It's time to take a bold step forward and commit to significantly improving NCLB. We must insist on high achievement for all students. Our nation's children deserve it.
We see evidence every day that we are letting our children down. We hear news stories about low reading scores, see high numbers of students dropping out of school and learn from business owners and college professors that graduates lack necessary skills and knowledge. We cannot afford to sit idly by and hope that things will improve. We have a responsibility as a nation to take bold steps to close the achievement gaps that plague our nation’s schools and to ensure that all students are prepared for successful and productive lives after high school.

This year, Congress is scheduled to review the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). In 2002, this law signaled an important change in federal education policy by focusing on accountability for results rather than simple compliance. While the law set us on a more productive course and spurred some improvement, it has not been enough. Far too many children are still not achieving to high standards in every state.

Last February, 15 leaders in education came together to form the Commission on No Child Left Behind, a bipartisan, independent effort dedicated to improving NCLB. Through the generous support of our funders and the Aspen Institute, we traveled across the country, listening to the experiences of students, educators, parents, administrators, state and district officials, experts and policymakers.

Our work has uncovered shortcomings in both the implementation of the statute and in some tenets of the law itself. We believe that to do better, the law must be dramatically improved, and our report outlines specific and actionable recommendations for establishing a high-achieving education system. It is in the spirit of maintaining the commitment to success for every child that we present these recommendations for improving NCLB to the President, Congress and the public. We are confident that, taken as a whole, our recommendations will close achievement gaps and raise expectations for all, so that we can fulfill the promise of high achievement and success for every student, in every school.

Secretary Tommy G. Thompson and Governor Roy E. Barnes
Co-Chairs, The Commission on No Child Left Behind
The Commission on No Child Left Behind

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A merica today faces a stark choice: do we take bold steps to accelerate progress in education and fulfill our promise to our nation’s children? Or do we risk jeopardizing the future of our nation’s children and our competitiveness in the global economy by maintaining the status quo?

There are significant education challenges facing the nation today. Unacceptable achievement gaps continue to pervade our schools. We are failing to ensure our children are sufficiently prepared academically to compete with their international peers. In international comparisons of 15-year-olds’ performance in mathematics, American students scored significantly lower than their peers in 20 of the other 28 industrialized countries participating (Lemke et al. 2004).

And far too many students do not even finish high school; 7,000 students drop out every school day (Alliance for Excellent Education 2007). Worse yet, those who do make it to graduation are often left unprepared for life in an increasingly competitive global economy.

Addressing these challenges is a national imperative. Over the past five years, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) has laid the groundwork for closing achievement gaps and improving public schools. The law, which was passed by overwhelming majorities in the House and Senate, had strong support from Republicans and Democrats, who agreed that standards, accountability, teacher quality and options for students were vital for improving student achievement, and that collaboration among the federal government, states and local school districts—based on results rather than simple compliance—could bring about those improvements.

NCLB was a bold step. The law ramped up testing requirements, mandating annual assessments in reading and mathematics in grades 3 through 8 and once in high school, called for reporting test results separated by race, ethnicity and other key demographic groups of students, and required schools to demonstrate “adequate
yearly progress” (AYP) on state tests overall and for each group of students. If schools could not demonstrate AYP, they faced interventions followed by increasingly severe sanctions. Further, the law allowed students in schools that did not demonstrate sufficient progress to transfer to better-performing schools or receive tutoring, required states to ensure that every teacher was “highly qualified” and mandated detailed reports to parents on school performance and teacher quality.

More than any other federal education law in history, NCLB has affected families, classrooms and school districts throughout the country. Virtually every aspect of schooling—from what is taught in elementary, middle and high school classes, to how teachers are hired, to how money is allocated—has been affected by the statute.

While these changes are substantial, they have not been enough. The problems that NCLB was intended to address remain. Fortunately, the consensus that produced the impetus to pass NCLB also remains—a widespread commitment to closing achievement gaps and raising the academic achievement of all students. Although the extremes in the debate—those who believe the law is nearly perfect and those who believe it is fatally flawed—attract attention, most Americans continue to believe that the law’s principles are moving us in the right direction. The Commission on No Child Left Behind sought to move beyond the sometimes heated and uninformed rhetoric about NCLB and examine the evidence about the law’s effects in a dispassionate, nonpartisan process.

