A Special New Politics Symposium: NCLB: A Progressive Response

written by newpolitics | March 31, 2010

WITH OVERWHELMING SUPPORT from both Democrats and Republicans, the Bush administration employed the rhetoric of equity and accountability to forge a legislative package called "No Child Left Behind" (NCLB). NCLB was an omnibus bill that contained numerous provisions that made federal aid to low-income schools and children dependent on schools' accepting new regulations on a host of school policies, from qualifications for teachers to the kinds of instructional materials that can be used. However, the mandates best known to the public require testing in grades 3-8 and punish schools that fail to deliver high test scores for all students.

We are pleased to publish the contributions of researchers and activists who were invited by *NP* to analyze the origins and impact of NCLB, as well as the contours of a genuinely progressive response. All of the contributors identify critical problems with NCLB, but they differ on whether progressives should press to eliminate or reform the legislation. Michael Charney and Michele Brooks advance the perspective of many activists in the American Federation of Teachers and parent advocacy groups that would like to reform NCLB and fund it at higher levels. Stan Karp, Carlos Torres, and Lois Weiner each describes the legislation in more starkly critical terms. Torres and Weiner (a member of the NP editorial board) argue that public education can only serve the needs of students, parents, and teachers if the neoliberal agenda that NCLB represents is comprehensively defeated.

We welcome letters from readers about the contributions and the issues they raise.

Footnotes