The Audacity of Adequate Yearly Progress

In 2001 the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act passed both houses of Congress with strong bipartisan support. And why wouldn’t it? Who could say they didn’t want all children to succeed? Who could say they didn’t want all schools to be successful? Who could say they didn’t want all teachers to be effective?

The act was signed into law in January 2002 and put into effect during the 2002–2003 school year. It was during the summer of 2003 that students, teachers, and parents were first introduced to the method by which NCLB’s goals would be measured—a method soon to be known throughout the land as adequate yearly progress (AYP).

Our public education system has always taken pride in its efforts to provide the best possible education for all our children. But for years the system has fallen quite short of this goal, with few consequences. As a result, there are many who are calling for the removal of AYP because they can’t stomach its “punishment” provisions.

What are the “punishments” they find so offensive? Is it the extra help that schools receive when they don’t make AYP? Tutoring after school becomes available at no cost to parents, and students identified as academically weak are given extra help and lots of support in their learning. This doesn’t seem like punishment to me.

Is it the requirement that all students be able to read and do mathematics on grade level that is so distasteful? Do we actually want 25 percent, 35 percent, or even 50 percent of our students to fail? There always will be the haves and the have-nots because that’s the American way. But does it have to be the future American way? Please don’t tell me that some of us really don’t want all students to graduate from high school and go on to higher education. I realize that achieving this goal would put a strain on our colleges and universities, but it seems to me that a more educated society is a nice problem to have.

And so we are stuck with a system that has the audacity to “punish” schools, teachers, and students who need help in attaining lofty goals. The nerve of those who would force us to reach for the stars!

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