Our Vision: High Achievement for All

Over the past year the Commission has held public hearings and roundtables, visited schools and spoken with individuals who live the law every day, read thousands of comments submitted through our Web site, scoured the research literature and conducted our own studies and analyses. We approached this work in a bipartisan and independent manner, focusing on the actual effects of NCLB. These efforts have shown us that this law, like others before it, is not perfect. While many problems can be attributed to implementation challenges, our work has revealed that statutory changes are needed to improve the law itself.

We have concluded that this nation cannot back away from carrying on with this effort to ensure that all children achieve to high expectations. The challenge for the nation is to learn from NCLB and prior efforts and do what is necessary to create a high-achieving education system that succeeds for every student, in every school. This system must ensure that children are academically proficient, are able to meet the demands of good citizenship and have a sense of self-worth and accomplishment that
Effective Teachers for All Students, Effective Principals for All Communities

comes from a high-quality education and the opportunities it affords. We must close achievement gaps and raise expectations for all so that each child can be prepared to succeed in the future and the nation can remain preeminent in the global economy.

Now is the time for another bold step, one that builds on the foundation of NCLB while addressing the shortcomings we have identified in the law and its implementation. Having the benefit of hindsight, we can clearly view the consequences of the law, intended and unintended, that its original architects could not. We believe that the task at hand is to preserve the goals and foundational principles of this law while improving it in ways that are informed by the five years of experience in classrooms, central offices and state houses since its passage.

Only with such a careful effort—to keep what works and improve what doesn’t—can we fulfill the worthy promise that the architects of NCLB made to America’s children. By creating a high-achieving education system that closes achievement gaps and raises expectations and performance for all students, America can ensure that all children have the opportunity for a fulfilling, productive future and that the nation can maintain its stature in the global economy. This report lays out a vision for achieving such a system, the steps the nation should take to get there and the changes in the law necessary to accomplish this task. The following is a summary highlighting the Commission’s major recommendations for achieving this vision.

Effective Teachers for All Students, Effective Principals for All Communities

One of the foundational principles of NCLB, supported by ample research, is the idea that teacher quality is the single most important school factor in student success. Research also shows that teacher quality is unevenly distributed in schools, and the students with the greatest needs tend to have access to the least qualified and least effective teachers.

At the same time, research increasingly demonstrates that the quality of school leadership is also crucial to student and school performance. Numerous studies on what makes a successful school have consistently shown that high-performing schools have principals who are effective leaders.

Ensuring Teacher Effectiveness

The Commission believes that it is time to ask all teachers to demonstrate their effectiveness in the classroom rather than just their qualifications for entering it. This is a significant change and must be implemented in a way that is fair to teachers. Teachers who are held to this higher standard need and deserve more support.
Therefore, the Commission recommends requiring all teachers to be Highly Qualified Effective Teachers (HQET)—teachers who demonstrate effectiveness in the classroom. Under HQET, states would be required to put in place systems for measuring the learning gains of a teacher’s students through a “value-added” methodology, using three years of student achievement data, as well as principal evaluations or teacher peer reviews.

The new HQET measure will, for the first time, trigger guaranteed, quality professional development for teachers who need it most. Those who are not initially successful in producing measurable learning gains in the classroom must be given access to effective professional development to help them succeed. Those who are unable to demonstrate effectiveness in the classroom after receiving support for a reasonable period of time should no longer teach those students most in need of help.

**Ensuring Effective Teachers for All Children**

Determining teacher quality based on effectiveness in the classroom rather than simply qualifications for entry is an important first step in improving achievement for all children. But if we mean what we say—“all children”—we must take the additional step of ensuring that every child has the same opportunity to be taught by highly qualified and effective teachers regardless of where that child lives.

To ensure quality and effectiveness for all, districts should no longer be able to mask inequalities in resources for teacher quality by averaging the cost of teacher salaries across all schools in a district. Therefore, the Commission recommends ensuring comparability of access to quality and effective teachers by requiring that Title I and non-Title I schools have similar expenditures for teacher salaries and comparable numbers of HQETs. Districts should not be allowed to achieve comparability by salary averaging, comparing staff-to-student ratios or simply forcing teachers to transfer schools. Instead, districts must ensure that Title I schools receive at least 95 percent of the average spent on teacher salaries from state and local funds compared to non-Title I schools.

**Ensuring Principal Effectiveness**

Like teachers, principals also need to be able to demonstrate their effectiveness by showing results in student achievement in their schools. And like teachers, principals—especially those who cannot yet demonstrate effectiveness—need professional development to strengthen their knowledge and skills.

