

NCLB



STORIES FROM THE FRONT LINES

CTA members share how NCLB is hurting students



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“When are you going to teach us instead of just making us take tests?”

That was a question a student in Bakersfield asked a teacher recently, and it powerfully captures the frustration so many CTA members feel about the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act.

Many people are aware of the impact NCLB is having on our schools, but the people who can best describe what the law is doing to their classrooms are CTA members themselves. That’s why the California Teachers Association recently invited its members to share their NCLB stories from the front lines. The incidents they describe are poignant, distressing, and sad. Underneath it all, they illustrate the need to improve the No Child Left Behind Act as it is written.

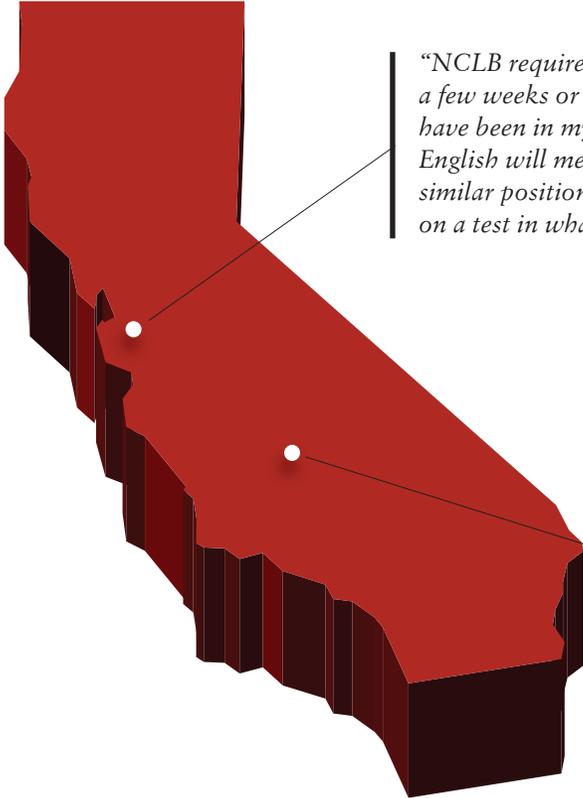
Our students don’t need more testing, more sanctions and more hoops to jump through. They deserve reforms that work, like class size reduction, quality training for teachers and paraprofessionals, and resources to encourage parental and family involvement.

The following stories from the classroom provide us with many reasons why NCLB needs to be rewritten. Please read on, and then do something! Go to www.cta.org for more information and ways to take action.

David A. Sanchez
CTA President

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“NCLB requires that my immigrant students, even those who have been in the U.S. for only a few weeks or months, to test in English. I currently have two students from Somalia who have been in my class for one week; they speak no English. To think that a test written in English will measure what these students have learned is ludicrous. I have many students in similar positions. For my school to be penalized because these students cannot perform well on a test in what is, for them, a foreign language, is unconscionable.”

Patricia Huddleston
Campbell Education Association
Prospect High School

“One of our new first-year teachers told me that one of his students asked him last week, ‘When are you going to teach us, instead of just making us take tests?’ The new intern teacher didn’t have an answer for the student, and he probably won’t be teaching for our district next year. That intern teacher is my son!”

Carol L. Reichert
Bakersfield Elementary Teachers Association
President Elementary



“Where do I even start to tell you how destructive NCLB has been to my first graders? I start every day at school saddened that I have to spend the whole day of teaching pulling workbooks and assessing my students who are 6 year olds. I try to fit the fun in it, but it’s hard when my first-graders have more books than even fit in their desks. No time for art, no time for P.E., no time for them to use their imagination. Then I spend a great amount of time teaching testing strategies and how to fill a bubble properly.”

