The following essay is designed to articulate the National Council for History Education’s viewpoint regarding the NCLB situation.

**NCHE and NCLB**

Many members of NCHE have expressed strong concerns about the effect of the *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) legislation on the classroom. Not only has NCLB’s focus on the testing of reading and math led to the severe reduction or shrinkage of classroom time for history, but the entire enterprise, based on multiple-choice assessments, has also encouraged a kind of mindless "teaching to the test". No less troubling is NCLB's shortchanging of the gifted student, who is forced to conform to a test-driven curriculum and given little room for imaginative growth. One of our members put it bluntly: the effect, he said, has been to "dumb down" all of education, and the only remedy might be something like the National Defense Education Act that was the response to Sputnik in the 1960s.

While specific opinions may vary, the overall unease with NCLB is widely shared, and there have been no signs of members supporting the legislation. The question is: what can NCHE do about this? And the answer, if we are to be realistic, has to take into account the political and legislative world in which these decisions are made. Of course, that is not how NCHE began. Its initial efforts, in the early 1990s, were focused on the immediate needs of classroom teachers. Emerging from the work of the Bradley Commission on History in Schools, and also extending the Commission's publications -- *Building a History Curriculum* and *Historical Literacy* -- into more detailed guidelines for teachers, NCHE devoted most of its energies to the development of effective mechanisms (notably its Colloquia and Workshops) for bringing the latest ideas into the History classroom. Soon, however, it became clear that, to be true to our mission of promoting the importance of History in schools and society, we had to address the effect on curricula of the new educational initiatives that were being undertaken in the 1990s by State Legislatures and Boards of Education. Accordingly, NCHE undertook a series of efforts, in states across the nation, to bring its concerns to the attention of those who were devising the new Standards, Curriculum Frameworks, and similar regulations for schools.

Those efforts had varied results, but one conclusion was inescapable: given the effects of such initiatives on the classroom, NCHE could not afford to ignore what was happening in the political arena. That arena widened dramatically in January 2002, when President Bush signed the Act that launched NCLB. This legislation marked an unprecedented intervention by the Federal Government in public education. Since NCHE had taken the view that the welfare of History and its teachers required involvement with State authorities, it had little choice but to grapple with the consequences of actions now taken at the national level.
Although the ill effects of the legislation are clear, it has become equally clear that, simply to denounce NCLB and demand its abolition is not the most effective way to defend the interests of History -- let alone reverse the dramatic reduction in classroom time for History that NCLB has caused. The experience of the past 15 years or so has demonstrated that it is only when one works with political leaders, exploring their concerns and making them aware of the problems policies have caused (often unintentionally), that one can hope to have remedies adopted. That role, in turn, requires expert help. NCHE has therefore hired Christina Cocek Anderson as a part-time Legislative Consultant, and she, together with various Board members -- most notably David McCullough -- have managed to bring our concerns to the attention of those most closely connected with the fate of the NCLB legislation.

In addition, NCHE has issued position statements on a number of the issues, and these, together with an update on NCLB, can be found at our website (http://www.nche.net). As will be evident there, we have been heartened by signs that Congress is beginning to recognize the seriousness of the curriculum shrinkage caused by NCLB. A major effort has been necessary merely to secure the admission that this shrinkage, or narrowing of the curriculum, is a serious problem. And we feel that there is even a chance for a further step -- the demand by Congressman Miller, Chair of the House Committee on Education and Labor (his statement is available on our website), for broad requirements that would expand the emphasis on reading and math to include the liberal arts. In his words, this would ensure "that all students in all schools have access to a broad, rich curriculum." If adopted, his proposal would be a significant advance indeed.

We have no idea how to predict the eventual outcome, either of our efforts or of the wish by some lawmakers to expand rather than narrow school curricula. A recent article in the New York Times, suggested the high likelihood that the regulations associated with NCLB will be dramatically revised, if not abandoned, in the next two years. Nevertheless, the emphasis on accountability is unlikely to change, and for that reason alone the connections we have established with lawmakers may be important in ensuring a hearing for our views on assessments, yearly progress, and teacher training.

