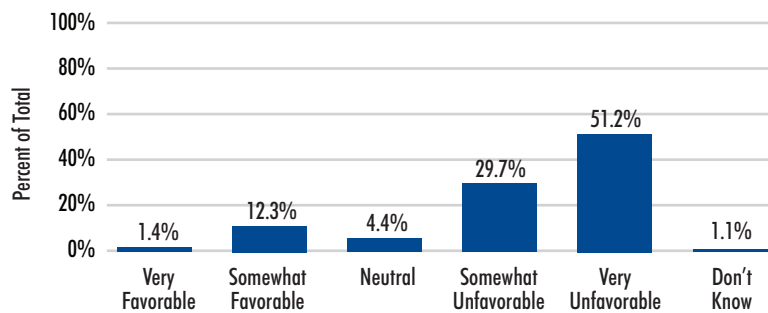


Chart 1: Utah Teacher Opinions of No Child Left Behind

RESULTS OVERVIEW

Of the 1,020 Utah public school teachers that responded to the survey, 14 percent view NCLB favorably, whereas 81 percent view it unfavorably. Four percent of those surveyed have a neutral opinion of the federal law and one percent did not know enough about it to comment. Chart 1 displays the results:

When asked to explain their opinion on NCLB, respondents offered a wide variety of comments, both positive and negative. We analyzed all 1,020 responses, aggregated comments with similar themes, and composed a statement summarizing those themes. Tables 1A and 1B list the ten positive and negative themes that teachers mentioned most often. The next section includes a complete list of themes mentioned.

Table 1A: All Teachers – Top 10 Positive Themes

RANK	THEME	COMMENTS
1	The general idea of trying to help all students reach grade level is a good one; the law was written with good intentions	144
2	Standards and accountability for districts, schools, and teachers are important.	101
3	NCLB encourages teachers to address the needs of all students, particularly those who are below grade level or at risk, so no student "falls through the cracks"	45
4	NCLB motivates teachers to examine and improve their instruction	20
5	Schools and teachers are held more accountable for what they teach and how they teach it	19
6	Student achievement, particularly in reading, has improved through teacher training, standards, and accountability	13
7	Data has helped educators identify "best practices" and is driving more decisions	12
8	NCLB clarifies curriculum for teachers and encourages them to focus on the state core	10
9	Funding has increased generally, and particularly for special programs like Reading First	9
9	NCLB has caused the educational system to examine itself and has propelled it to action	9
9	Teacher training and professional development have increased	9

Table 1B: All Teachers – Top 10 Negative Themes

RANK	THEME	COMMENTS
1	NCLB goals, expectations, and requirements are unrealistic, unreasonable, and unattainable. It expects 100 percent of students to be on grade level by 2014 regardless of their varying backgrounds, abilities, and effort. It has set up students and schools for failure.	261
2	NCLB assessments and standards are unfair to special education students and English Language Learners (ELL) who are expected to achieve the same proficiency as other students. It does not consider their special needs or circumstances and frustrates them when they make progress but still can't pass tests. It's unfair to include their scores in AYP.	199
3	Too much responsibility and accountability is placed on schools and teachers instead of more on parents and students. Good educators are only one component necessary for success.	134
4	NCLB places too much emphasis on standardized testing, which takes valuable time from teaching and other important activities.	112
5	NCLB does not account for the individual abilities, limitations, interests, learning styles, backgrounds, and circumstances of each child. It assumes that all students are alike and treats them as clones or raw materials on an assembly line rather than as humans. It offers a "one-size-fits-all," "cookie-cutter" approach.	111
6	There is inadequate funding to meet requirements. NCLB is an "unfunded mandate."	108
7	Holding teachers and schools accountable for student performance is unreasonable and unfair because they cannot control factors such as low attendance, disabilities, poverty, family circumstances, parental involvement, and student apathy. Teachers can use similar methods with different students and get very different results.	105
8	NCLB encourages teachers to "teach to the test" rather than teach students other important content and skills such as problem solving, critical thinking, and creativity.	105
9	Standardized tests are not the most accurate or only appropriate instrument for assessing learning progress. They only measure how well a student can test and do not account for other knowledge and skills learned.	87
10	While focusing on helping students who are below grade level, it leaves out students who are at grade level, above grade level, or "gifted." It "dumbs down" the curriculum and does not offer opportunities for all students to excel.	82

RESULTS DETAIL

Responses resulted in the following distribution:

Question 1

Table 2: Question 2 Results

The first question posed to survey respondents was this:

RESPONSE	NUMBER	PERCENT
Very favorable	14	1.4%
Somewhat favorable	125	12.3%
Neutral	45	4.4%
Somewhat unfavorable	303	29.7%
Very unfavorable	522	51.2%
Don't know	11	1.1%
Total	1,020	100%

“From what you know about the federal No Child Left Behind Act, what is your overall opinion of it?”

