

Politics Today!

NEA
STUDENT-PROGRAM

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NEA Urges Congress: To Slow Down, Get

WHAT'S IN THIS ISSUE?

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As Congress considers the House Education Committee's drafts of proposed changes for a reauthorized version of the No Child Left Behind Act, NEA is warning legislators that the "train is on the wrong track" and that they need to slow down and get it right.

NEA has formally expressed to the committee its major concerns about the drafts and NEA leaders and staff are aggressively lobbying for substantial revisions to the drafts that would both strengthen the law and make it more effective.

A [September 18 letter](#) to House Education Committee leaders and members regarding Titles II-XI emphasizes NEA's opposition to the proposed performance pay provisions.

We remain adamantly opposed to the federal intrusion on local collective bargaining found in the discussion draft of Title II..." the letter says. "Our members across the country have made it very clear to us that they will not tolerate these assaults on labor."

NEA has strong concerns about other provisions in the House draft as well, including the fact that it completely ignores class size reduction, access to quality early childhood education, and adequate resources. In addition, it eliminates the High Objective Uniform State Standard of Evaluation (HOUSSE) which helps veteran teachers meet the "highly qualified" requirements, and it imposes many new mandates without guarantee of additional funding.

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Representative Albert Wynn (D-MD) has taken a bold stand in support of children and public education. In a [letter](#) to House Education Committee Chairman George Miller, Wynn outlined his strong concerns about draft legislation under consideration to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act/No Child Left Behind. The Wynn letter raised concerns about the draft's continued heavy reliance on standardized test results, failure to address class size reduction and dropout prevention, and links between teacher pay and test scores. While the current law is flawed, Congressman Wynn told Chairman Miller that the path Congress is taking now "will only exacerbate those flaws rather than correct them."

If you would like to thank Congressman Wynn for standing up for what is right, visit his website to send him an [e-mail](#).

We support the three priorities below:

- **Use more than test scores to measure student learning and school performance.**

- **Reduce class size to help students learn.**

- **Increase the number of highly qualified teachers in our schools.**

Keep The Pressure On Congress To Slow Down, Take The Time To Get ESEA Reauthorization Right

NEA cyber-lobbyists are doing a great job in getting the message to Capitol Hill. If you have not already done so, e-mail your Member of Congress today. Tell Congress that any ESEA reauthorization bill must:

Reduce emphasis on standardized tests,

Provide a common-sense accountability system that looks at the full picture of student and school achievement and takes into account the unique needs of individual students,

Help reduce class sizes and modernize school facilities, and

Reject any effort to tie teacher pay to test scores.

Contact Your Members Of Congress Today

[Remind your Representatives](#) in Congress about these important principles for ESEA reauthorization.

Continue To Urge Senators To Cosponsor Bills On Common-Sense Assessment Systems

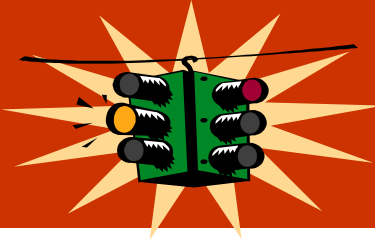
Two critical bills have been introduced in the Senate that would make a real difference in improving assessment systems and offering meaningful accountability. In recent weeks, we have asked you to urge Senators to sign on as co-sponsors to the [Improving Student Testing Act of 2007 \(S. 2053\)](#), sponsored by Senator Russ Feingold (WI) and Patrick Leahy (VT). Senators Chris Dodd (D-CT) and Ken Salazar (D-CO) have also introduced the [No Child Left Behind Reform Act \(S. 1194\)](#). Both bills would make significant, meaningful changes to measurement of student performance and school success, including by allowing states to use growth models and multiple measures and ending the over-reliance upon two standardized tests given one day out of the year.

[Both bills have NEA's support, but they need the additional sponsorship of your Senators.](#)

[Contact Your Senators Today](#)

[Tell your Senators to cosponsor the Improving Student Testing Act and the No Child Left Behind Reform Act.](#)

Caution! Caution!



Caution! Caution!

CAUTION: BLOGGING MAY BE HAZARDOUS TO YOUR CAREER

In 1969, the Supreme Court ruled that neither teachers nor students “shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate.” School employees, like all citizens, have the right to speak or “blog” publicly on a wide range of subjects, including matters of public and private concerns. School employees, however, do not have an absolute right to First Amendment protection. This article addresses the potential hazards of blogging.