Therefore, the Commission recommends enhancing school leadership by establishing a definition of a Highly Effective Principal (HEP). This definition, similar to the Commission’s recommendations for highly qualified and effective teachers, requires principals to obtain certification or licensure as required in their state, demonstrate the necessary skills for effectively leading a school and, most importantly, produce improvements in student achievement that are comparable to
high-achieving schools with similar children facing similar challenges. All principals should meet this new definition, but we recommend requiring it as a condition of working at a Title I school. Existing principals will receive three years to achieve this standard once states have established their systems to designate HEPs. A reauthorized NCLB must recognize the impact that principals have on school success and ensure that the effectiveness of school leadership is assessed and reported.

**Accelerating Progress and Closing Achievement Gaps Through Improved Accountability**

Over the past two decades, states have increasingly held schools accountable for student achievement. Accountability is a powerful tool that elicits actionable information and data to drive reform. By holding schools responsible for the achievement of all students, strong accountability systems encourage schools to take steps to bring about improvements.

**Ensuring Accuracy and Fairness**

The accountability provisions of NCLB—requiring schools to demonstrate AYP—have yielded important benefits. They have created incentives for schools to continuously improve. They have shone a bright light on schools that are genuinely in need of improvement. Most significantly, they have helped ensure that schools address the needs of all groups of students.

However, the current system of rating schools based on whether they have made AYP is a fairly blunt instrument. Schools either make AYP or they don't. The method does not distinguish between schools that are moving significantly in the right direction but have not yet reached the bar and those that are seriously struggling and show little or no progress. **Therefore, the Commission recommends improving the accuracy and fairness of AYP calculations by allowing states to include achievement growth in such calculations.** These calculations would enable schools to receive credit for students who are on track to becoming proficient within three years, based on the growth trajectory of their assessment scores, when calculating AYP for the students’ school. Including growth as a factor in AYP will yield richer and more useful data on student performance—both for the classroom and for school accountability.

Accuracy and fairness also require limits on the minimum sizes for calculating subgroup performance and confidence intervals. Although these practices are appropriate to maintain statistical reliability and protect student privacy, they can be—and have been—abused. As a result, large numbers of schools have not been held accountable for the performance of significant numbers of students.
The procedures for including students with disabilities in AYP calculations must also be clarified to ensure these students are treated fairly and are held to high standards—and schools are accountable for their achievement. NCLB has taught us that children with disabilities can achieve to high expectations with proper instruction and assessment.

Therefore, the Commission recommends holding schools accountable for the achievement of all students by restricting the minimum subgroup size to no more than 20 and confidence intervals to no more than 95 percent. In addition, we recommend improving the rules for including students with disabilities in AYP calculations. Specifically, we recommend maintaining the U.S. Department of Education’s (U.S. DOE) existing 1 percent policy (allowing children with severe cognitive disabilities to be assessed against alternate achievement standards using alternate assessments). However, we would amend the U.S. DOE’s proposed 2 percent policy (allowing students with disabilities to be assessed against “modified achievement standards”) by reducing the cap on how many children may be included under this policy from 2 to 1 percent. Thus, states could administer alternate assessments for up to 1 percent of their student population and administer assessments with modified achievement standards to an additional 1 percent of students.

As under current implementation of these policies, a child’s Individualized Education Program (IEP) team would determine whether he or she qualifies for one of these categories. However, to ensure decisions are made properly and children with disabilities are assessed in the most appropriate manner, we recommend strengthening the procedures used for determining which children are included in these categories and improving the tools and resources available for IEP teams to make those decisions.

Making States Accountable for Upholding the Law

Ensuring that NCLB works for all students requires more than asking states to develop plans for assessment and accountability systems. It requires making sure states carry out their plans and fulfill their obligations under the statute.

Therefore, we recommend that parents and other concerned parties have the right to hold districts, states and the U.S. DOE accountable for faithfully implementing the requirements of NCLB through enhanced enforcement options with the state and the U.S. DOE. States and the U.S. DOE would be required to establish a process to hear complaints, with the only remedy being the full implementation of the law. We view the enforcement of NCLB’s requirements as fundamental. We cannot hope to ensure our teachers are qualified or effective or that students are getting the extra help to which they are entitled if states merely comply with these requirements on paper, yet fail to execute their responsibilities. Implementation of the law and its requirements are critical to addressing achievement gaps. This new enforcement authority would give parents and other citizens a real chance to ensure that states are faithfully living up to the letter and the spirit of the law.
Accountability is only the first step on the road to student and school success. The goal is not simply to label schools but to ensure that achievement improves. It is what happens after a school is labeled “in need of improvement” that is most important.