- a. Very favorable**
- b. Somewhat favorable**
- c. Neutral**
- d. Somewhat unfavorable**
- e. Very unfavorable**
- f. Don't know enough about it to say”**

Notes: (1) Teachers surveyed include regular classroom teachers, special education teachers, and school-based specialists (e.g., reading and math specialists, mentors). (2) The margin of error is +/-3% at the 95% confidence interval. (3) Due to rounding, percentages may not add up to exactly 100 percent.

Question 2

The second question posed to survey respondents was this:

“Please explain briefly why you answered Question 1 the way you did.”

Responses to this open-ended question varied greatly, but there were many recurring themes. We analyzed

all 1,020 responses, aggregated comments with similar themes, and composed a statement summarizing each of those themes.

The tables below list all positive and all negative themes that reflect comments from at least five respondents. Please note that these lists do not differentiate by type of response to Question 1 (very favorable, somewhat favorable, neutral, etc.), however, the tables in the Appendix do list themes by response type.

Table 3A: All Teachers – Positive Themes

RANK	THEME	COMMENTS
1	The general idea of trying to help all students reach grade level is a good one; the law was written with good intentions.	144
2	Standards and accountability for districts, schools, and teachers are important.	101
3	NCLB encourages teachers to address the needs of all students, particularly those who are below grade level or at risk, so no student "falls through the cracks."	45
4	NCLB motivates teachers to examine and improve their instruction.	20
5	Schools and teachers are held more accountable for what they teach and how they teach it.	19
6	Student achievement, particularly in reading, has improved through teacher training, standards, and accountability.	13
7	Data has helped educators identify "best practices" and is driving more decisions.	12
8	NCLB clarifies curriculum for teachers and encourages them to focus on the state core.	10
9	Funding has increased generally, and particularly for special programs like Reading First.	9
9	NCLB has caused the educational system to examine itself and has propelled it to action.	9
9	Teacher training and professional development have increased.	9
12	NCLB helps create equity in education for disadvantaged students, particularly minorities and the disabled.	7
12	Holding schools and teachers more accountable for what they teach and how they teach it is a good idea.	7
12	National standards and/or curriculum are good. Local entities don't always know what is best and some students move from state to state.	7
15	NCLB recognizes the potential of every student to succeed.	6
	Total	418