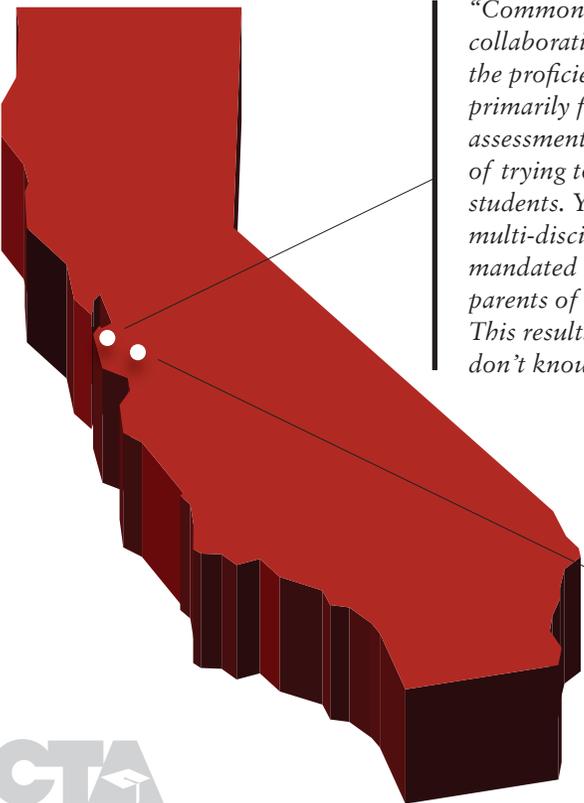
Silvia Ramos-Higueros
El Monte Elementary School Teachers Association
Columbia School

“As a special education teacher, I have witnessed the effects of NCLB on my students. Because my students lag behind grade level and often perform poorly on standardized tests, they have to be in remedial math and language arts classes for most of their school day. This leaves them behind when it comes to electives. They are not allowed to participate in art, music, and other electives. Those electives are often the only classes in which they can experience success. This contributes to boredom with school and causes our dropout rate to rise even higher. My students often cannot experience the pleasure of following their interests.”

Rebekah Acord
Association of Colton Educators
Terrace Hills Middle School

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“Common planning time is no longer for creating exciting, interesting activities collaboratively. It is now for data analysis to discuss target students who are close to the proficient level test score threshold. Professional development is now on strategies primarily for improving test-taking skills... The district gives benchmark multiple choice assessments every six weeks. Electives have gone away. Teachers are frustrated and tired of trying to get their students excited about content that has no connection to their students. Younger teachers who come out of college fired up about teaching interesting multi-disciplinary lessons are crushed when they find out what they are actually mandated to use. Having the failing label placed on our school has resulted in many parents of our highest-achieving students opting to place their children in other schools. This results in a downward achievement spiral that there appears to be no way out of. I don't know about other schools, but my kids certainly feel very 'left behind.'”

Mark Murray
United Educators of San Francisco
Horace Mann Middle School

“It's tragic that when our school was told our API score had been adjusted upwards, our first thought was “Now we have further to go to reach our next target.”

Lynne Formigli
United Teachers of Santa Clara
Cabrillo Middle School





"I usually have the 5th grade students who have ADD, hyperactivity, poor school attendance, non-supportive parents, etc. The emphasis and pressure to pass the test limits the ability of a teacher to focus on the problems of these students. They have to fit a mold. I would rather work to shape their behavior over time to produce students who like school and are working to succeed in a less stressful classroom atmosphere. Not every student will be proficient according to these tests!"

Robert Triplett
Janesville Teachers Association
Janesville Elementary School

"During my entire education career, I have been fortunate to work in school districts that mainly service disadvantaged, minority, second language learners and special education students. What is evident with this particular group is the unfairness of the NCLB system which forces our students to meet requirements that are totally unsupportive for them. Testing appears to be biased and works against student success. I find this particularly true with English Language Learners who recently migrated to the United States and who are required to test despite their lack of exposure to language, culture and other factors leading to the test demands."

