



The U.S. Department of Education contended that the *No Child Left Behind Act*, signed by the President on January 8, 2002, would usher in a new era based on the premise that every child can learn and achieve to high standards, regardless of race, socioeconomic status, or disability. In its non-regulatory guidance on standards and assessment, it asserted that the cornerstone of any substantive education reform rested in the creation and application of rigorous academic standards, and that we had to be able to accurately and efficiently measure whether or not students are meeting the standards of learning expected of them, diagnose problems, and offer immediate intervention. The act therefore called upon states to build on the work they had already begun in these areas, and to fully implement aligned academic content standards, achievement standards, and assessment measures in the core academic subjects of reading/language arts, mathematics, and science.



Standards terminology, early requirements, and past legislation

NCLB refers to academic standards in terms of both *content* and *achievement*. Content standards should be clear and give stakeholders sufficient direction to guide learning and teaching. Student achievement standards—called “performance standards” under the 1994 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) reauthorization—are specific descriptions of what students must know and be able to do to demonstrate proficiency. They extend and define content standards by specifying the information needed to determine *how well* students are acquiring the knowledge and skills contained in content standards. Therefore, it is important that the two types of standards, along with the connected assessments, be thoroughly aligned (see section [Stakes in the States in the Exploratory Report - Education Standards 2009](#)).

As per guidelines, achievement standards were to include the following components:

Achievement levels -- Labels for the levels that convey the degree of student achievement in a content area. Each level encompasses a range of achievement.

Achievement descriptors -- Descriptions of competencies—what students know and can do—associated with each achievement level.

Exemplars -- Examples of student work that illustrate the range of achievement within each achievement level.

Cut scores -- Scores on an assessment that separate one level of achievement from another.

In viewing early NCLB requirements in light of previous ESEA legislation, it is helpful to note that where assessments had been required in the past, just as now, so had student achievement standards that described the criteria used in measuring assessment results. Similarly, other changes regarding standards and associated assessments had more to do with form than function. An exception was the assertion that waivers were not to be allowed, in contrast with the 1996 ESEA, the requirements of which many states

never met. For example, states were required under the previous legislation to test for mathematics and reading or language arts once each at grade bands 3-5, 6-9, and 10-12. Under *No Child Left Behind*, states were required to include annual assessments in reading/language arts and mathematics in grades 3 through 8 along with and at least once in grades 10 through 12 by the 2005-2006 school year. Additionally, by 2007-2008, all states were to begin annual assessment of their students in science at least once in each grade band 3-5, 6-9, and 10-12. Insofar as specificity is concerned, a state's content standards could be grade-specific, could cover more than one grade, or even—at the high school level only—be course specific. If reading/language arts and mathematics standards at grades 3 through 8 covered more than one grade, states had to additionally have grade-level content expectations for each of grades 3 through 8—an effort to ensure adequate specificity for appropriate alignment with achievement standards and assessments required at those grade levels.

NCLB compliance timeline for state standards and assessment development and implementation

In addition to completing unmet requirements of the 1996 ESEA, for which at each state had to at least filed a plan for completing, states had to develop and implement content and achievement standards and administer assessments by dates provided in the following timeline. The timeline also mentions where these requirements were or were not specific changes from the 1994 ESEA to the 2002 ESEA (NCLB) reauthorization.

Though NCLB never made strict stipulations regarding alignment of standards with NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress), beginning in 2003 states were required to participate in these assessments in reading and mathematics at grades four and eight once every two years, if selected as part of random samplings from local agencies that receive Title I funds.

Already completed (by all states except Iowa, according to our research) is the As of 2009-10, each state's requirements regarding provision of academic content standards in **reading/language arts, mathematics, and science**, as well as assessments, have been met, with varying degrees of effectiveness. Waivers and flexibility are now common, however.

By school year...	States were required to...
2004-2005	... administer annual assessments in reading/language arts and mathematics at least once during each grade band 3 -5, 6-9, and 10 -12.
2005-2006	... develop academic content standards and achievement standard <i>levels</i> and <i>descriptors</i> in science for grade bands 3-5, 6-9, and 10-12; and ... develop/implement student achievement standards (all facets) and assessments in reading/language arts and mathematics for each of grades 3 through 8, in addition to at least once in the grade band 10-12 (as required by 1994 ESEA, along with grade bands 3-5 and 6-9, though achievement standards were called performance standards).
2007-2008	... develop/implement student achievement <i>cut scores</i> and assessments in science at least once in each grade band 3-5, 6-9, and 10-12.

Note: The above report is an update of information originally drawn in 2004 from the full text of the 2002 legislative act *No Child Left Behind*. Only the information dealing with assessments and standards was extracted. In an effort to avoid reproducing potential misunderstanding or error, no intermediary agency's interpretations (e.g., state departments, local education agencies, national non-profit centers, and so forth) were used. Likewise, we included no opinions or extrapolations of information in the act. To our knowledge, all of the information was accurate at the time of original transmission (September 2004) and at the time of this update (January 2009). However, in the event that any possible error is noted, please contact us at the e-mail address below, and we will look into the situation and make any modifications that are appropriate.

Interested parties may access the full provisions and requirements of the act (Public Law 107-110, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001) at:

<http://www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/index.html>

Or, directly download the PDF of the act at:

<http://www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/107-110.pdf>

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