Table 3B: All Teachers – Negative Themes

RANK	THEME	COMMENTS
1	NCLB goals, expectations, and requirements are unrealistic, unreasonable, and unattainable. It expects 100 percent of students to be on grade level by 2014 regardless of their varying backgrounds, abilities, and effort. It has set students and schools up for failure.	261
2	NCLB assessments and standards are unfair to special education students and English Language Learners (ELL) who are expected to achieve the same proficiency as other students. It does not consider their special needs or circumstances and frustrates them when they make progress but still can't pass tests. It's unfair to include their scores in AYP.	199
3	Too much responsibility and accountability is placed on schools and teachers instead of more on parents and students. Good educators are only one component necessary for success.	134
4	NCLB places too much emphasis on standardized testing, which takes valuable time from teaching and other important activities.	112
5	NCLB does not account for the individual abilities, limitations, interests, learning styles, backgrounds, and circumstances of each child. It assumes that all students are alike and treats them as clones or raw materials on an assembly line rather than as humans. It offers a "one-size-fits-all," "cookie-cutter" approach.	111
6	There is inadequate funding to meet requirements. NCLB is an "unfunded mandate."	108
7	Holding teachers and schools accountable for student performance is unreasonable and unfair because they cannot control factors such as low attendance, disabilities, poverty, family circumstances, parental involvement, and student apathy. Teachers can use similar methods with different students and get very different results.	105
8	NCLB encourages teachers to "teach to the test" rather than teach students other important content and skills such as problem solving, critical thinking, and creativity.	105
9	Standardized tests are not the most accurate or only appropriate instrument for assessing learning progress. They only measure how well a student can test and do not account for other knowledge and skills learned.	87
10	While focusing on helping students who are below grade level, it leaves out students who are at grade level, above grade level, or "gifted." It "dumbs down" the curriculum and does not offer opportunities for all students to excel.	82
11	NCLB is a federal mandate that is intrusive, top-down, overreaching, or unconstitutional. Public education is the role of state and local governments.	63
12	NCLB testing and standards have narrowed the curriculum to focus on math and literacy, excluding subjects such as music, the arts, civic and character education, and science.	58
13	NCLB was written without input from teachers by people who have little or no classroom experience and, therefore, is not based on the realities of teaching and learning processes.	57
14	NCLB testing requirements do not measure achievement accurately because they do not track individual student growth. We need a "growth model" to measure student achievement.	56
15	NCLB "highly qualified" status requirements force teachers to "jump through hoops" that do not necessarily improve their teaching ability or make them "highly qualified." Requirements change too often and prevent teachers from teaching subjects they are qualified to teach.	49
16	NCLB imposes unneeded stress, pressure, and burden on teachers.	39
17	A good school can fail and receive a "black eye" if just a few students or one subgroup of students does not meet proficiency standards.	36
18	NCLB presumes that teachers are not doing their best or need lots of assistance, which makes them feel disrespected and demoralized.	29
19	Students are pushed to the next grade even if they don't know enough, which makes them less motivated to work hard.	28
20	NCLB imposes unneeded pressure and stress on students, particularly "high-stakes" testing	28
21	NCLB sanctions for failing to meet AYP take funding from the schools and students who need it most. "Failing" schools should be helped rather than punished.	27
22	NCLB has reduced the enjoyment and intrinsic motivation of teaching and learning. Students don't have fun anymore.	26

RANK	THEME	COMMENTS
23	As a whole, expectations for students are lower. NCLB does not allow for failure or excellence but encourages mediocrity by causing teachers to focus on "bubble" students.	24
24	NCLB places additional workload, inconvenience, and paperwork burden on teachers unnecessarily, which takes time from students.	19
25	NCLB is poor implementation of good ideas.	19
26	NCLB has added more "red tape" (rules, regulations, and paperwork) to schools and districts.	17
27	NCLB funding does not go to what is needed most (e.g., reducing class size, paying teachers).	14
28	NCLB is not doing what it was intended to do. Student achievement has not improved and more children are being left behind than ever.	12
29	NCLB is punitive to teachers, schools, districts, and students. It punishes them instead of rewarding them for excellence.	12
30	NCLB testing requirements make it harder to teach because of less time, micromanagement, and other restrictions.	11
31	Test scores should not be the only indicator of progress for AYP.	10
32	Schools already performing well on tests find it increasingly difficult to achieve AYP.	8
33	NCLB was passed for political reasons and has "politicized" education.	8
34	NCLB sanctions placed on schools for not making AYP are not appropriate or too severe.	7
35	Data has been manipulated to make schools look better than they are to help pass AYP.	7
36	Teachers have less autonomy to teach as they wish and to do what is best for their students.	6
37	NCLB was designed to make public schools look bad in order to privatize education.	6
38	Teachers are not rewarded for their increased burden.	5
39	Standards should not be set by individual states; we need common standards, curriculum, and graduation requirements.	5
40	NCLB provokes dissatisfied teachers to leave the profession early.	5
Total		1,995

COMMENTS

To paint a more complete picture of how Utah teachers feel about NCLB, what follows is a sampling of comments that capture the overall sentiment of survey respondents. These quotes are full or partial responses received, and the identities of respondents remain confidential. All quotes are from regular classroom teachers unless otherwise noted.

Comments from respondents with a “Very favorable” or “Somewhat favorable” opinion of NCLB

- “If one ignores the cheap politics raised about NCLB, this is the most important legislation since

the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1965. To free children from the bonds of school systems who wish to ignore them and their needs, it is vital we continue this movement. The benefits of the first five years justify, in fact demand we increase the goals and expectations of NCLB that schools change with the changing clients and realities of this century.”