Jon Alota
Eastside Teachers Association, San Jose
District Office

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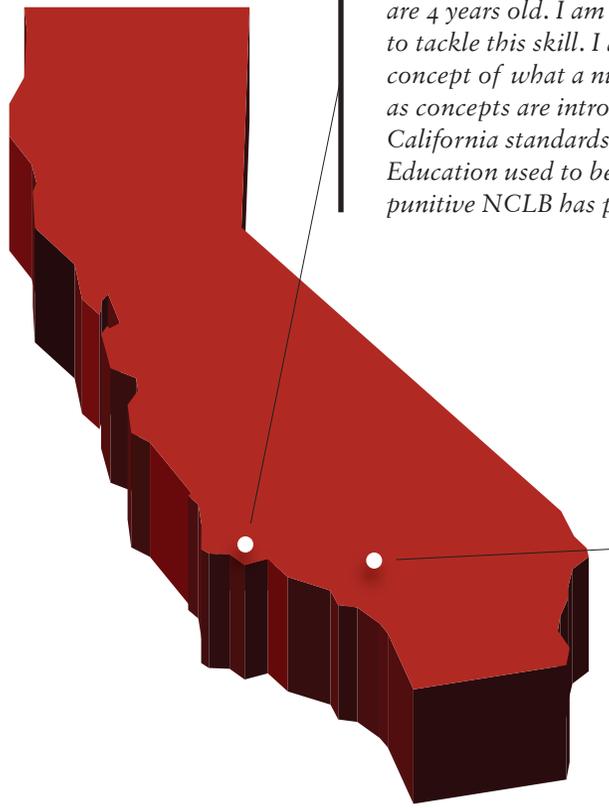
“NCLB has been a disaster for my school and district. With all the emphasis on testing, students get the idea that only tests count and you can let the rest of the work go. Students get nightmares, skip test days, and think less of themselves when they don’t understand the tests due to language ability, special needs or cultural differences. We need to use more than one test score to measure student and school success. Please provide schools with assistance and resources rather than sanctions.”

Christopher Kevin Bourke
Soledad Teachers Association
Soledad High School

“Rather than more support to meet the needs, I have experienced the opposite. Achieve higher standards, but do it with less, is the attitude. Since the passage of Prop. 227 and the implementation of NCLB, I have lost most of my instructional aide support, including all second language support. To employ strategies that will be more cognitively demanding with 4 and 5-year-olds requires more adult guidance and interaction. One teacher working alone with 20 or 21 kindergarten students is not as effective as one teacher with support. There is also no money to support an appropriate early learning environment, (which includes hands-on and developmentally appropriate practices).”

Marie Ibsen
Alhambra Teachers Association
Park School





“When I taught kindergarten 20 years ago, I taught reading and math readiness. Today, I am teaching what was once a first grade curriculum to kindergarten students, some of whom are 4 years old. I am teaching reading to students that may not be developmentally ready to tackle this skill. I am teaching addition and subtraction to children who do not have a concept of what a number is yet. I see the frustration in the faces of my very young students as concepts are introduced that they are not ready to grasp. However, I have to teach the California standards for kindergarten that resemble first-grade standards of 15 years ago. Education used to be about learning. Now it is all about passing a test. The oppressive and punitive NCLB has placed teachers and students in pigeon holes that some of us don’t fit in.”

Maria McDonell
Hueneme Education Association
Hueneme Elementary School

“Since the inception of NCLB, the special ed classes in Pomona have been ordered to use a scripted reading program two periods a day. Whereas all students need to learn to read, the elimination of fine arts and voc ed classes to make room for two periods of reading is extremely detrimental to special needs students. These are the very classes where special needs students find the opportunity to be successful. Those are the very classes which might provide a student with lifelong learning skills. Such a shame.”

