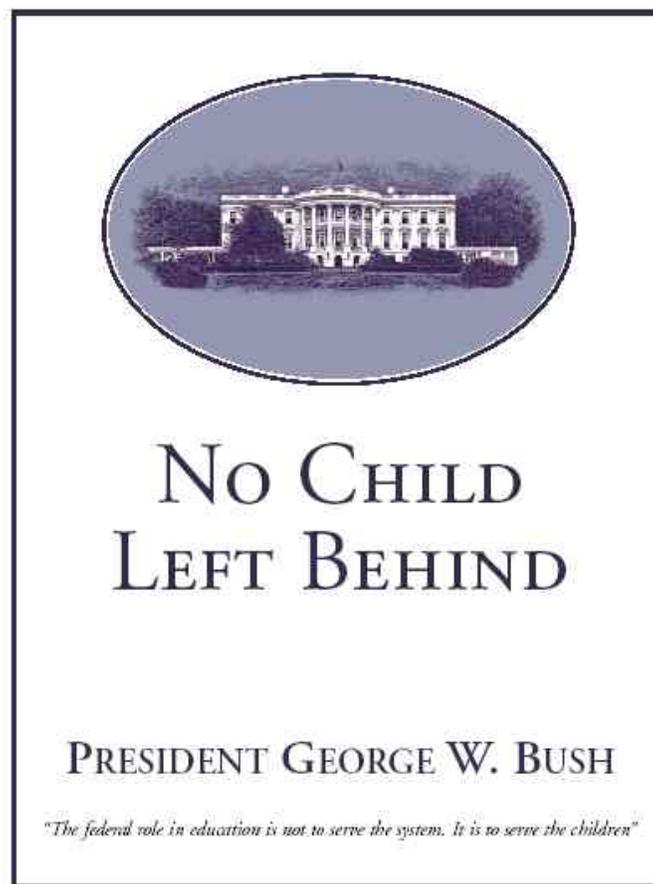


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Review

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No Child Left Behind: Transforming the Federal Role in Education So That No Child is Left Behind. Washington, DC 2002. <http://www.nochildleftbehind.gov/next/overview/index.html>; also at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/reports/no-child-left-behind.html>.



“...Today, nearly 70 percent of inner city fourth graders are unable to read at a basic level on national reading tests. Our high school seniors trail students in Cyprus and South Africa on international math tests. And nearly a third of our college freshmen find they must take a remedial course before they are able to even begin regular college level courses.

Although education is primarily a state and local responsibility, the federal government is partly at fault for tolerating these abysmal results. The federal government currently does not do enough to reward success and sanction

failure in our education system... We have a genuine national crisis. More and more, we are divided into two nations. One that reads, and one that doesn't. One that dreams, and one that doesn't....”

This quotation is not an acerbic critic's review of the current status of the Nigerian education system. It is an *official* picture of the state of education in the United States as outlined in the document, *No Child Left Behind*, the educational reform initiative of the US President George Bush in 2002.

It is something of a shock to learn of this official appraisal of the quality of education in the United States, when the US has, for many years, provided the sole role model for curricular planning and educational policy initiative to many countries, including Nigeria. Indeed, the current educational system in Nigeria is structured along American lines with the entrenched mindset philosophy of freedom of choice.

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (Public Law 107-110) was signed into law by President George W. Bush on January 8, 2002. No Child Left Behind (NCLB) reauthorizes the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Developed by a bipartisan team of legislators, the act mandates that states establish tough new academic standards, improve teacher quality, and create safe schools, among other measures. It also allocated \$26.5 billion to public K-12 education — a 20 percent increase over 2001.

This law reflects four components of education reform: *accountability and testing, flexibility and local control, funding for what works, and expanded parental options.*

Accountability for Results

No Child Left Behind creates strong standards in each state for what every child should know and learn in reading and math in grades 3-8. Student progress and achievement will be measured for every child, every year.

- No Child Left Behind creates strong standards in each state for what every child should know and learn in reading and math in grades 3-8. Student progress and achievement will be measured for every child, every year.
- Results from these tests will be made available in annual report cards, so parents can measure school performance and statewide progress, and evaluate the quality of their child's school, the qualifications of teachers, and their child's progress in key subjects.
- Statewide reports will show progress for all student groups in closing achievement gaps between disadvantaged students and other groups of students.
- Schools will be held accountable for improving performance of all student groups, so every school will be performing at proficient levels within 12 years.