- “Teachers are more aware of every child in their class. I don’t believe as many kids are slipping through the cracks. Teachers are also more aware of their data and much more reflective on

their teaching practices. When a child or small group of children makes a significant change – positive or negative – teachers are more able to pinpoint the root cause.”

- “I see in the mandate a vision that stands for the possibility for the success of all children. The implementation of NCLB has been a challenge to teachers, but I believe that the discomfort has presented not only a necessary and previously lacking accountability, it has also introduced a positive learning curve for teachers.”

- “In theory, the act can improve test scores, improve local standards, increase accountability of teacher and student. It can improve the quality of education and the public perception of the curriculum that teachers and the school employees are creating and implementing. However, the NCLB act does not accommodate for those students with disabilities, high-performing students (gifted or talented), and non-English speakers. The act narrows curriculum and research. Also there are problems with standardized testing. The act also creates a bigger debt – funding can be a problem. Overall, I think the act is great in theory and helps students learn what the teacher is teaching from the standards.” (Special education teacher)

Comments from respondents with a “Neutral” opinion of NCLB

- “The positive effects are that it has made us as public school educators more accountable. We must know where all our students are academically with literacy and math skills so that we can

plan appropriate and effective interventions for those who need more help. I think public educators are better at using assessment to plan their instruction because of NCLB.... The negative effects are that it is basically not realistic to expect all students, no matter what problems they have, to catch up with their peers in just a couple of years.... We have a large ESL population and it takes as many as 7 or more years for these students to learn English and gain enough academic language skills to ‘catch up’ with their native English speaking peers.... NCLB forces teachers and schools to focus on meeting the needs of the below average students. Advanced students are not getting their needs met because the focus is on the low students.”

- “I favor the attempts to improve the education of minorities and low income populations. The culture in some schools that accepts failure from minority students must end.... Instead of punishing poorly performing schools, perhaps we should be giving incentives for effective teachers to take on the hard jobs instead of watching them fight for the next AP/Honors class in the suburbs—even if that means differential pay.... Becoming ‘highly qualified’ for special education teachers is extremely difficult just as it is for rural teachers who teach multiple subjects. Also, the notion that kids with disabilities who are generally 3-5 years behind their peers by junior high can perform on grade level if we only apply enough punishment to ‘failing schools’ is laughable. My students can learn and make progress with appropriate instruction, but the constant pressure to test on grade level prevents us from going back and re-teaching to fill the gaps from

previous years.... Labeling a whole school as 'failing' just because the special education kids still have major learning problems is inappropriate and risks promoting more discrimination rather than less as schools seek to avoid qualifying students in special education so they can remain in the larger statistical pool of general education." (Special education teacher)

Comments from respondents with a "Very unfavorable" or "Somewhat unfavorable" opinion of NCLB

- "I think the increased awareness has been positive, but I think it excludes considering children with potential 'at and above grade level.' I think NCLB sends a clear message that teachers are only responsible and should only work to get all students to grade level. We know that in life, there are many people who don't have the in-born capacity to get up 'to grade level,' yet most of teachers' time is now being expected to be spent on this population.... I think we need to strive to meet the needs of each student equally.... They call it 'No Child Left Behind,' but with the current regulations and expectations, we are leaving more students behind their potential than ever."
- "Most of all I worry that teachers are teaching to the test. We are raising children who are getting proficient at making good guesses on multiple choice tests and yet lack the ability to think through and solve a problem rationally much less communicate effectively their reasoning processes.... Until administrators quit worrying about a single core test score and let the teachers determine whether or not students are competent at a concept kids won't be taught to think and reason. We will become a nation of memorizers not thinkers and inventors."
- "If you want me to improve my teaching – come observe me, watch me, listen to me, and then evaluate how I am as a teacher. Do not make a judgment of my teaching ability based on a score from students who: don't come to school, never do any of the homework, have a real hard time focusing and listening in class, have absolutely no support from home, and who have consistently tested very low on all the previous test scores.... What I don't appreciate is being held accountable for things that are outside my realm of control, and being slammed for them. I want to be held accountable for those things that I can do something about – my credentials, my teaching style, my subject knowledge, and my ability to motivate my students. NCLB is an albatross around our necks that deflects and disguises what we really should be addressing which is how to get parents to be more involved, how to address the increasing numbers of 'ADD and ADHD' students that are flooding the schools, and how to keep the class sizes smaller (not just add more cheaply paid aides to help out)."
- "As much as we wish to be able to cure all of society's ills and be able to change attitudes toward education in this short amount of time, we still have to deal with students who haven't eaten all day and students who would prefer to be on the street getting fast money by selling drugs. We also have students with learning, physical, and emotional disabilities. Our influence as teachers is not as strong as that of family since so

