

# The Challenges to No Child Left Behind



## FRAME 1

The NEA and 21 different states are taking action against "NCLB."

## BASIC LEVEL

President George W. Bush's main educational program might be in big trouble. **What is this program called?** (*No Child Left Behind.*) This was signed into law in 2002. In this program, young people are tested every year in reading and math to see what their school's scores are. If a school's scores continue to be low for five years, that school could lose its federal money. **What does "federal" mean?** (*From the U.S. government.*) This act also lets the government close schools that are doing poorly.

The reason it is in trouble is that some groups say the program is not working. One of these groups is the National Education Association, or NEA. This is the largest teacher's union in the U.S. **What is a union?** (*A group of people with the same types of jobs who get together for strength.*) The NEA is suing the government. It says that the government owes schools \$27 billion dollars for this program. NEXT PICTURE

## GENERAL LEVEL

In 2002, President George W. Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act into law. **What is this law all about?** (*It is a law about education that requires more testing for students and for schools.*) Many people thought that No Child Left Behind would change the way public schools worked in the United States. This is because this act calls for nationwide standards in reading, math, and science. **Do you think schools have changed much in the last three years? If so, how?**

But No Child Left Behind is in big trouble right now. The National Education, or NEA, has just filed a lawsuit against the U.S. Department of Education. **What is the NEA?** (*The largest teacher's union in the U.S.*) In this lawsuit, the NEA claims that the government has failed to give schools about \$27 billion dollars that it owes them. This money was supposed to pay for the costs of No Child Left Behind. **Did you know the government could be sued?**

Several school districts and states have either joined this lawsuit or started their own lawsuits against the Department of Education. Lawmakers in the state of Utah recently voted to put their own state standards over those of the federal government. **Why would they do this?** (*These lawmakers say that the federal government wants too much control over what is taught and how students are evaluated, or graded.*) It looks like the president's education plan is in for some tough battles in the upcoming months. Let's look at what No Child Left Behind is all about. NEXT PICTURE

## ADVANCED LEVEL

When George W. Bush was running for president, he touted his educational record as governor of Texas. He said that his state plans had worked because they demanded more accountability from schools. He also said the plan would work to get rid of bad teachers and to recruit more good ones. Bush promised that if he got elected, he would bring that plan out on a national level. So many of his supporters had high hopes when he signed the No Child Left Behind Act into law in 2002. **Can you briefly describe the tenets of No Child Left Behind?** (*It provides for more mandatory reading, math, and science testing of students from third grade through eighth grade. It also threatens loss of federal funding for schools whose students do not improve in five years, with an ultimate penalty of the school being shut down.*) **What else have you heard about No Child Left Behind, or NCLB?**

But the program has had many critics, who warned that this act would harm education in the U.S. One of the most vocal of these critics is the National Education Association, or NEA. **What does this organization do?** (*It is the largest teacher's union in the U.S.*) Recently, the NEA joined together with several school districts around the country in a lawsuit against the federal government. This lawsuit alleges that the government has underfunded No Child Left Behind by \$27 billion in the last three years. This lawsuit is forcing a closer look at this controversial educational program. NEXT PICTURE

## The Challenges to No Child Left Behind (continued)



### FRAME 2

This education plan has been popular...and controversial.

### BASIC LEVEL

No Child Left Behind has been very important to President Bush. He said that this program would help children, teachers, and parents. In this plan, all students in grades three through eight have to take yearly tests in reading and in mathematics. **Do you know what subject will be tested starting in 2007?** (*Science.*) These tests are supposed to show how well schools do at teaching these subjects. Schools with low test scores might lose money, or be closed by the government. **Have you heard about these tests?**

But some groups have never liked the plan. One of these groups has been the NEA. The teachers in this group think that these tests do not tell the whole story about a school. They think that a school should be run by its staff, not by the U.S. government. One government official is Margaret Spellings, shown here. **Can you guess what her job is?** (*She is the U.S. secretary of education.*) NEXT PICTURE

### GENERAL LEVEL

When President Bush introduced his plan, many people were very excited about it. No Child Left Behind is based on the education program Bush had set up as the governor of one of the biggest states in the U.S. **What state was this?** (*Texas.*) The people who supported this bill said that it would make schools responsible for their students' education. Some important Democratic lawmakers, like Massachusetts senator Edward Kennedy, shown here at the bill signing, backed No Child Left Behind.

