

Knowing of your interest in education issues, I wanted to let you know about two roundtable meetings I hosted with Northern California educators last week. The purpose of these meetings was to learn about their experiences with No Child Left Behind (NCLB), a federal education law enacted in 2002 that was designed to increase accountability and strengthen student performance. As you may know, the five year authorization of NCLB expired last year (though its programs continue as long as funding is appropriated), and Congress is currently reexamining the federal government's role in K through 12 education as it prepares to reauthorize and modify this law.

It is clear from the feedback I received at last week's meetings, as well as from communications from parents and teachers, that there are major local concerns with NCLB. One of the biggest problems is that local control of education policies has been supplanted by one-size-fits-all federal mandates. The challenges faced by rural Northern California schools are not the same as the challenges faced by schools in large metropolitan areas or other states, so the same school improvement strategies are not going to work for everyone. One of the lessons we have learned is that states need greater flexibility to effectively address the different educational needs of students and their local schools districts. For these reasons, I have cosponsored the [A Plus Act](#), which would free states from the federal requirements often tied to federal education funding while maintaining accountability to parents and taxpayers.

While the President has indicated that education is one of his top priorities for the year, it is unlikely that reauthorization of NCLB will be voted on before the end of 2009. With that said, I believe it is very important to start the dialogue now about the strengths and weaknesses of the current law. Therefore, as the debate over the reauthorization of NCLB heats up in the coming weeks and months, I would welcome your views about the current policy and ways you believe it could be improved.