Ellen Gervase
Associated Pomona Teachers
Pomona Alternative High

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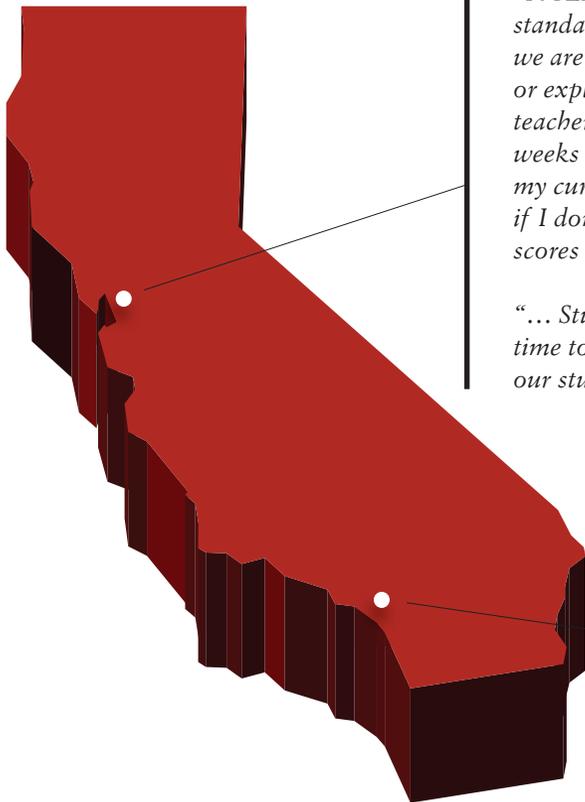
“I am a first-grade teacher at a school district that had many Program Improvement (PI) schools in the last few years. Those schools were required to do what the government told them. My school was not a PI school so was not required to change its programs. We just received our test scores. Our schools API score went up 18 points but at the Program Improvement sites the scores went down. Our district as a whole is now a Program Improvement district as a result.”

Our school now has to change its programs even though we are doing well by our students. I will now have to lose 50 minutes a day to stand in front of the class and point to words (not stories) and have the students chant. This is called direct instruction. I will not have time to teach social studies or science. I will have less time for my students to do guided reading where I have my students read entire books in small groups at their reading level with support from me. Then I check for comprehension.

Reading is meaningless without comprehension and the development of vocabulary. Without teaching science my students will not be prepared to take the state tests which have more than half of the reading comprehension questions based on non-fiction paragraphs. My students who are from underprivileged backgrounds will know nothing about their world. My children deserve the best education we can give them. NCLB makes this impossible.”

Clara Lilyblade
Fairfield-Suisun Unified Teachers Association
Dan O. Root II Elementary





“NCLB has had a huge effect for me as a mathematics teacher. The number of standards we are required to teach leave me, and my colleagues feeling as if we are running a relay race. There is no time to pause for reflection, discovery or exploration, or in-depth discussion before we pass on the baton to the next teacher. Currently, in my district, we begin testing when there are still eight weeks left in the school year. That’s 20 percent of my year. Twenty percent of my curriculum! Yet, 15-20 percent of the standards I may not be able to cover if I don’t stay in the race! However, I am still held accountable for my students’ scores – which will indicate they are not proficient.”

“... Student success needs to be measured through more than one test. We need time to teach our curriculum and time to teach in depth – time to work with our students, and give them tools for success. NCLB has not given us this.”

Carleen Maselli
Benicia Teachers Association
Benicia High School

“Ironically, this law is practically ensuring, in many cases, that the children who are currently behind, stay behind.”

Amy Asaoka-Nakakihara
Anaheim Elementary Education Association
Sunkist School

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“NCLB has raised the bar beyond what is reasonable for both students and teachers. As a teacher, most creative planning and teaching has been taken away. There is no time and no room for anything but the mandated curricula in math and language arts. Students at the first grade level experience little more than ‘learning’ how to complete workbook pages so they will be ready for standardized testing starting in the second grade. Students suffer from lack of science, social studies and the arts. NCLB is creating a generation of ‘do-ers’ as in do workbook pages 25, 26, 27, instead of lifelong learners. No Child Left Behind not only takes away the job of teaching. It’s killing the joy of learning.”

Jodi Dayberry
South Tahoe Educators Association
Sierra House Elementary School

“Like many veteran teachers in our ‘Program Improvement’ district, I have been bullied and harassed for relying on the expertise I’ve gained over the past two decades in the classroom. My students have been deprived of enrichment activities and instructional strategies that make learning an enjoyable and uplifting experience. The holistic approach to education has been sacrificed on the altar of multiple choice tests.”

Mark Kotch
Delano Union Elementary School Teachers Association
La Vina Middle School





“My school is in Year 1 of PI which has caused much focus to be put on our school by the district. They decided we needed to apply for the High Priority Schools grant to help us raise test scores. Due to the process of applying for this grant, we were told we have been out of compliance with NCLB.