The implementation of NCLB has shown the need to do a better job in providing interventions, such as public school choice and supplemental educational services (SES or free tutoring), designed to help students in low-performing schools. We must move more effectively and decisively in turning around consistently struggling schools.

Maximizing Student Options While Improving Quality

Nothing is more important than getting struggling students the help they need to improve their academic performance. But low levels of participation in both NCLB’s SES and public school choice options show that students are not getting the support they are entitled to in the numbers envisioned by the authors of the law.

We believe both of these options can enhance and support student achievement and overall school performance. However, both options have to result in genuine improvements in achievement for the children using them. SES in particular, largely due to its relatively short four-year existence, has been difficult to assess and evaluate.

Therefore, the Commission recommends a comprehensive approach to expanding the availability and quality of options for students in schools that do not make AYP. This approach should include the following:

- Schools that make AYP must make available a number equal to 10 percent of their seats for transfers from schools in which students are eligible for choice
- An annual independent audit of the space available for public school choice transfers
- If a school district is unable to accommodate all of its requests for public school choice (as demonstrated in an annual audit), the school district must offer SES to eligible students
- Schools should be required to offer space in school facilities for private providers of SES if those schools offer the use of school facilities to other non-school-affiliated entities
• Districts must provide enrollment periods several times a year to ensure that all eligible children have the opportunity to participate in SES

• Districts must identify and publicize a person or office that would operate as a point of contact for assisting parents in learning about options available for their children

However, simply increasing access to these options without improving their quality would not help children succeed. In addition to a focus on increasing the utilization of these options, we recommend the U.S. DOE use a portion of Title I funding to study the nationwide effects of SES on student achievement and that states evaluate the impact of their SES providers on the achievement of children.

Too often parents select these options without having the information necessary to make the best decision for their children. Too often states, as part of their SES oversight responsibilities, do not identify which providers are producing achievement gains and which are failing to help children. There must be effective monitoring of the quality of these services to ensure that children in struggling schools get the assistance they need.

Providing More Aggressive and Effective Interventions for Schools

The real work of improving academic achievement at a struggling school happens when schools, districts and states implement instructional strategies and interventions to address the school’s shortcomings. When schools fall into corrective action status, NCLB presently requires them to pick one of a menu of options to address academic challenges. Unfortunately, quick fixes and continuing down the path of least resistance won’t cut it—schools need to undertake proven, comprehensive reforms designed to improve instruction and learning.

Therefore, we recommend that schools in corrective action be required to select a comprehensive set of interventions designed to have a systemic impact, rather than the one option presently required. We also recommend that schools in corrective action have a full school year to implement such interventions before facing more serious sanctions. These recommendations will ensure that instructional interventions conducted by schools are significantly more likely to improve academic performance.

We also recommend strengthening the capacity of states and districts to help chronically low-performing schools by increasing the amount of federal funds set aside by states for school improvement and by allowing districts to focus their restructuring efforts on the lowest-performing 10 percent of their schools.

Additionally, we recommend boosting research and development on school improvement by doubling the research budget for elementary and secondary education at the U.S. DOE’s main research arm—the Institute of Education Sciences.

Without the tools, knowledge and will to do what is necessary to turn around schools, we cannot consistently produce significant improvements in performance. Yet as shown
in the testimony before the Commission and in other work we have done, states and districts too often lack one or more of these important precursors—tools, knowledge and will—for taking effective action in their communities for every child. NCLB has had significantly more success in assessing student performance than in improving it.

Fair and Accurate Assessments of Student Progress

The assessment provisions of NCLB have been closely watched. Tests are highly visible to students, parents, teachers and the general public. They are essential to the success of NCLB’s teacher quality, accountability and school improvement provisions. And they often are credited—or blamed—for many of the improvements or ills, real or perceived, associated with the law.

Assessment results are crucial in systems designed to hold schools accountable for performance; without objective measures to determine how students are performing, there would be no way to know if schools are succeeding or need additional help. In addition, assessment results provide parents and communities with indications of school quality that they can use in making judgments about the performance of their schools or districts.

Improving Assessment Quality

NCLB helped establish a strong foundation for strengthening assessments by requiring them in each grade from 3 through 8 and once in high school and by providing resources to states for building and expanding their assessment systems. Most states have implemented new systems, but there is more work to be done to ensure that all states have in place sound, high-quality assessments that provide valid and reliable information about a broad range of student capacities, particularly for students with disabilities and English language learners.