much more time is spent under the familial influence and world view. If we taught robots, I think the legislation might work; but we don't. There needs to be room for being human and also realizing that school is not all that these kids have to deal with."

- "I entirely oppose NCLB. I chafe under the federal regulation of education that is entirely unconstitutional. I sorrow at the lack of basic understanding of the proper role of government so that we perpetuate an industry which licks the boots of the federal government for their dollars (really our dollars) to create an educational system that miserably serves our children. We offer crumbs when the children need to feast. A system reborn, wrapped in correct principles both educational and moral, could nourish our children once again.... Parents are cut off from a process that they should be the very heart of and yet they've unwittingly thrown their stewardship for their precious children into the hands of teachers who care deeply but whose knowledge is deficient, energy is exhausted, and hands are tied. NCLB is the latest ugly twist in a long federal history of programs unconstitutional, and we are breaking." (Special education teacher)

- "Working in a Title I school has made me very aware of the achievement gaps that exist between demographics. NCLB has forced us, in a sense, to look at and work harder to address those gaps. The time table and even some of the goals themselves are unrealistic. 'All children will be reading on grade level by 2014,' sounds good on paper, but the majority of my students are English Language Learners.... To say that ALL

children will reach the finish line at the same time, in a race in which the runners are started from different gates, and using running shoes in disparate states of repair is unfair and doubtful." (Specialist)

METHODOLOGY

The survey was conducted by email during the period Nov. 9, 2009 - Feb. 2, 2010. It was sent to a sample of Utah public school teachers that included teachers in every school district and charter school. We received 1,020 responses from teachers in the following demographic areas and types of schools:

Table 4: Responses by Area

RESPONSE	NUMBER	PERCENT
Urban	593	58.1%
Urban/Rural	341	33.4%
Rural	86	8.4%
Total	1,020	100%

Note: Due to rounding, percentages may not add up to exactly 100 percent.

Table 5: Responses by School Type

RESPONSE	NUMBER	PERCENT
Traditional Public	914	89.6%
Charter	99	9.7%
Utah Schools for Deaf and Blind	7	.7%
Total	1,020	100%

Note: Due to rounding, percentages may not add up to exactly 100 percent.

The margin of error for the survey is +/- 3% at the 95% confidence interval.

CONCLUSION

The opinions of public school teachers are vital to understanding the role No Child Left Behind has played and should or should not play in Utah public education. This survey reveals that Utah teachers generally believe NCLB was written with good intentions and that the goal to bring all students to grade level is a good one. They also believe that standards and accountability for students, teachers, and schools are important. However, negative feedback was far more prevalent than positive feedback.

According to Utah teachers, NCLB standards and expectations are unrealistic, unreasonable, and unattainable, particularly for special education students and English Language Learners. They also believe the law places too much emphasis on testing, which has had many negative impacts on instruction and the overall achievement and morale of students. Teachers assert

that NCLB does not take into account a student's individual abilities and circumstances, including the effort of parents and students. And many expressed concerns about diminishing local control and overreaching federal influence in Utah public schools.

Overall, the vast majority of Utah teachers do not support No Child Left Behind. National and state policymakers should carefully consider the results of this survey in their ongoing efforts to shape sound public policy that will benefit Utah public schools and students.