Several changes have occurred to bring us into compliance. We are not allowed to use any curriculum other than state-adopted material to teach core subjects. So even though our language arts program is weak in writing, we cannot supplement the writing program with other materials or programs. We have been told that even if we use state-adopted text for most of the teaching of core, we cannot supplement any core with any material outside the adopted curriculum.

In our affluent, non-PI schools, they continue to use rich resources that go beyond what one program can cover. So the students that are already succeeding get further enrichment. Students in PI schools must receive instruction from one program regardless of inadequacies of the program. ...

Due to the restrictions on creativity and innovation, we will lose many talented, experience teachers because they will not put up with this insult. NCLB punishes and restricts instead of being supporting and encouraging innovation.”

Shannan Brown
San Juan Teachers Association
Thomas Edison Elementary School

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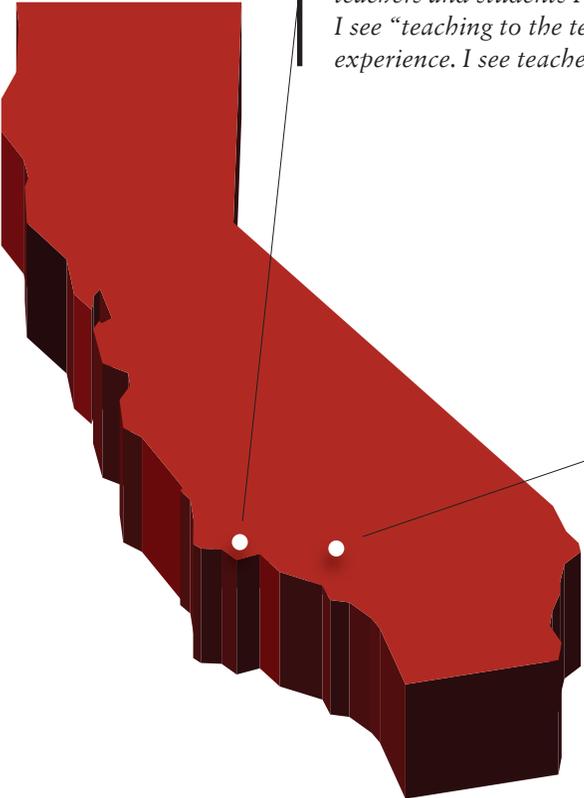
“I teach high school art. Last year I had about 40-50 students per class. This year I’m averaging about 30. My first inclination was relief from the high class loads, then I discovered the reason. Many of our students are being double-dosed in English and math as well as being enrolled in test-strategy classes. Classes that are not arts-standards based but deliver fine arts credit are being used to bypass a quality arts education. My district is a large high school district: 16 comprehensive high schools. We have high schools in affluent neighborhoods and schools in urban, high-poverty neighborhoods. The arts programs in the wealthier neighborhoods have not been impacted. In fact, parents have the ability to supplement the arts education of their children. In essence, we are creating separate systems in regards to arts education. This addiction to testing is denying our at-risk students a real and substantive arts education.”

Jesse Aguilar
Kern High Faculty Association
East Bakersfield High School

“One-day high-stakes testing is inaccurate, misleading, unfair and destructive to children. To defend themselves, children would rather not try and instead draw designs on a test that bores and humiliates them. Millions of dollars that could be spent on class-size reduction, improved facilities, teacher recruitment and retention incentives is being wasted on this form of child abuse.”

VickyLynn Castillo
NEA Jurupa
Jurupa Valley High School





“As a carpenter for my school district and a member of CTA, I see how NCLB has affected the teachers and students I work with on a daily basis. Instead of a positive learning environment, I see “teaching to the test.” I see students that are not excited about their public education experience. I see teachers that are discouraged from developing a creative learning environment.”

