

Opinion: New education act better option than waiver

By Tom Torlakson

Parents, teachers, administrators and members of Congress all seem to agree on this much: It's time for No Child Left Behind to go. But what should take its place?

As a teacher and state superintendent of public instruction, I've seen the shortcomings of this federal law firsthand:

- Mislabeling as failures schools that are improving.



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- Providing very little funding to pay for a lot of mandates.

- Directing scarce resources toward services parents don't seem to want.

- And leaving the troubling achievement gap – the disparity in learning among different groups of students as measured by standardized tests – nearly as large as it was 10 years ago.

Just this fall, NCLB labeled as a “failure” Westmoor High in Daly City – my alma mater – even though its test scores continue to climb and now stand just two points from the statewide academic goal.

I've been outspoken about the need for relief from NCLB

sanctions, but I'm just as concerned that California not simply trade one flawed policy for another. Unfortunately, that appears to be just the unfair choice federal officials have placed before the state Board of Education.

To obtain a temporary waiver from No Child Left Behind, California would have to meet 11 new federal mandates – and do so quickly – without one dollar of new resources.

The price tag for meeting these requirements is likely to reach \$2 billion to \$3 billion, depending upon how each is implemented – all within the next year or two, even as our schools continue to cope with a statewide financial emergency and the dire threat of further funding cutbacks.

Tom Torlakson is California's superintendent of public instruction.

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