Thus far, the second major problem with NCLB -- the nature of the tests themselves -- has attracted less consideration, but we intend to continue to press this issue, especially since the whole purpose of the legislation has been to improve accountability and proficiency. Our argument (outlined in the December issue of History Matters!) is that there is little point in imposing assessments if they produce empty statistics; it is essential that their results be acceptable as genuine indicators of proficiency.

Those, then, are our goals: to reverse the narrowing of the curriculum caused by NCLB and to support valid assessments. We hope that our members will agree that, by bringing them to the attention of policy makers, we are doing nothing but extending the basic mission of NCHE. To the extent that we all engage, as actively as possible, with the forces that are shaping what K-12 students learn, we can only advance our cause: to make an understanding of History an essential part of American education.
This essay was written by Theodore K. Rabb, retired Professor of History at Princeton University who is currently serving a second term as Chair of the NCHE Board of Trustees, in consultation with a number of members of the Board of Trustees, and Christina Cocek Anderson, NCHE Legislative Consultant.

The National Council for History Education
26915 Westwood Rd., Ste. B-2
Westlake, OH 44145
Phone: (440) 835-1776, Fax: (440) 835-1295
Contact NCHE
Making Sure History is Not Left Behind
Update on the Reauthorization of No Child Left Behind

Reauthorization of No Child Left Behind
Postponed by Congress until Future Session

After months of Congressional hearings, public debate, citizen input, and diligent work by the U.S. Senate and House education committees, it was announced in early November, 2007, that a revised version of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 would not be introduced until the 2008 session.

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was scheduled to be reauthorized in 2007 during the 110th Congressional session.

Senator Edward Kennedy (D-MA), chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee, and Senator Mike Enzi (R-WY), Ranking Member of the HELP Committee, stated that there was not enough time in the 2007 session to complete work on all aspects of the legislation. Senator Kennedy noted, through a representative, that he's committed to "putting together a responsible reauthorization package early in 2008."

However, some say that it may be difficult in the coming year for Congress to achieve the bipartisan support needed to pass legislation of the magnitude and controversy of No Child Left Behind since 2008 is a presidential election year.

Congressman George Miller (D-CA), who serves as chairman of the U.S. House Committee on Education and Labor, also stated in early November that it is not likely that a bill to revise NCLB will get to the House floor before 2008. Congressman Miller announced, through a representative, that "We continue to work hard on the bill. Discussions with Republicans and education organizations continue."

For more information about the tabling of the NCLB reauthorization, click here to read November 6, 2007 New York Times article by Sam Dillon on this subject or click here to read November 2, 2007 Associated Press article.

Click here to read the December 23, 2007 New York Times article by Sam Dillon, which focuses on No Child Left Behind as an issue in the 2008 presidential campaign and the challenges lawmakers face in reauthorizing NCLB.

Chairman Miller and Congressman Howard P. "Buck" McKeon (R-CA), who serves as Senior Republican of the House Committee on Education and Labor, along with Congressmen Dale Kildee (D-MI) and Michael Castle (R-DE), who serve as Chairman and Senior Republican of the Sub-Committee on Early Childhood, Elementary and
Secondary Education, released in late August and early September, 2007, a bipartisan Discussion Draft of the reauthorization of No Child Left Behind.

Click on the following links to read Miller/McKeon Discussion Draft for Title I, Summary of the Title I Discussion Draft, Text for Title II Discussion Draft, and Text for Title III-XI discussion draft. You may also wish to read or view the testimony given at the September 10, 2007 full committee hearing of the House on the "Miller McKeon Discussion Draft of ESEA Reauthorization."

To find out more about the actions taken and encouraged by the National Council for History Education with regard to NCLB and in response to the history-related aspects of the Miller/McKeon Discussion Draft, please go to NCHE Action.

We will provide additional updates on the debate in Congress in connection with the reauthorization of No Child Left Behind as it is available.

No Child Left Behind was signed into law on January 8, 2002. The act reauthorized and amended federal education programs established under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA). NCLB expired September 30, 2007 but the law is automatically extended in its current form until a reauthorization is passed or other legislative action with regard to the bill is taken.

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