

# Does the House Make the Grade?

## REPORT CARD ON EDUCATION FOR THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Earlier this year, the Center on Education Policy outlined four core principles for a revised federal role to improve elementary and secondary education. Using those principles, the Center evaluated H.R. 1, the bill recently passed by the House to reshape the major federal education programs for grades K–12. The Center also reviewed the recently enacted budget resolution for 2002 outlining congressional funding priorities. Here is what we found based on the information currently available:

**OVERALL GRADE FOR EDUCATION BILL: *B***

**OVERALL GRADE FOR BUDGET RESOLUTION: *F***

	GRADE	COMMENTS
<b>Does the House require higher standards and greater accountability?</b>	<i>B</i>	Requires higher academic standards and assessments of student progress, and demands greater accountability for results. Fails to encourage all states to adopt diagnostic testing that teachers can use to assess student learning needs and tailor instruction. Fails to address the total burden of required federal, state, and local tests. May also mean more paperwork for states and school districts.
<b>Does the House provide children with a fair chance to learn?</b>	<i>F</i>	Sets goals for increased funding for Title I and other important education programs. However, Congress failed to provide these increased funding levels in the FY 2002 budget resolution.
<b>Does the House provide a rational approach to program consolidations?</b>		
<i>Regular Program Consolidations</i>	<i>B+</i>	Consolidates several programs, establishes clear purposes and strong accountability measures for consolidated programs, and targets funds on poorer school districts. Sets funding goals for most consolidated programs that are higher than total spending for programs being consolidated, but the Congress failed to provide this funding in the FY 2002 budget resolution.
<i>Transferability</i>	<i>A</i>	
<i>Straight A's Local Block Grant</i>	<i>C</i>	
<b>Does the House provide for private school participation in the programs?</b>	<i>B</i>	Continues the policy of federally funded services for children in private schools. Does not authorize vouchers for private school tuition, but permits vouchers for the purchase of supplemental educational services, such as tutoring, for students in persistently failing schools. Misses an opportunity to encourage a reasoned dialogue between public and private schools.



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## CEP Core Principle #1: High Standards and More Accountability

The federal government should continue to encourage high academic standards, but should also demand meaningful accountability for increased student achievement and accept national responsibility to help in the proper use of tests.

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### STRENGTHS

- Continues federal requirements for states to set standards for what students should learn and how well they should perform in mathematics and reading/language arts, and requires standards in science by school year 2005-06.
- Requires annual tests in reading and mathematics for students in grades 3 through 8. Students in high school must be assessed at least once during grades 10-12.
- Shortens the time line for identifying Title I schools and school districts (those with significant percentages of low-income children) in which student achievement is not improving. Strengthens the interventions that must be undertaken to raise achievement in these schools and districts.
- Requires Title I schools, districts, and states to track the progress of particular subgroups of students (including students who are economically disadvantaged, disabled, limited-English proficient, or from racial/ethnic minority groups), and to raise achievement for these subgroups.
- Adds accountability measures in other federal elementary and secondary education programs, such as requiring that all teachers in Title I schools be “fully qualified” upon enactment of the legislation and that all teachers in a state be fully qualified by December 31, 2005.

### WEAKNESSES

- Does not provide sufficient safeguards to ensure that tests are used appropriately and accurately.

- Does not require states to develop or use tests that are designed to help teachers diagnose student needs and revise their teaching to improve student learning; instead, the mandated assessments are primarily for public accountability.
- Does not require that states participate in the National Assessment of Educational Progress, so there is no independent comparable check on a state’s progress.
- Does not address the total burden of testing—whether federal, state, or local—on students and schools.

### CONCERNS

- Stronger accountability requirements may mean more paperwork and red tape for districts and states.

GRADE : **B**

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## CEP Core Principle #2: Provide Adequate Funding to Give Children a Fair Chance to Learn

Title I funding should be doubled to provide all students with a fair chance to learn.

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- H.R. 1 establishes annual funding goals for the Title I program, which, if appropriated, would fully fund the program over 5 years. In addition, the bill sets funding goals that allow room for growth in several other programs. These gains are an empty promise, however, because the Congress failed to provide this funding in the FY 2002 budget resolution.

GRADE : **F**

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### **CEP Core Principle #3: Rational Approach to Program Consolidations**

The numerous federal education programs that exist now should be consolidated into fewer categories, but separate programs should be retained if they are fulfilling an important national purpose that can only be addressed by targeted aid. The three conditions that must exist in any consolidation are that there is a clear purpose and accountability, that there is an assurance of increased appropriations, and that the funds are distributed to school districts based on the number of low income children they are serving.

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#### **REGULAR PROGRAM CONSOLIDATIONS**

- H.R. 1 combines several existing federal programs into four consolidated authorizations to improve teacher quality and reduce class size, integrate technology into education, support innovative programs, and support bilingual and immigrant education programs. Under most of the consolidations, there are clear purposes for which the funds can be used and strong accountability measures, and money is targeted to school districts based on poverty rates or counts of other children with special needs. The funding goals for most of the consolidated programs are higher than the current combined appropriation level for the programs being consolidated. However, the Congress rendered these funding goals meaningless by failing to provide for this funding in the FY 2002 budget resolution.

**GRADE : B+**

#### **TRANSFERABILITY**

- The bill also allows school districts to transfer up to 50% of the funds received under the teacher quality program, technology education program, innovative education strategies program, and the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act program among these programs and into the Title I program. The accountability provisions of the receiving program apply.

**GRADE : A**

#### **STRAIGHT A's LOCAL BLOCK GRANT**

- H.R. 1 allows 100 school districts to consolidate funds under the teacher quality program, the innovative programs block grant, technology programs, and the Safe Schools program in exchange for increasing student achievement and narrowing the achievement gap. However, funds are so loosely authorized that they can be used for nearly any purpose. In addition, participating school districts are held to a weaker standard of accountability than under the bill's Title I program.

**GRADE : C**

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### **CEP Core Principle #4: Private School Participation**

The federal government should continue the principle of equitable participation for private school children in federal education programs, but should not get caught up in divisive battles over vouchers. Instead, a reasoned dialogue ought to take place between the public and private school leaders of the country.

- H.R. 1 strengthens assurances that private school children and teachers will participate equitably in federal programs. It does not contain vouchers to pay for private school tuition, but it does permit vouchers for students in persistently failing schools to purchase supplemental educational services such as tutoring. Finally, H.R. 1 does not promote a reasoned dialogue between national public and private school leaders.

**GRADE : B**