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APPENDIX

Table 5A: Teachers with a "Very favorable" or "Somewhat favorable" Opinion of NCLB

THEMES	COMMENTS
Positive Themes	
Standards and accountability for districts, schools, and teachers are important and those set forth in NCLB have helped improve education.	32
NCLB encourages teachers to address the needs of all students, particularly subgroups of students who are below grade level or at risk, so no student "falls through the cracks."	26
The general idea of trying to help all students reach grade level is a good one; the law was written with good intentions.	20
Schools and teachers are held more accountable for what they teach and how they teach it.	18
Student achievement, particularly in reading, has improved through teacher training, standards, and accountability.	11
NCLB motivates teachers to examine and improve their instruction.	10
NCLB has caused the educational system to examine itself and has propelled it to action.	8
NCLB recognizes the potential of every student to succeed.	6
NCLB clarifies curriculum for teachers and encourages them to focus on the state core.	6
NCLB helps create equity in education for disadvantaged students, particularly minorities and the disabled.	5
Teacher training and professional development have increased.	5
Total	147

THEMES	COMMENTS
Negative Themes	
NCLB goals, expectations, and requirements are unrealistic, unreasonable, and unattainable. It expects 100 percent of students to be on grade level by 2014 regardless of their varying backgrounds, abilities, and effort. It has set students and schools up for failure.	30
NCLB assessments and standards are unfair to special education students and English Language Learners because they are expected to achieve the same proficiency as other students. It does not consider their special needs or circumstances.	19
Too much responsibility and accountability is placed on schools and teachers instead of more on parents and students. Good educators are only one component necessary for success.	16
There is inadequate funding to meet requirements. NCLB is an "unfunded mandate."	14
NCLB does not account for the individual abilities, limitations, interests, learning styles, backgrounds, and circumstances of each child. It assumes that all students are alike and offers a "one-size-fits-all," "cookie-cutter" approach.	8
Holding teachers and schools accountable for student performance is unreasonable and unfair because they cannot control factors such as low attendance, disabilities, poverty, family circumstances, parental involvement, and student apathy. Teachers can use similar methods with different students and get very different results.	7
NCLB places too much emphasis on standardized testing which takes valuable time from teaching students.	7
A good school can fail and receive a "black eye" if just one subgroup of students does not meet proficiency standards.	6
NCLB imposes unneeded pressure and stress on students, particularly "high-stakes" testing.	6
NCLB testing requirements do not measure achievement accurately because they do not track individual student growth. We need a "growth model" to measure student achievement.	5
NCLB is poor implementation of good ideas.	5
Sanctions placed on schools for not making AYP are not appropriate or too severe.	5
NCLB encourages teachers to "teach to the test" rather than teach students important skills such as problem solving, critical thinking, and creativity.	5
Total	133

Table 5B: Teachers with a "Neutral" Opinion of NCLB

THEMES	COMMENTS
Positive Themes	
The general idea of trying to help all students reach grade level is a good one; the law was written with good intentions.	9
Standards and accountability for districts, schools, and teachers are important and those set forth in NCLB have helped improve education.	9
NCLB encourages teachers to address the needs of all students, particularly those who are below grade level or at risk, so no student "falls through the cracks."	6
Total	24
Negative Themes	
NCLB goals, expectations, and requirements are unrealistic, unreasonable, and unattainable. It expects 100 percent of students to be on grade level by 2014 regardless of their varying backgrounds, abilities, and effort. It has set students and schools up for failure.	7
There is inadequate funding to meet requirements. NCLB is an "unfunded mandate."	6
NCLB encourages teachers to "teach to the test" rather than teach students important skills such as problem solving, critical thinking, and creativity.	6
Too much responsibility and accountability is placed on schools and teachers instead of more on parents and students. Good educators are only one component necessary for success.	5
Total	24

Table 5C: Teachers with a “Very unfavorable” or “Somewhat unfavorable” Opinion of NCLB

