

NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND POLICY BRIEF:
Implications for the Early Learning Field
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Overview

All too often early childhood educators are not fully considered or included in discussions of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). The three components of NCLB that are relevant for early learning are adequate yearly progress, highly qualified teachers, and reading/literacy. The goal of this article is to inform early learning educators and policymakers better about specific NCLB components, and to begin to discern what implications – both positive and negative – NCLB holds for the early learning field.

Adequate Yearly Progress

While NCLB does not mandate (or encourage) testing for students in 2nd grade and below, the Act does provide an opportunity to promote and expand early learning as a critical and viable solution for improving achievement later on. This age of school accountability is a perfect opportunity for early education to showcase its role in preparing ready students.

Highly Qualified Teachers

A central feature of NCLB is acknowledgment of the important role that teacher quality plays in promoting student achievement. There are two teaching quality provisions that hold potential relevance to the early learning community. First is the “highly qualified” teacher requirement. Second, there are a variety of professional development activities provided by the law that hold potential benefit for early childhood educators. The Early Childhood Educator Professional Development program is the only teaching quality provision of NCLB that applies explicitly to early learning educators. As a result of NCLB there is increased attention from policymakers and the public on better understanding what makes a teacher “highly qualified”.

Reading and Literacy

NCLB significantly increases funding for two specific programs that aim to have all children achieve reading proficiency by 3rd grade. States must use this money to develop a research-based Reading First program that builds on and coordinates existing literacy efforts at all levels of education. A noteworthy program is the Early Reading First effort, which is designed to prepare preschool-age children to start school with the language, cognitive and early reading skills they will need to become proficient readers.

Conclusion

Aside from creating a few new grant opportunities, NCLB is not directly focused on the early education sector. However, many of its provisions include ideas which could be implemented to strengthen this sector. Working in partnership, early childhood professionals and policymakers may be able to leverage NCLB to advance an agenda for high-quality early learning opportunities for all children.

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