Michael Musser
Ventura Classified Employees Association
Ventura Unified School District

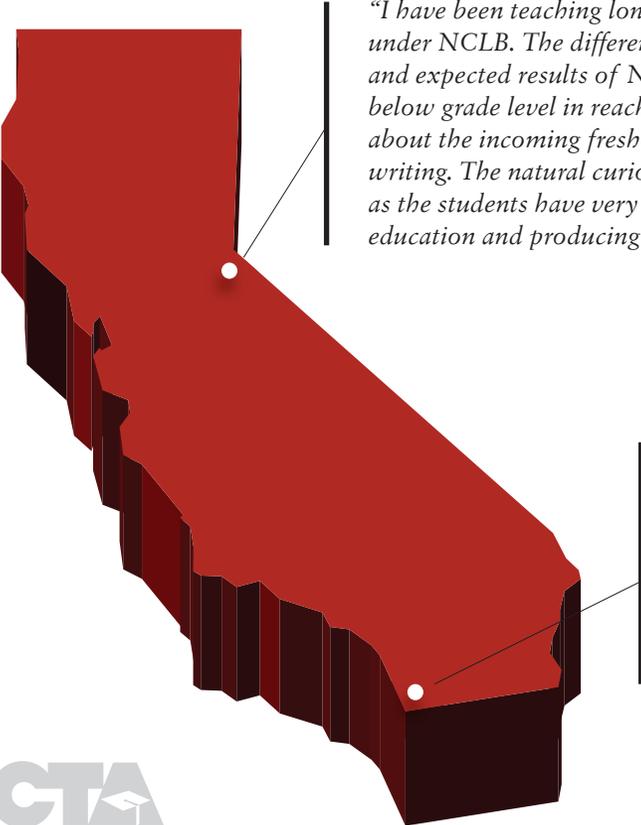
“The joy has definitely been sucked out of teaching and learning. I don’t have students anymore, just zombies. Thinking and analyzing seems to be things of the past. It’s all thanks to NCLB’s testing. Our district wants those improved scores so they implemented scripted programs such as Open Court and Saxon; apparently they don’t even want the teachers to think.

What I’ve noticed is that students growing up with these programs expect answers to be handed to them. They seem to only learn one way to do a math problem – it has to be just like the example or they panic.”

Karen Kobey
United Teachers of Pasadena
Webster School

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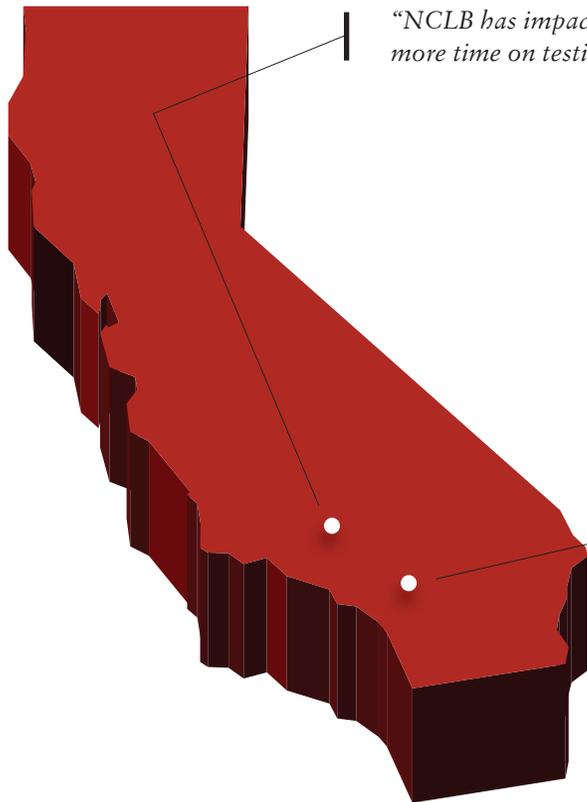
“I have been teaching long enough to have six years of teaching without NCLB and then six years under NCLB. The difference in the students coming up to the high school level is astonishing and expected results of NCLB are not showing. The incoming freshmen I meet are much further below grade level in reaching and problem-solving than before NCLB. The other observation about the incoming freshmen is that they are very turned off to school, especially to reading and writing. The natural curiosity in them is gone, and science teaching is more like teaching reading, as the students have very little or no science background. NCLB is choking the life out of public education and producing students that are turned off to learning and problem-solving.”

