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## **NEW STUDY: FALSE ASSUMPTIONS CAUSE 'NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND' TO FAIL STUDENTS –** *As Congress considers NCLB, education reform expert offers critique – and alternative – to throwing more money into a broken program*

*Washington DC:* Education reform expert Gary Ratner published new analysis of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), including a plan for how to fix it. The foundations upon which the legislation's accountability system is built, according to Ratner, are flawed; deep structural changes are needed to make the legislation effective. Ratner's article, just published in the University of the District of Columbia Law Review, comes as Congress begins considering reauthorizing NCLB.

“Merely tweaking the accountability scheme and increasing funding would be like rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic,” said Ratner, “We need to fix the underlying problems if we are to reach the important goals of No Child Left Behind.”

Without changes from Congress, if school improvements continue at the current rates, it will take 280 more years for the Act to meet its goals of bringing every student in the nation to proficiency in reading (as measured by the National Assessment of Educational Progress.)

Ratner identifies four faulty assumptions that form the foundation of NCLB's Adequate Yearly Progress/sanctions-based accountability system, and that doom it to failure:

1. **ASSUMPTION:** Punitive sanctions motivate real educational improvements.  
**REALITY:** Punitive sanctions motivate manipulation and cheating, teaching to the test, and lowering achievement standards.
2. **ASSUMPTION:** Problems are local and individual schools have the capacity to address them in isolation.  
**REALITY:** Most of the serious academic problems that individual Title I schools face are systemic and require a coordinated response at the local, state and federal levels.
3. **ASSUMPTION:** Escalating, strategic-planning based, piecemeal sanctions produce necessary change.  
**REALITY:** Because school reform entails changing school culture that affects all stakeholders, change has to come organically, gradually and under skilled leadership.
4. **ASSUMPTION:** States have the capacity to turn around failing schools.

**REALITY:** States lack the human and financial resources to effectively turn around failing schools. Turning failing schools over to state control, without providing for improved capacity at the state level, won't solve the problem.

To overcome this inherently defective accountability structure, Congress needs to replace it with a different accountability system whose assumptions are sound. Instead of having the federal government continue to sanction schools for failing to raise test scores, it needs to lead states and localities to make the changes that experienced educators know, and research generally confirms, enhance student learning: systemic improvements in teacher and administrator preparation, training, curriculum level and family support. Then, the Government needs to hold localities and states accountable for implementing those changes, while continuing to require regular publication of test results for each student subgroup, so that the public can monitor achievement in each school.

"This article by Gary Ratner challenges us to think deeply about the value of tweaking or more money for NCLB. American needs to re-think some very fundamental assumptions and beliefs about education and Gary makes us look at those assumptions," said Michael T.S. Wotorson, National Education Director of the NAACP.

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#### ***About the Author***

Gary M. Ratner is the founder and Executive Director of Citizens for Effective Schools (CES), a nonprofit education reform advocacy organization. Mr. Ratner has been a nationally recognized authority on school reform law and policy for over 20 years. He is a principal drafter of the Joint Organizational Statement on No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, the policy statement now endorsed by 100 national organizations, including NAACP, National School Boards Association, National Council of Churches, NEA and National Parent Teacher Association.

Mr. Ratner's opinions have appeared in The New York Times, The Washington Post, BusinessWeek, The Boston Globe and other major publications. His upcoming article, "Why the No Child Left Behind Act Needs To Be Restructured To Accomplish Its Goals and How To Do It," will appear in The University of the District of Columbia Law Review later this month. His law review article, "A New Legal Duty for Urban Public Schools: Effective Education in Basic Skills", published in the Texas Law Review in 1985, is the seminal work that called for holding urban public schools legally accountable for effectively educating all students.

Gary won a Presidential Rank Award as a senior executive at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, was a top assistant to the Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, and was characterized in an editorial in The Boston Globe as "one of Boston's prized lawyers," who "had more impact on city and state government...over the past decade [than all but a] few people in or out of the legal community."

He graduated from Williams College, Phi Beta Kappa, and Harvard Law School.

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*Copies of the article with its executive summary available on request. Ratner is available for interviews or background briefings on the bill and the critical choices confronting education reform at this juncture.*