Therefore, the Commission recommends maintaining existing federal support for assessment development and targeting those funds to several new assessment priorities such as:

- Improving the quality of assessments
- Providing alternate assessments for students with disabilities and English language learners
- Developing science assessments currently required under the law and the 12th grade assessment recommended by the Commission
- Improving test delivery and scoring technology
Linking Assessment and Instruction
The annual assessments required under NCLB have created a desire for even more information that can show how students are progressing. Teachers need detailed information throughout the school year so that they can make adjustments to their instruction and provide additional help to students who are struggling before they face an end-of-the-year assessment. Parents deserve regular information on their children’s performance to ensure they are on track and achieving. Students deserve to know how they are performing so they can identify areas on which they need to focus.

Therefore, the Commission recommends that districts be permitted to use a portion of their Title I funds to develop or acquire and implement high-quality formative assessments and be required to use such assessments in schools that are identified for school improvement. Such assessments should be aligned to state standards to provide teachers and parents with meaningful information on student progress throughout the year. These assessments would not be used for accountability purposes but rather as tools to improve instruction to better address individual student needs.

High Standards for Every Student in Every State

Standards-based reform is the backbone of NCLB. Standards indicate what all students are expected to know and be able to do. In the past, such expectations were seldom explicit, and they varied widely; some students were expected to learn more than others.

NCLB, by allowing states to set their own content and achievement standards, has respected the long-standing tradition of local control over education. However, this has resulted in unacceptable variations in what constitutes proficiency. The disparities in proficiency definitions have fueled suggestions that some states are “gaming the system” by setting standards arbitrarily low to avoid sanctions under NCLB. And there are growing concerns that state standards do not match what students need to know and be able to do to succeed in college and the workplace. Clearly, many states are demanding too little of their students.

Aligning State Standards With College and Workplace Readiness Expectations
Over the past decade, as states have implemented standards for student achievement, expectations for all students have been increasingly clarified. Unlike in the past, when only a few students were expected to learn challenging academic content, we now expect all students to achieve to high standards.
But international comparisons show that the level of performance of American students is consistently surpassed by that of students in other countries. And large numbers of employers and college professors say that expectations for students do not match what they need to succeed after high school. It is a travesty for students to meet the expectations set out for them, only to need remediation in college or to be unable to land an entry-level job in their chosen field. States need to take a hard look at whether the standards they are setting for their students will truly prepare them for a future filled with meaningful opportunities.

Therefore, we recommend that states assess their reading or language arts, mathematics and science standards against requirements for success in college and in challenging jobs. All states must complete this process within one year of enactment of a reauthorized NCLB in order to participate in a national summit to be convened by the U.S. Secretary of Education. This summit would provide a forum for states to take a fresh look and report to the American people on whether the expectations they have set are sufficient to ensure that their students have the opportunity for success after high school.

Creating Model Standards at the National Level

Comparisons of student proficiency on state standards and student proficiency on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) show vividly the wide variations in expectations for students across states. For whatever reason, some states have clearly set the bar for students far lower than other states. Not only does this shortchange the students in those states, it also sends misleading messages to parents and taxpayers. Can citizens and businesses in a state where nearly all students are proficient on state tests—but where far fewer are proficient on NAEP—really have confidence in the strength of their education system?

In 2007, when young people in Milwaukee and Atlanta are competing with young people in Beijing and Bangalore, it is difficult to understand why Wisconsin’s definition of proficiency should be different from Georgia’s and why both would differ significantly from NAEP’s definition. It is troubling that many states may not be preparing our children to compete with their peers around the world.

Therefore, we recommend the development of voluntary model national content and performance standards and tests in reading or language arts, mathematics and science based on NAEP frameworks. A distinguished national panel, including members of the National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB), should be commissioned to create the standards and tests, extrapolating from the form and content of NAEP frameworks for grades 4, 8 and 12, and mapping the additional grades appropriately. In addition, the panel would ensure that any standards and assessments it produces would be aligned with college and workplace expectations.
For NCLB accountability purposes, states could adopt the resulting national model standards and tests as their own, build their own assessment instruments based on the national model standards frameworks or continue to keep their existing or revamped standards and tests. However, the U.S. Secretary of Education would periodically issue reports that compare the rigor of all state standards relative to the national model standards using a common metric.

Aiming higher should be non-negotiable. We must not label our children as proficient while leaving them unprepared. The steps outlined above will result in significantly raising the level of expectations for all American children.

