

Myths and Facts about the All Students Can Achieve Act

Myth: The legislation reduces accountability to provide new flexibility.

Fact: Accountability does not need to be weakened to provide states with flexibility. This legislation requires states to develop measures for teacher and principal effectiveness. Once implemented and peer reviewed, states may opt out of the existing Highly Qualified Teacher (HQT) requirement and will receive increased flexibility in their use of federal education funds. The move from a focus on inputs (e.g. HQT) to outcomes bolsters accountability.

Myth: Permitting states to opt out of the Highly Qualified Teacher shows that it was wrong to implement it five years ago?

Fact: The Highly Qualified Teacher provision was meant to ensure that all children are taught by qualified teachers. Qualifications are easily measured but they are an input not an outcome. As we move to measuring individual student growth, it is time to take the next step and measure teacher quality and effectiveness rather than initial qualifications. All children should be taught by quality teachers.

Myth: The legislation judges teacher effectiveness based on one test score.

Fact: States will receive funds to develop state teacher and principal effectiveness models and systems, with input from stakeholders, based primarily on objective measures of student growth. These models do not need to be based on a single test.

Myth: Student growth is the only measure for teacher effectiveness.

Fact: States have the flexibility to include other measures (e.g. principal and peer evaluations) in their evaluations of teacher effectiveness. However, student growth needs to be the primary measure.

Myth: States don't have the data systems to measure teacher effectiveness—it will never work.

Fact: Funding is authorized for state longitudinal data systems, with common data elements, to track student growth over time and to link student development to teachers, programs and supplemental services. A portion of the funding is available for consortia of states to develop infrastructure and systems for multi-state use. States have up to four years to complete data system development and implementation. For states that already have data systems in place or complete their systems in less than four years, this funding may be used for the development of teacher effectiveness systems and/or reforms to compensation, assignment and tenure policies.

Myth: Effective teacher measurement just labels teachers as failures and does nothing to support and improve teaching.

Fact: Currently, many teachers who need professional development are not getting it because it is either unavailable or does not fit their needs. This legislation would ensure that professional development funds are more efficiently targeted to reach those teachers who are most in need of additional services to improve their instruction.

Myth: Teacher effectiveness creates divisions among teachers because only teachers of the three core academic subjects would need to meet the requirement.

Fact: While initially teacher effectiveness applies to subjects in which NCLB requires assessments—reading or language arts, mathematics and science—a state may expand their effectiveness systems to more subjects ensuring that all teachers are effective, regardless of the grade level or subject area they teach.

Myth: Not enough is being done to assist schools in need of improvement and this legislation doesn't address that.

Fact: Additional new funds to schools needing improvement are authorized and allocated to states based upon the number of schools in the state identified for improvement. This provides incentives for a more accurate portrayal of schools not meeting Adequate Yearly Progress, and more rigorous standards for state assessments, as states with more schools under improvement will receive a larger share of funds.

Myth: Setting “American learning standards” is an intrusion of the federal government into local education?

Fact: Educators are free to innovate and are not instructed how to teach. The standards are voluntary and apply to English, science and math, subjects children need to know from Maine to California.

Myth: Since the American standards and assessments are voluntary, no one will adopt them.

Fact: The development and implementation of world-class assessments takes significant resources, especially to develop valid high quality assessments for the variety of students with disabilities and English language learners needing to take them. It is much more cost effective to develop assessments and make them available across the country than for each individual state to attempt to develop them. The assessments will be provided without charge to the states interested in using them. Further incentives may include access to infrastructure to get timely results from the assessments.

Myth: This legislation focuses on national standards and ignores regional cooperation.

Fact: The legislation permits and encourages state collaborations in develop data systems, standards and assessments. The American standards and assessments will provide a common benchmark for measuring the rigor of those developed by states or regional consortia.

Myth: Implementing teacher and principal effectiveness systems will take a decade.

Fact: It will take time. States are given up to four years to develop and implement data systems. States may need an additional two years to populate these systems with student performance data to measure student growth. Therefore, teacher and principal effectiveness systems need to be implemented within six years. There are several incentives, including funding flexibility, opting out of HQT, and moving to growth models, for earlier adoption.

Myth: The measure of teacher effectiveness is unfair for those teaching in high-need schools.

Fact: No. The learning gains of a teacher's students will be compared to the learning gains of students in schools with similar characteristics.

Myth: Focusing only on an individual's performance misses the teamwork that is required to produce a successful school.

Fact: The legislation also includes a school-based rewards system that recognizes the teamwork of teachers, administrators, counselors, resource teachers, librarians and media specialists, and other staff necessary to improve schools.

Myth: Teacher effectiveness is only measured for language arts, math and science teachers.

Fact: States are encouraged, but not required, to develop effectiveness measures based upon student growth for subjects beyond those with required assessments (language arts, math and science).

Myth: Elementary school teachers be required to meet effectiveness in three separate subjects.

Fact: Where separate subject tests are used in teacher effectiveness measurements, the aggregate test results may be used so that teachers do not need to meet three separate thresholds.

Myth: You do not address specifics in closing the achievement gap.

Fact: This legislation is focused on reducing the achievement gap with the goal of eventually eliminating the gap. The bill requires the equitable distribution of non-Federal funds within school districts; provides incentives for school professionals through teamwork in the poorest schools to make the greatest improvements in student performance; provides funds for out-of-district transfers to public schools for students without viable alternatives; provide equitable funding and flexibility under the Charter School Program; and disaggregates graduation rate data so that the gap in graduation rates can be reported and closed. It also requires teachers not rated as effective to get professional development and, after five years of continuously being rated as not effective, no longer permitting these teachers to teach in Title I schools.

Myth: You add many more ways for schools to fail without a strong basis for doing so.

Fact: It is true that we are adding science and closing the gap in graduation rates to the accountability system but with good reason. The future competitiveness of the country depends upon the strong math and science education of America's students. Under No Child Left Behind science assessments start next year. However, schools are not held accountable for the results of these assessments. This legislation addresses the importance of science education by including making the results of these required assessments meaningful. States and schools are given the same amount of time to reach proficiency as they were for language arts and math under No Child Left Behind. Furthermore, it is critical to address the large numbers of minority and poor children who fail to graduate from America's schools.

Myth: You just focus on effectiveness rather than bringing in teachers in high-need areas.

Fact: Funds are available to states to look at compensation, assignment and tenure issues, including rewarding the best teachers to teach in high need schools and high need subjects. Complementing the long-term development of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) teachers under the America COMPETES Act, this legislation authorizes the Administration's Adjunct Teacher Corp concept to bring math, science and critical foreign language professionals into public secondary schools to work with teachers and students. These adjunct teachers will provide expertise and assistance to teachers during their first year and in subsequent years will be held accountable under the teacher effectiveness requirements. The legislation also emphasizes the expansion and replication of successful models under the math and science partnerships program.