A blog is a website on which a blogger (author) posts thoughts and information on a wide variety of topics, such as politics, religion, war, abortion, music, gardening, and work. Bloggers often invite others to post their thoughts and engage in an interactive communication with the blogger and other visitors. Blogs are easy to create and there are millions of blogs with thousands more being created every day. Once created, most blogs can be viewed by a world-wide audience.

Since blogging is a relatively new phenomenon (there were only 23 recorded blogs in 1999), there is not much case law to guide bloggers through the maze of pitfalls that might lead to lawsuits for defamation, invasion of privacy, copyright infringement, and employment terminations. This much is known—many employees in both the private and public sectors have been “dooced,” the term used to describe the termination of an employee for blogging.

Aspiring teachers should know that school districts routinely “google” applicants to see what footprints they have left in cyberspace. As one Superintendent said, “If I see pictures of an applicant who is drinking or posing in an inappropriate manner, I eliminate that person from consideration. Why invite trouble?” Note also that blogs and websites last forever. Even if removed, they are archived or “cached” and may be retrieved by anyone who later wants to find them.

Public employees generally have a right to speak out on matters of public concern, but that right is not absolute. The courts will apply a balancing test to determine whether the employee’s interest in commenting on a matter of public concern outweighs the employer’s interest in advancing its public services. Thus, if an employee’s speech disrupts the workplace, is related to job duties, or harms the employer’s interest, it is not protected by the First Amendment.

Teachers who blog should always check to see if their district has a policy on blogging and, if so, follow that policy until and unless their local association negotiates changes. Most importantly, teachers must understand that they are held to a higher moral standard than most other workers and should not engage in public speech which might jeopardize their status as role models.

Finally, because case law has not yet established a bright line test for what is and what is not protected speech in the blogging arena, teachers who blog should do so with caution.

NEA/AEA Member Goes Abroad: Reginald Mitchell Receives Fulbright Teacher Exchange Grant

Reginald Mitchell Receives Fulbright Teacher Exchange Grant.

Reginald Mitchell of the Tuscaloosa County School System was awarded a Fulbright Teacher Exchange grant to teach Special Education and Emotionally Disturbed students in the United Kingdom of Belfast, Northern Ireland, the United States Department of State and the J. William Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board announced recently.



Reginald Mitchell is one of approximately 170 United States citizens who traveled abroad for the 2006-2007 academic year through the Fulbright Teacher and Administrator Exchange Program. Established in 1946 under legislation introduced by the late Senator J. William Fulbright of Arkansas, the Program's purpose is to build mutual understanding between people of the United States and the rest of the world. The Fulbright Program, America's flagship international educational exchange program, is sponsored by the United States Department of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. The Program operates in over 150 countries worldwide.

Mitchell has a Bachelor of Arts degree from Stillman College in Tuscaloosa, Alabama and a Master of Education degree from the University of West Alabama in Livingston, Alabama. He also has a Class A Alabama Teacher Certification for Special Education and is a Clinical Master Teacher for The University of Alabama's College of Education. He has been an employee of the Tuscaloosa County School System since 1999, working with disabled and special education students. He also served as an Adult Education Instructor for Shelton State Community College for six years.

Mitchell has received many awards and recognitions including being named Big Brothers/ Big Sisters Volunteer of the Year for 2003, Jacksonville State University Teacher Hall of Fame Nominee for 2000, and a Tuscaloosa County Foundation for Educational Excellence Grant Recipient in 2000. He is a member of Phi Delta Kappa International, National Education Association, Alabama Education Association, and Tuscaloosa County Education Association. Mitchell serves as a voluntary member of the Advisory Council for Big Brothers/ Big Sisters, and also serves as a Parent's Resource Institute for Drug Education (PRIDE) Board Member. He is also a member of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity.

A native of small town Millport, Alabama, during Mitchell's stint aboard, he visited over 13 different countries and two continents. For the British Council, he gave presentations on Diversity in the USA, served as a delegate to the International Education Conference, and wrote for The Learning World Magazine. Also, Mitchell was a delegate to the Fulbright Community Annual Conference [Expressions in Civil Society held in Marrakech, Morocco](#). Last, Mitchell was featured in three local Northern Ireland newspapers about his experience aboard: Belfast Telegraph, The Irish News, and North Belfast Time.