THEMES	COMMENTS
Positive Themes	
The general idea of trying to help all students reach grade level is a good one; the law was written with good intentions.	115
Standards and accountability for districts, schools, and teachers are important, though not necessarily as set forth in NCLB.	60
NCLB encourages teachers to address the needs of all students, particularly those who are below grade level or at risk, so no student "falls through the cracks."	13
NCLB motivates teachers to examine and improve their instruction.	8
Holding schools and teachers more accountable for what they teach and how they teach it is a good idea.	7
Data has helped educators identify "best practices" and is driving more decisions.	5
Total	208
Negative Themes	
NCLB goals, expectations, and requirements are unrealistic, unreasonable, and unattainable. It expects 100 percent of students to be on grade level by 2014 regardless of their varying backgrounds, abilities, and effort. It has set students and schools up for failure.	224
NCLB assessments and standards are unfair to special education students and English Language Learners (ELL) who are expected to achieve the same proficiency as other students. It does not consider their special needs or circumstances and frustrates them when they make progress but still can't pass tests. It's unfair to include their scores in AYP.	176
Too much responsibility and accountability is placed on schools and teachers instead of more on parents and students. Good educators are only one component necessary for success.	113
NCLB places too much emphasis on standardized testing, which takes valuable time from teaching and other important activities.	101
NCLB does not account for the individual abilities, limitations, interests, learning styles, backgrounds, and circumstances of each child. It assumes that all students are alike and treats them as clones or raw materials on an assembly line rather than as humans. It offers a "one-size-fits-all," "cookie-cutter" approach.	99
NCLB encourages teachers to "teach to the test" rather than teach students other important content and skills such as problem solving, critical thinking, and creativity.	94
Holding teachers and schools accountable for student performance is unreasonable and unfair because they cannot control factors such as low attendance, disabilities, poverty, family circumstances, parental involvement, and student apathy. Teachers can use similar methods with different students and get very different results.	94
There is inadequate funding to meet requirements. NCLB is an "unfunded mandate."	88
Standardized tests are not the most accurate or only appropriate instrument for assessing learning progress. They only measure how well a student can test and do not account for other knowledge and skills learned.	80
While focusing on helping students who are below grade level, it leaves out students who are at grade level, above grade level, or "gifted." It "dumbs down" the curriculum and does not offer opportunities for all students to excel.	77
NCLB is a federal mandate that is intrusive, top-down, overreaching, or unconstitutional. Public education is the role of state and local governments.	62
NCLB testing and standards have narrowed the curriculum to focus on math and literacy, excluding subjects such as music, the arts, civic and character education, and science.	57
NCLB was written without input from teachers by people who have little or no classroom experience and, therefore, is not based on the realities of teaching and learning processes.	55
NCLB testing requirements do not measure achievement accurately because they do not track individual student growth. We need a "growth model" to measure student achievement.	49

THEMES	COMMENTS
Negative Themes (continued)	
NCLB "highly qualified" status requirements force teachers to "jump through hoops" that do not necessarily improve their teaching ability or make them "highly qualified." Requirements change too often and prevent teachers from teaching subjects they are qualified to teach.	43
NCLB imposes unneeded stress, pressure, and burden on teachers.	36
A good school can fail and receive a "black eye" if just a few students or one subgroup of students does not meet proficiency standards.	28
NCLB presumes that teachers are not doing their best or need lots of assistance, which makes them feel disrespected and demoralized.	28
NCLB sanctions for failing to meet AYP take funding from the schools and students who need it most. "Failing" schools should be helped rather than punished.	27
Students are pushed to the next grade even if they don't know enough, which makes them less motivated to work hard.	24
As a whole, expectations for students are lower. NCLB does not allow for failure or excellence but encourages mediocrity by causing teachers to focus on "bubble" students.	22
NCLB imposes unneeded pressure and stress on students, particularly "high-stakes" testing.	22
NCLB has reduced the enjoyment and intrinsic motivation of teaching and learning. Students don't have fun anymore.	21
NCLB places additional workload, inconvenience, and paperwork burden on teachers unnecessarily, which takes time from students.	16
NCLB funding does not go to what is needed most (e.g., reducing class size, paying teachers).	13
NCLB has added more "red tape" (rules, regulations, and paperwork) to schools and districts.	13
NCLB is poor implementation of good ideas.	13
NCLB is punitive to teachers, schools, districts, and students. It punishes them instead of rewarding them for excellence.	12
NCLB is not doing what it was intended to do. Student achievement has not improved and more children are being left behind than ever.	11
Test scores should not be the only indicator of progress for AYP.	10
NCLB testing requirements make it harder to teach because of less time, micromanagement, and other restrictions.	8
Schools already performing well on tests find it increasingly difficult to achieve AYP.	7
NCLB was passed for political reasons and has "politicized" education.	7
NCLB was designed to make public schools look bad in order to privatize education.	6
Teachers have less autonomy to teach as they wish and to do what is best for their students.	6
NCLB provokes dissatisfied teachers to leave the profession early.	5
Total	1,747



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