



Walton County Democratic Party
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No Child Left Behind' program adequately addresses the issue of increasing the quality of teachers and schools and how do you think this will likely affect Walton County?

The "No Child Left Behind Act" is a looming nightmare for America's children, parents and public schools because of *inadequate funding* and *unfair rating criteria* that will cause *abandonment* of "failing" schools. This act, under funded by over \$14 billion, attempts to enforce teacher accountability by punishing all *local* partners in the public education process.

This is how it works - standardized tests taken by all students in math and reading will be used to measure our public schools and teachers. Tests are developed by each state. Florida, under the direction of the Bush administration, chose the Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test (FCAT). *Adequate Yearly Progress* for a school is achieved when students score at least level 3 on the FCAT. In 2003 and 2004 at least 38% must meet this goal in Math (reading is similar), next year 53% and 100% by 2014. Each of 8 possible subgroups must score at this level: 5 race/ethnicity subgroups, 1 economically disadvantaged, 1 limited English proficiency, and 1 disabilities. Failure of **ANY** subgroup means the school does not meet *Adequate Yearly Progress*.

About 80% of Florida schools failed last year and will fail again this year and thus be categorized as "Needing School Improvement." Only three of the thirteen schools in Walton County (none of the High Schools) scored well enough to achieve *Adequate Yearly Progress* last year and the results are not expected to improve. Arbitrary thresholds of achievement based on FCAT are a poor gauge of the success of our teachers and schools.

The school choice part of this act will potentially bring the most devastating blow to our public schools. After two years of failing to meet *Adequate Yearly Progress* students can elect to attend another school (public, private, charter, church or education company school). School Boards with already inadequate budgets and little new funding are required to provide transportation, new teachers, and new classrooms for these students. The most *unfair* part of this act is that private, church, corporate, and education providers are neither required to accept students from "failing" schools nor use the FCAT standards.

The "No Child Left Behind Act" enforces the perception that public schools are failing our students. Those pressures are causing programs for pre-school, special education, economically disadvantaged, and learning disabilities to be penalized and shut down. Schools are left with no alternative other than to encourage these students to drop

out in order to increase test scores. Some Texas school systems have already taken this approach.

Many states with Republican controlled legislatures are fighting this act, but not Florida. The Utah House voted to scrap all parts of the bill not financed by the federal government. Virginia passed a resolution denouncing the program, stating that the law "represents the most sweeping intrusions into state and local control of education in the history of the United States," and will cost "literally millions of dollars that (the state) does not have."

The Democratic Party's vision is based on the proposition that Americans should have equal opportunity for a quality education; that a well-educated and informed citizenry is necessary to the health and success of America's political and economic institutions. Ours is a vision that requires early childhood preparation, assurance of a healthy and safe learning environment, and a commitment to both accessibility and affordability of higher education; giving every person the chance to realize their potential. Education reform should be about investing in teachers, and assisting schools in developing and attaining standards and comprehensive assessments that raise achievement - not imposing sanctions which guarantee failure. ***This act must be eliminated.***