Reduce Bureaucracy and Increase Flexibility

Provide new flexibility for all 50 states and every local school district in America in the use of federal education funds. The No Child Left Behind Act provides new flexibility for all 50 states and every local school district in America in the use of federal education funds.

- Every local school district in America and all 50 states will be permitted to target up to 50 percent of federal non-Title I dollars to programs that will have the most positive impact on the students they serve.
- The new law consolidates and streamlines programs and targets resources to existing programs that serve poor students, reducing the overall number of ESEA programs from 55 to 45.

Focusing on Proven Educational Methods

No Child Left Behind calls for educational dollars to be spent on proven, research-based approaches that will best help children to learn.

- Implements President Bush's Reading First initiative by increasing federal funding for reading programs from \$300 million in FY 2001 to more than \$900 million in FY 2002, and tying federal funding to the use of scientifically proven methods of reading instruction.
- Implements a new Early Reading First program to support early language, literacy, and pre-reading development of preschool-age children, particularly those from low-income families.
- Strengthens teacher quality by providing \$2.8 billion for teacher quality programs and allowing local school districts to use additional federal funds to hire new teachers, increase teacher

Expanded Choices for Parents

Enhance options for parents with children in chronically failing schools.

- This section of the bill enhances options for parents with children in chronically failing schools – and makes these options available immediately in the 2002-03 school year for students in the thousands of schools already identified as failing, under current law.
- Once a school is identified as failing, parents will be allowed to transfer their child to a better-performing public or charter school.
- For the first time, federal Title I funds (approximately \$500 to \$1,000 per child) can be used to provide supplemental educational services – including tutoring, after school services, and summer school programs – for children in failing schools. Services can be provided by faith- and community-based organizations.
- The charter school initiative is expanded, creating more opportunities for parents, educators, and interested community leaders to create schools outside the education establishment.

Under *No Child Left Behind*, and for the first time in US history, federal education funding will be tied directly to academic achievement and will ensure that schools are using taxpayer funds on programs that work. These new education reforms make the best use of every tax dollar spent on education by funding programs that follow good research, and by insisting on accountability and results. In that way, taxpayers know what they're getting for their money, and parents know if their children are learning. Thus *No Child Left Behind* makes more federal money available for K-12 education but holds educators accountable for failures in teaching the nation's 48 million public school students, particularly those from poor families.

No Child Left Behind is designed to change the culture of America's schools by closing the achievement gap, offering more flexibility, giving parents more options, and teaching students based on what works.

Under the act's accountability provisions, states must describe how they will close the achievement gap and make sure all students, including those who are disadvantaged, achieve academic proficiency. They must produce annual state and school district report cards that inform parents and communities about state and school progress. Schools that do not make progress must provide supplemental services, such as free tutoring or after-school assistance; take corrective actions; and, if still not making adequate yearly progress after five years, make dramatic changes to the way the school is run.

Under *No Child Left Behind*, states and school districts have unprecedented flexibility in how they use federal education funds, in exchange for greater accountability for results.

It is possible for most school districts to transfer up to 50 percent of the federal formula grant funds they receive under the Improving Teacher Quality State Grants, Educational Technology, Innovative Programs, and Safe and Drug-Free Schools programs to any one of these programs, or to their Title I program, without separate approval. This allows districts to use funds for their particular needs, such as hiring new teachers, increasing teacher pay, and improving teacher training and professional development. Similarly, the law's consolidation of bilingual education programs gives states and districts more control in planning programs to benefit all limited English proficient students.

A new demonstration program allows selected states and school districts to consolidate funds received under a variety of federal education programs so that they can be used for any educational purpose authorized under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as amended by the NCLB Act in order to assist them in making adequate yearly progress and narrowing achievement gaps. In addition, the new Improving Teacher Quality State Grants program gives states and districts greater flexibility to choose the teacher professional development strategies that best meet their needs to help raise student achievement.

No Child Left Behind is not the first time the US Government has expressed concern about the quality of its education. Almost 20 years earlier, it released *Nation At Risk*, a devastating attack on the quality of education in the United States. For instance, as stated in *Nation At Risk*,

If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war. As it stands, we have allowed this to happen to ourselves. We have even squandered the gains in student achievement made in the wake of the Sputnik challenge. Moreover, we have dismantled essential support systems which helped make those gains possible. We have, in effect, been committing an act of unthinking, unilateral educational disarmament. Our society and its educational institutions seem to have lost sight of the basic

purposes of schooling, and of the high expectations and disciplined effort needed to attain them.