Under this new education plan, the government set up mandatory yearly reading and math tests for every public school student in grades three through eight. **Define "mandatory."** (*Required.*) These tests measure how many students in a school are working at or above grade level, and how many are working below grade level. No Child Left Behind says that if too many students in a school are not doing well in these areas, then the school needs to set up a plan. If that school does not get better after five years, the government can send in experts to work with the school, or even take it over. Schools that do very poorly might lose their funding, or even be shut down. **Does this sound like a good plan so far? Should the same rules be applied to all schools?**

The NEA has criticized No Child Left Behind from the beginning, saying it takes too much power from teachers and schools, and gives it to the federal government and people like the woman in the picture at left, Margaret Spellings. **What is her job?** (*She is the U.S. secretary of education.*) NEXT PICTURE

### ADVANCED LEVEL

The NEA has been against George Bush's education plan from the time he implemented a similar plan in Texas. This organization lobbied against George W. Bush in the 2000 election, throwing its support behind Al Gore. **Why do you think teacher's unions traditionally lean towards Democratic candidates?** This organization, which counts almost three million members, has also spoken out against No Child Left Behind's focus on mandatory testing. **Why would the NEA object to nationwide testing as a way to evaluate schools and teachers?** (*These teachers think that it leaves teachers out of the picture, and treats all students, and all schools, as if they face the same challenges.*) **Should the same rules be applied to all schools regardless of individual differences? Does this penalize schools that work with more disadvantaged children or children with learning disabilities?**

Until now, schools sought to comply with the new rules set down by NCLB. But now lawmakers in the state of Utah have voted to prioritize their own state goals over those of the federal government. **What does this mean for Utah?** (*The state will forfeit about \$76 million in aid this year.*) Now several more states are taking steps in this direction. Margaret Spellings has been trying to meet with important lawmakers and educators to shore up support for No Child Left Behind. **What is Ms. Spellings's job?** (*U.S. secretary of education.*) But that has not stopped several school districts around the country from joining the NEA lawsuit. NEXT PICTURE

## The Challenges to No Child Left Behind (continued)



### FRAME 3

The big issues here, as usual, are money and politics.

### BASIC LEVEL

Some states and local school districts do not like No Child Left Behind either. The state of Utah has voted to stop following the No Child Left Behind rules.

**What does this mean for Utah schools?** (They will lose the money they get from the U.S. government, but they will have more freedom.) Other states are thinking about doing this too. They say they should decide what is best for their students, not the U.S. government. This idea is called “states’ rights.” **Do you agree with this idea? But what if a state makes an unfair law?**

The biggest problems have to do with money and politics. People say that the government makes schools follow No Child Left Behind, but is not giving schools enough money to do the program right. This means that states and school districts have to pay for the program. Some say this is against the law. **Can you understand why people are upset with No Child Left Behind? What do teachers and students in your area think of No Child Left Behind?** END

### GENERAL LEVEL

It was no surprise that the NEA did not like No Child Left Behind. But many people were shocked when Utah came out against it.

**Why?** (Utah is a very conservative state, and its residents voted heavily for President Bush in both elections.) For many of the other states and districts that are rebelling against this law, No Child Left Behind comes down to two issues: money and politics.

It is not that schools disagree with the ideas of students getting better at math, reading, and science. Many of these school districts simply do not like being told what to do by the government. This is especially true because federal funds only make up a small amount of schools’ budgets. **Where does most public school money come from?** (State and local taxes.) No Child Left Behind came with a guarantee that states would not have to use their own money on this federal program. **Why was this written into No Child Left Behind?** (To help it pass, the bill was written to reassure lawmakers and voters that it would not be an expensive program.)

It is coming down to an issue of states’ rights. **What does this phrase mean?** (It refers to the idea that each individual state is supposed to be in charge of its own affairs, with little interference from the U.S. government.) It is clear that this idea is a strong one when it comes to education. Almost half the states in the U.S. are trying to shake off some of the controls of No Child Left Behind. **What do you think about the idea of states’ rights? What do the teachers you know think of No Child Left Behind?** END OF STORY

### ADVANCED LEVEL

It was very shocking to many people that Utah was the first state to vote on breaking away from No Child Left Behind. **Why?**

(Because Utah is a conservative state that traditionally backs the Republican Party.) But for many lawmakers, it came down to an issue of economics, and of states’ rights. **What does “states’ rights” mean?** (It is the idea that the federal government should be as small as possible, and that individual states should have the power to decide most issues that deal with their states.)

This idea, also known as “federalism,” is as old as the United States itself. It has been most often associated with Republicans and conservatives in this century, with Democrats painted as proponents of a large and powerful government. **Do you side more with the idea of a strong central government, or with “states’ rights”?** **Why?** But many of the legislators in Utah have said that they resent the idea that any administration should dictate what Utah schools should teach and how they should teach it — especially when state and local taxes pay for more than 90 percent of schools’ budgets.

Part of the problem for the Bush administration is the language of NCLB itself, which guarantees that states will not have to pay for any federally mandated parts of the act. This was to reassure nervous legislators. But many critics see this as proof that the act was written for political reasons instead of for educational reasons. **Do you think No Child Left Behind will weather the current storm? How do the teachers you know feel about NCLB?** END OF STORY