

Teaching to the test, law leaves students behind

By Pamela Stringer

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The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 altered students' testing procedures, teachers' hiring qualifications and college students' preparation for teaching.

"No Child Left Behind is a really good first attempt," said Emily Gustafson, junior psychology student at UNC Asheville with an elementary school licensure. "But we need to revamp it. We need to get some educators, some retired teachers, some new teachers and college students, and in some way, shape or form try to get them involved, because they're the ones out there trying to do it. The idea was good; it's just not realistic."

NCLB requires a certain number of students in each grouping to pass an end-of-grade test and end-of-course test, which was implemented in the 2005-06 school year, according to Maggie Hatling, UNCA junior history student with a middle school licensure.

"If the school doesn't reach that goal, then they're put on probation where they lose resources and money," Hatling said. "If they don't pass again the next year, the school is completely taken apart, and the students have to go to a new place to go, overcrowding other schools."

Due to the probation system, schools that need money don't receive it because

the school doesn't make their annual progress reports. Meanwhile, the schools that do well get the money and continue to meet standards, often surpassing them easily, Gustafson said.

"Students should be able to choose what school they want to go to," she said. "All of the gifted students go to good schools, so schools just continually die."

States make their own testing limits, allowing them to lower the bar so everyone passes and receives the money, Hatling said.

"You have to make the decision between letting all of your creativeness fall to the side, and you're going to get all your students to pass, and you're just going to teach the test," Gustafson said. "Or you're going to spend a lot of time trying to integrate math into science and social studies to get it all taught."

According to Gustafson, NCLB implemented new standards for teachers. Teaching requires a subject major and grade specific licensure, whereas before, a degree in education would suffice, which puts parents at ease. But the requirement doesn't come without its drawbacks.

"Unfortunately we just don't have enough teachers," Gustafson said.



Emily Gustafson

"Schools are having 28 kids in a classroom. Some of those teachers that aren't highly qualified are good teachers. They've been teaching 10 or 15 years, and they just don't fit standards."

Frustrations of NCLB run to afterschool tutoring programs, according to Christina Stringer, a tutor for a company geared toward the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test, which is funded by NCLB.

"This is definitely an imperfect system in all aspects," she said. "The kids really need tutoring, but only some of the kids whose names are submitted to the county for tutoring receive it. They only allow so many kids to get it, and there doesn't seem to be all that much reasoning behind who gets it and who doesn't."

According to Gustafson, administrative pressure forces teachers to teach only for the test and to leave out important aspects of education because of a lack of time.

"They're leaving out the fun," Hatling said. "Students aren't learning how to learn, they're learning how to memorize. They're learning how to fill in circles. They aren't writing well. If you teach it right, you can teach kids how to read between the lines and infer things. If you're teaching for the test, they're learning dates, which won't help them. A teacher has to work extra hard to get that all in."

The focus on annual progress wears down on teacher's morals, Hatling said.

"You get broken. Especially first-year teachers. For most first-year teachers, there's hope," she said. "You're going to want to use all of the stuff you learned in college and implement all these cool ideas. But when it comes down to it, you just have to get the material taught."

The teachers' relationship with the tutors isn't respectful, according to Stringer.

"While the teachers acknowledge that the students need help, they often aren't that supportive in helping the tutoring going as well as possible," she said. "Some of the teachers seem to resent the need for outside tutoring and not really respect what I do."

The end-of-course tests require teachers to fit a large amount of material into an inadequate time period, Hatling said.

"You don't have time to get into depth into the details," Hatling said. "You have to teach world history in a year - 180 days to learn every single country, everything that happened. But you can't, so you have to pick and choose."

Hatling and Gustafson agree the new standards aren't deterring students' desires to become educators. The hesitation to become a teacher isn't new.

"A lot of people get into it and are like, 'I cannot do this,'" Gustafson said. "And a lot of people are like, 'I want to teach. I want be different. I want to find a way to teach the test and have fun.'"

Mayor who? Students' knowledge of local politics insufficient

By Aaron Dahlstrom

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Republicans, Democrats and independents stress the importance of local politics in the day-to-day lives of citizens. This fact resonates with older members of the community, but falls short with younger voters who tend to get mesmerized by the blitz and glamour of national politics.

"The problem that we have in our country is that most young people can tell you who was running for president but can't tell you who was running for U.S. Senate, can't tell you who was running for Congress and definitely can't tell you who was running for House or county commissioner," said Timothy Johnson, chairman of the Buncombe County Republican Party. "That's sad, because at the end of the day the things that affect you and I the most

are the decisions that are made at the county level."

Johnson, 44, stressed the importance of local issues to voters. While striving to keep party members connected with national politics, real change happens at the local level, he said.

"My first and foremost responsibility is to galvanize our base, to communicate our principles to the general population and to get our candidates elected or advocate for their election," he said.

Kyle Cogburn, community liaison for the Buncombe County Young Democrats, said when it comes to quality of life, lo-

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cal issues trump national.

"It is the Buncombe County commissioners that regulate what taxes you pay, what type of development you can have in the community and how clean our drinking

water is going to be. All those issues come down to local politics," Cogburn said.

Both Republican and Democratic parties want to energize young voters into making a difference. Despite ideology, both parties see local politics as the ideal place to start.

The BCYD consists of about 15 core members ages 18 to 35, and honorary and affiliate members, which brings the total

closer to 50. The organization promotes local Democrats during election cycles in efforts to elect them to local offices.

While local politics are the focus, national issues matter, too. In 2007, the BCYD arranged a visit from presidential candidate Dennis Kucinich and helped staff the regional Barack Obama offices.

For their part, Johnson and fellow Republicans employ many of the same tools - such as social networking and online donations - that helped fuel Obama's successful presidential bid. These innovations make communication quicker, easier and timelier than in the past.

"No longer do you have to wait for the newspaper or the 6 o'clock or 11 o'clock news to find out what is going on in your community. It has become closer," Johnson said. "When used effectively, (the In-

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