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Letter-to-the-Editor, Los Angeles Times

NOTE: The following letter-to-the-editor was submitted to the Los Angeles Times in response to their September 15th editorial entitled, "The 85% Solution."

September 16, 2003

Dear Editor:

Last month, most states released lists of schools that did not make Adequate Yearly Progress under the No Child Left Behind Act. The sheer number of schools on those lists has caused much concern. It should. The accountability provisions of the Act are intended to shine a much-needed spotlight on whether *all* groups of students are improving and improving fast enough. To ensure that all means all, the law requires 95% of each group of students to be tested.

The Education Trust firmly supports this provision because both school leaders and the public need a full picture of who is learning and who is not. So we were surprised to read the editorial in Monday's paper ("The 85% Solution," September 15, 2003) that suggested we view the requirement is too stiff.

In this baseline year, the 95% participation requirement has identified many schools that aren't testing 95% of their students. We should keep in mind the overwhelming majority of schools nationally are meeting that standard. But leaders in schools that did not are understandably worried that their failure to get sufficient participation on the test will be equated with failure to make academic progress. They are underestimating the public. Survey research shows that parents understand that different schools can miss the mark for different reasons. Now that schools understand the importance of test participation, they can do what it takes to meet the 95% mark next year, before there are any consequences under the federal law (only schools that miss goals for two consecutive years are identified as needing improvement).

Congressman Miller is right. We shouldn't rush to change the law. Reducing the 95 percent requirement would just allow more students and the schools that teach them to slip under the accountability radar. Too much is at stake for us to back down now.

Sincerely,

Russlynn Ali, Director
The Education Trust--West



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