Carla Zezula
South Tahoe Educators Association
South Tahoe High School

“Just last week all the math and English teachers at my middle school had to go to a half-day training on how to help our students become better test-takers. Strategies were taught like, ‘Pass once, then pass again and return to the harder ones at the last’ and pick one letter to use consistently on questions you don’t know, process of elimination, etc. We all have a binder with strategies and sample questions they want us to do 10 minutes a day until testing. That’s how important testing has become!”

Jean Poznanski
San Diego Education Association
Lewis Middle School





“NCLB has impacted me by the amount of paperwork that has increased. I’m spending more time on testing and accounting for the tests than being creative with the children.”

Simone Zulu
Palmdale Elementary Teachers Association
Highland School

“I want to tell you about the psychological impact of being at a PI 5 school. Lincoln High used to be the jewel of East L.A. It was the most beautiful school with the most school spirit and finest teaching staff. Since we fell into PI 5 status, the staff is demoralized and the students are embarrassed to go there. There is a different atmosphere. Lincoln used to be a place that was considered the gates to college. Now it’s considered the walls that keep generations imprisoned in poverty.”

Mark Wilkins
United Teachers Los Angeles
Lincoln High School

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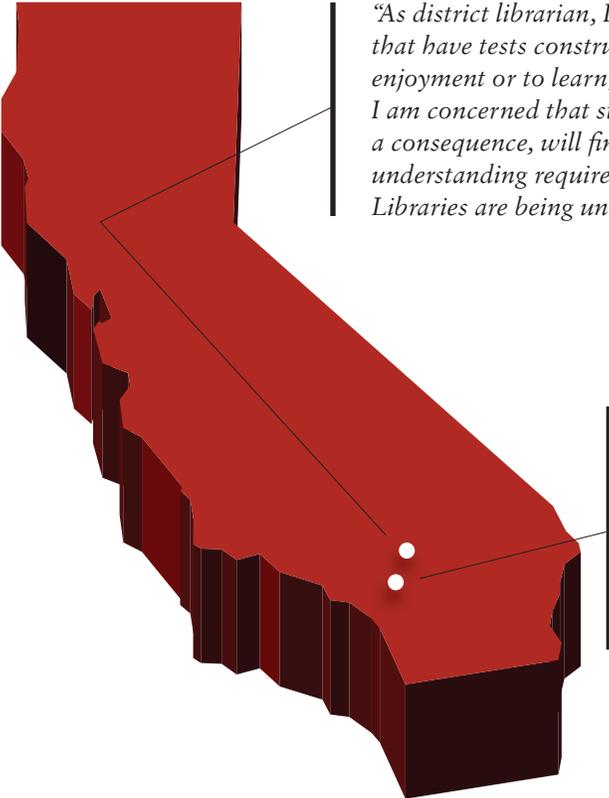
“Before the implementation of NCLB, I used to teach my students how to publish a community newspaper. The students did everything from beginning to end product – reporting, writing, editing photography, including developing and printing film, cartooning, pasting up and distributing both for our school and the surrounding community. This process taught them an amazing amount of skills and critical thinking. One time one of our reporters even scooped the L.A. Times. Now there is no time for such an activity.”

Linda Bell
Hueneme Education Association
Hathaway School

“I used to assess my students learning by having them write essays on topics in U.S. History. They used to write research papers on historical topics addressing California state history standards. Writing is of great value to our students. But since NCLB puts so much emphasis on multiple choice test scores, we no longer have our students write essays and research projects. Now we spend much of our time practicing multiple choice, bubble-in-the-space tests. NCLB has made test-taking skills much more important than written communication.”

Bill Higbee
United Teachers Los Angeles
Gage Middle School





“As district librarian, I am finding that students are being directed to read only books that have tests constructed for them like accelerated readers. Students are not reading for enjoyment or to learn, because teachers are forced to have measurements of student progress. I am concerned that students are being conditioned to connect reading to testing and as a consequence, will find reading onerous. Ultimately, our society will fail. Reading with understanding requires a broad base of knowledge, not just deciphering symbols or phonics. Libraries are being underused, there is no time for research or the exploration of knowledge.”

