

# No Child Left Behind and Northwest Accreditation

Working Hand-in-Hand



Three days after taking office in January 2001, President George W. Bush announced *No Child Left Behind*. He described this framework for bipartisan education as "...the cornerstone of my administration." President Bush expressed his deep belief in public schools, but emphasized that "too many of our neediest children are being left behind." The President called for bipartisan solutions based on accountability, choice, and flexibility in federal education programs.

Less than a year later, the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB Act) was passed. The law emphasizes how to improve the performance of America's elementary and secondary schools ensuring that no child must attend a failing school.

The NCLB Act, which reauthorizes the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA), incorporates the principles and strategies proposed by President Bush. These federal requirements include:

1. Increased accountability for states, school districts, and schools.
2. Greater choice for parents and students, particularly those attending low-performing schools
3. More flexibility for states and local educational agencies (LEAs) in the use of federal education dollars.
4. A stronger emphasis on reading, especially for the youngest grade levels.

The Northwest Association developed its *Standards for Accreditation* based on effective school improvement research with the intention of supporting state and federal laws.

The *NCLB Act* was designed to strengthen Title I accountability. It requires states to implement statewide accountability systems for all public schools and the students who attend. These efforts challenge state standards in reading and mathematics, provide annual testing for all students in grades 3-8, and prescribe annual statewide progress objectives. This helps to ensure that all groups of students reach proficiency within twelve years of schooling. Assessment results and state progress objectives must be disaggregated by poverty, race, ethnicity, disability, and limited English proficiency to "ensure that no group is left behind." School districts and schools that fail to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) toward statewide proficiency goals will be, over time, subject to external direction. These corrective actions and restructuring measures are aimed at getting the schools back on course to meet state standards. Schools that meet or exceed AYP objectives or close achievement gaps will be eligible for state *Academic Achievement Awards*. Again, the Northwest Association's *Standards for Accreditation* support state accountability requirements.

With the many state mandates in place to implement NCLB, schools are looking for ways to support their school improvement efforts. The Northwest Association of Accredited Schools has developed and implemented eight *Standards for Accreditation*. The *Standards* are designed to support school improvement efforts and increase student achievement. To become accredited, schools must engage in three areas:

1. Schools must complete an annual report to their respective state committee.
2. Conduct a self-study every six years.
3. Have a school improvement plan this is implemented and reported annually.

These three requirements in turn support the four NCLB mandates above.

*How does Northwest Accreditation work along with NCLB to increase student achievement?*

The *Standards for Accreditation* and supporting indicators are intended to be a framework to help schools engage in quality school improvement. Schools can depend on accreditation to enhance the efforts required in NCLB. The Northwest Association helps schools to assess and make judgments on their responses to the indicators provided for each *Standard*. To be more specific, both Northwest Accreditation and NCLB require disaggregation of data. Schools use the Northwest accreditation results to develop a school profile that paints a picture of students' success. This may result in a change in the mission and/or beliefs about student success, and expectations for student learning. In turn, the school is required to conduct a self-evaluation and have this evaluation validated by a trained visiting team. Current instructional results become evident during the analysis of the self-study. These results may be compiled in the school improvement plan. In other words, analysis of the accreditation indicators:

1. Enhance effective school assessment.
2. Are conducive to the development of the school improvement plan.
3. Provide the necessary information and tools for meeting the requirements of NCLB.

President Bush's 2001 analysis that "too many of our neediest children are being left behind" has guided legislators and accreditation efforts towards successful schools. Northwest Accreditation has continually bridged the gaps in school progress since its initial efforts in 1917. In 2008, the Northwest Association's *Standards for Accreditation*, self-study, and team evaluation processes support and enable the federal NCLB and state laws. This combination of efforts will result in the achievement of school improvement goals and enhanced student performance. Northwest Accreditation assessments will continue to evolve, guiding schools and working hand-in-hand with forthcoming state and federal mandates in the years-to-come.