Ensuring High Schools Prepare Students for College and the Workplace

There is a growing sentiment that the American high school is “obsolete,” as Microsoft Founder Bill Gates put it at an education summit in 2005. In response, high school reform has rapidly risen on the national education agenda. States and districts are hastening to redesign existing high schools and create new ones.

Concern over high schools partly stems from findings that too many students are dropping out of school. At the same time, there are rising concerns that those who do graduate from America’s high schools are leaving without the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in college or the workplace.

Strengthening Accountability and Support for High Schools

Current efforts across the country to redesign and strengthen high schools are encouraging. But the persistence of low achievement among high school students suggests that much more is needed.

Efforts to improve our high schools cannot—and should not—rest solely on the shoulders of the schools themselves. Low-performing high schools cannot go it alone; they often lack the resources and capacity to bring about meaningful change. We believe that districts can and should play a crucial role in turning around struggling high schools.

Therefore, we recommend requiring districts with large concentrations of struggling high schools to develop and implement comprehensive, districtwide high school improvement plans. These high schools need the leadership and support of the district to spur significant reform and increased student achievement.
High School Assessments

The requirement for assessments in each grade from 3 through 8 and once in high school has enhanced the quality and reliability of information about school performance. Yet the requirement for assessments in only a single grade in high school has meant that student progress cannot be tracked through the end of high school. In short, we simply don’t have the data we need to identify and assist struggling high schools under the current NCLB assessment system.

To make matters worse, a great deal of research shows that far too many of those students who do graduate from high school are unprepared for college and the workplace. As the system currently stands, we have no way to gauge whether schools hold high expectations for students after 10th or 11th grade. We need a stronger assessment and accountability system in high schools, one that would help spur continuous student growth through graduation and ensure that our graduates are adequately prepared for what lies ahead.

Therefore, the Commission recommends creating complete assessment systems by requiring states to add an additional assessment in grade 12 to enable measures of student growth in high school. The 12th grade assessment would provide information on student and school performance at a critical year in students’ careers. This assessment should be designed to measure 12th graders’ mastery of content they will need to be college and workplace ready. However, we recommend that this assessment not be used as the sole determinant for graduation purposes. This assessment, along with current 10th grade tests, would also make possible the inclusion of growth calculations in AYP for high schools and HQET/HEP measurements for high school teachers and principals.

Driving Progress Through Reliable, Accurate Data

The information revolution that has transformed the way Americans live, work and play has been slow to reach education. Sophisticated data systems offer tremendous potential for educators at every level. Teachers can use data on student progress to adjust lesson plans. Principals can look at classroom data to gauge the effectiveness of teachers and curriculum. Superintendents can examine school data to make better decisions about professional development and resource allocation. State officials can determine district needs and target assistance more efficiently.
Developing and Strengthening Data Systems

To implement the recommendations in this report—in particular, the proposals to include student growth in calculations of AYP and to determine whether teachers are “effective”—the federal government and states must partner to create more sophisticated data systems that can track individual student achievement over time and provide critical information to parents, teachers and school administrators. Some states have begun to develop such systems, but all states need to pick up the pace to ensure that needed information is collected and available.

Therefore, we recommend requiring all states to design and implement a high-quality longitudinal data system within four years of the enactment of a reauthorized NCLB. These systems must have common elements (described in detail in our report), and the federal government should provide formula grants to assist states in their development and implementation.

A Call to Action

Over the past five years, NCLB has changed the educational landscape in our nation by demanding improved achievement, enhancing our understanding of teacher quality and strengthening classroom practice. These changes, we believe, have benefited students, families, schools and our nation. We also know, however, that NCLB is not perfect, and our work has shown the need to improve the law. We know that we must do more to ensure that all students achieve at high levels and every school succeeds.

We believe that our recommendations should be considered as a whole. A high-achieving education system includes all of the elements outlined in this report—teacher and principal quality and effectiveness, strong accountability, increased and high-quality student options, significant school improvement, accurate assessments, high standards for all students and more. We must ensure that each element is producing results. The goal is not to simply comply with federal regulations; it is to improve education for every student, in every school.

We urge Congress, educators, parents and community members across the country to join us. Together, we can fulfill the promise to America’s children.

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To order or download a complete copy of the Commission’s report, please visit www.nclbcommission.org.
It’s time to take a bold step forward and commit to significantly improving NCLB. We must insist on high achievement for all students. Our nation’s children deserve it.