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UNITED STATES SENATOR • MINNESOTA



## Leaving No Child Behind by Ensuring They Can All Achieve

*by Senator Norm Coleman*

Children are our nation's most valuable resource. As such, we need to nurture and invest in them. With one child in college and one in high school, I recognize the best investment we can make in America and in our children's future is to provide the best education for all students, regardless of race, class, or school district.

Our state produces some of the best and brightest students in the nation, and statistically Minnesota has proven itself many times over as a nation-wide leader in educating our children. In 2006, Minnesota had the highest average ACT score in the nation. Nearly 80 percent of 3rd graders tested in Minnesota scored proficient on the math and reading assessments. Last year the vast majority of our schools reached the "Adequate Yearly Progress" required by No Child Left Behind. As promising as Minnesota's statistics are, educators from around state have frequently voiced concerns to me about the inflexibility of the No Child Left Behind Act.

This is why I, along with my colleagues Senator Lieberman (D-CT) and Senator Landrieu (D-LA), am introducing the All Students Can Achieve Act. To improve learning and produce better results, we need to address No Child Left Behind's weaknesses without weakening the bill's accountability measures.

One of the best features of our legislation is that it will allow states to measure individual student growth over time instead of relying on – and teaching for – one test administered on one day. Measuring a student's growth over time benefits both students and teachers because it recognizes that students have different starting points and acknowledges their individual progress. This approach will free teachers from the burden of teaching for one high-stakes test, while still giving parents the assurances they need that their children are learning in a high quality atmosphere. Minnesota has been trying for some time to move to this "growth model" of evaluation and our bill provides the funding to develop and implement the data systems our state would need to move to such a model.

Our bill also addresses something I have been particularly focused on – ensuring that the next generation has the math, science and foreign language skills needed to be competitive in an increasingly globalized economy. As countries like China or India develop increasingly skilled workforces, we must ensure that American students do not fall behind in these critical and highly relevant fields. Our legislation adds a science assessment to the accountability system and gives states the option to bring in qualified sci-

ence, math and foreign language practitioners to assist teachers and students.

Another concern I hear in Minnesota is that a school can be, in effect, penalized because a group of new immigrants does not test as well as long-time students. The All Students Can Achieve Act will replace the current all-or-nothing approach with a system that makes a distinction between schools that need comprehensive interventions, versus those that need more focused help. In other words, while current law groups all low-performing schools together regardless of how many students miss Adequate Yearly Progress, our legislation offers a more targeted approach, sending additional resources toward schools with pervasive problems, while allowing schools that just have one or more low-performing subgroups to focus on closing the achievement gap with that particular group.

A final aspect of our legislation is that it would change the way teachers are evaluated. Currently under No Child Left Behind, good teachers have to jump through a number of bureaucratic hoops to demonstrate on paper that they are "qualified" experts in the subjects they teach. I understand this has been a serious burden particularly in rural communities, where very good teachers provide instruction in more than one subject. I also know as a parent, that a teacher's résumé may or may not reflect their actual abilities in the classroom. That's why our legislation provides states with new flexibility in the ways they rate and reward excellent teachers.

At its core, No Child Left Behind is about closing the achievement gap. We still have a long way to go – recent data shows that still only 13 percent of African American and 19 percent of Hispanic 4th graders scored at or above the proficient level on the National Assessment of Educational Progress mathematics test, compared to 47 percent of their white peers. By measuring teacher effectiveness, school quality, and student learning, our legislation will help reduce this unacceptable disparity in America today.

Our bipartisan legislation is based on recommendations from a panel of experts, and has been endorsed by some leading educators. However, we know it is just the beginning of a conversation about how and where to add flexibility to the No Child Left Behind law. As we move forward, I welcome the advice of teachers, parents, and administrators on how best to help all Minnesota students achieve.