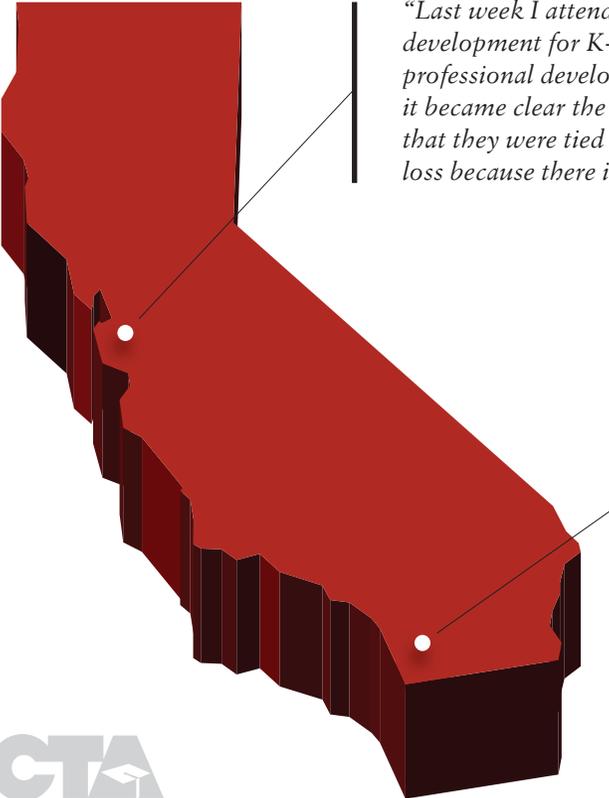
Valerie Lichtman
Rim of the World Teachers Association
District Media Center

“With the demands of NCLB, there is pressure to just teach to the test. There is no time to teach science, social studies, art, music or P.E. We are developing a society of test takers, not well-rounded citizens. In a PI school, all time is devoted to reading and math instruction. Students are starting to hate school because all the joy has been taken out of education. There is no additional time for any field trips, reward time, or even holiday artwork or parades because it takes away from math and reading instruction.”

Mark Lawrence
Riverside City Teachers Association
Jackson School

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“Last week I attended a meeting of several well respected groups involved in professional development for K-12 science educators. The topic? How to bring teachers back to professional development. Part of the meeting included a teacher panel. As the teachers spoke it became clear the number one reason they were not seeking professional opportunities was that they were tied to “THE TEST”. The anger and sadness was palpable. There is a feeling of loss because there is no room for art, music, and even science in a “non-test year.”

Heidi Black
East Side Teachers Association
Oak Grove High School

“Our district decided to make all students ‘college prep.’ The idea was to promote open access, which is a good thing. But, sadly, 9th graders are placed in these math courses, regardless of their entry level skills. The theory was they would rise to the challenge and therefore would have higher test scores. Unfortunately, scores are not improving and grades are falling. Now administrators are pressuring teachers to decrease the number of D and F grades. The result is, students’ needs are not met, there is pressure to inflate grades and teachers are blamed when students are not successful on mandated tests.”

Fran Zumwalt
Grossmont Education Association
Granite High School





“I teach kindergarten in a so-called, ‘failing’ school as labeled by NCLB. We are in year two of SAIT (School Assistance and Intervention Teams) due to our low test scores. I have watched approximately 10 talented teachers leave our school or the profession entirely, due to the workload over the last few years. My three and a half-hour instruction time has been micromanaged in such a way that my hands are tied to change subjects often before the need to complete a lesson is achieved. This year Physical Education/Recess time was taken away from the Kindergarten Daily Schedule as prescribed by SAIT and the school district.

I have beautifully packaged social studies curriculum from last year that I have used very infrequently and new science curriculum that I have used once so far this year. Art and music are out of the question. I have yet to receive Mathematics books for my students. The language arts curriculum is scripted and teachers in my district are trained to follow the Teacher’s Edition (TE) with ‘fidelity.’ We were advised at a recent training that our Administrators are required to note if their teachers have the TE in their hands while they teach.

The No Child Left Behind Act has deeply and for the most part, negatively impacted my classroom teaching.”

Angela Felt
San Bernardino Teachers Association
Riley Elementary School