U.S. Government, *A Nation at Risk*, April 1983¹

The *No Child Left Behind* initiative, however, has lost support of some Democrats who say too little money has been spent on the mandated actions. Critics have argued that the funding increases that Bush touts aren't nearly enough to cover the costs of the new requirements, including the expense of creating tests and processing their results. Critics also say that the way the federal grading system works isn't fair in some cases because it requires yearly progress not just from a school, but from every subgroup of students, including those with disabilities or ones who speak English as a second language.

Nevertheless what followed was an attempt by all US states to ensure that the provisions of the act were adhered to, at the same time drawing attention to some of the deficiencies in the act. In California, for instance, it was noted that

No Child Left Behind is remarkable in its single-minded call that limited English proficient students receive English-Only instruction. The blueprint fails to mention the use of bilingual education or primary language development as equally viable instructional approaches to support the development of English language and content skills with limited English proficient students.

Given the lack of evidence to support a single instructional approach to the education of limited English proficient students, the blueprint violates both the research based action and flexibility tenets. This glaring omission unnecessarily limits the rights of parents, local school districts, and States to decide on the type of educational program they deem appropriate for their limited English proficient students.

Thus if enacted

this blueprint would severely limit the choices of over forty percent of all the school districts in California who currently choose to provide instruction in a language other than English in order (1) to develop primary language abilities in their students that also strengthen their acquisition of English; (2) to help their limited English proficient students gain access to core academic content while they are learning English, (3) to develop the linguistic resources that these students bring in languages other than English; and (4) to provide opportunities for English-Only speaking students to develop a second or even a third language to better prepare them for the new global economy. (California Department of Education, 2000; Ramirez, 2001).²

¹ National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*. A Report to the Nation and the Secretary of Education United States Department of Education. Washington, D.C., National Commission on Excellence in Education.

² United States Commission on Civil Rights Testimony by Dr. J. David Ramirez, Director, Center for Language Minority Education and Research, California State University, Long Beach, on No Child

The debated that trailed the adoption of *No Child Left Behind* clearly demonstrates the strong and healthy nature of discourse in US educational structure. While there are critics of the system – who criticized not because *No Child Left Behind* is inherently bad, but because its implementation mechanism does not seem to be well thought out. As Paul Reville of Harvard University analyzed

...implementing the act may be so difficult as to undermine all of its good intentions. That's because the act features a convoluted scheme of federal-state power sharing on a much broader system of assessment and accountability than ever. It requires states to gather more information on student achievement (through standardized testing) at more frequent intervals. At the same time, it gives the federal government the power to dictate how quickly states' and schools' scores should rise, and which punishments will be meted out to those who fail to meet the mark.³

What drew most interest – certainly for Nigerian policy makers trying to implement the UBE – was the issue of testing. Hitherto US education system has no examination systems in the way the Nigerian system is structured. Progress through the school system was based on mandatory attendance of certain hours of instruction in certain subjects which will qualify a student for a “diploma” (certificate – equivalent to NECO or WAEC). In the No Child Left Behind Act, it seems that examinations or some form of testing will be introduced. As Paul Reville noted,

...the problems arise when the federal government, which has no influence on the variable standards set by each state, mandates the method for measuring improvement, the pace of improvement, and the consequences. We are not a nation of mandatory federal standards or tests, and we are deeply ambivalent about a federal role in education. Yet, we now have two separate levels of government dictating either the standards we have to live up to or how quickly we must live up to them—and all of this with little or no enforcement capacity.⁴

These discourses, where a federal policy is openly challenged without fear of repercussion (through reduced funding, for instance) or strikes by teachers or students clearly indicate the level needed to be reached if a level-headed dialog about the quality of education is to be attained. The appearance of *No Child Left Behind*, almost 20 years after *Nation at Risk*, which itself appeared almost 25 years after the Soviet launching of the Sputnik in 1957 and that triggered curriculum reforms in the US, shows clearly that UBE – for *No Child Left Behind* is UBE, American style – is a universal soul search for quality education. Clearly no one knows the answers. And that is quite worrying.

Left Behind, A Blueprint for Education Reform. April 13, 2001. Online at http://www.clmer.csulb.edu/ramirez_testimony.html

³ Paul Reville, a faculty member in the Administration, Planning, and Social Policy area at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Online at

<http://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/features/reville06012002.html>

⁴ Ibid.