

# Voices of the Dropout Nation: Sandy Kress Offers a Critique of Efforts Against No Child and Federal Accountability

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*U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan's gambit to force Congress to reauthorize the No Child Left Behind Act has been a dismal failure on all fronts, especially when it comes to ensuring that states take seriously their obligation to reform their public school systems and improve education for all children. This was clear last week when Idaho's state officials petitioned Duncan to allow them to opt out of No Child's Adequate Yearly Progress accountability system for one of their own that allows the land of potatoes to continue its educational mediocrity.*



*Status quo defenders, of course, support Idaho's move for obvious reasons. What is more amazing is that libertarian school reformers who should actually embrace accountability such as usually more-thoughtful*

*[Andrew Coulson](#) of the Cato Institute, also hail Idaho's move. From where they sit, the fact that *No Child* exposed the failures of traditional public education (and helped school reformers such as Coulson push for such solutions as school choice) was of little use. As Coulson wrongly puts it: "Thermometers don't cure people. At best, they are diagnostic tools." Not shocking given that Coulson and his colleagues embrace free market dogma a little too much — they should have learned long ago that dogma dies in the cold light of day — but given how *No Child* has helped their cause, it is a case of faulty thinking and a stubborn unwillingness to acknowledge that federal dollars should be accompanied by federal accountability for its use.*

*In this [Voices of the Dropout Nation](#), Sandy Kress — who crafted *No Child* — offers his own thoughts on Idaho is trying to get out of federal accountability rules. If anything, Kress' argument — which originates from a response to Coulson and to fellow accountability foe Bill Evers (of the anti-Common Core manifesto) offers an explanation for why [more accountability](#) is needed to spur pressure for school reform.*

Idaho is hardly a poster child for arguing against a federal role. Fourth-grade white students scored just 225 points on the reading portion of the 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress, a point higher than in 2002; while Hispanics saw a four-point increase in scores over that time (to 201 points). It compares badly to the progress in Florida, where scores for white students increased from 226 points in 2002 to 233 in 2009, and the increase in scale scores for Hispanics from 207 to 223. Or Texas, where white students score 232 points on NAEP, seven points higher than in Idaho, while Hispanics scored an average 210 points, or nine points higher. Nationally, scores for whites increased from 227 to 229, while scores for Hispanics increased by four points to 205. No wonder Idaho wants to stop the AYP clock. Their Hispanic kids are performing awfully. And their white kids are just barely beating Hispanic kids in Florida.

In eighth-grade reading, Idaho's Hispanics have seen their scores decline between 2002 and 2009, falling from 247 to 241. White students remain stuck at 269. Meanwhile in Florida, scores for students have increased, with whites scoring 272 points on NAEP and Hispanics scoring 260 points. Even in Texas, scores have increased, with whites scoring 273 points on NAEP while Hispanics average a score of 251 points. Nationally, eighth-grade white students score 273 points on NAEP and Hispanics score 249 points.

Then there's fourth-grade math. NAEP scores for Idaho students increased in the early part of the last decade. But now, the scores are stagnant. White fourth-graders scored just 244 points while Hispanics scored 225 points. The scores are lower than those of Florida, where whites scored 250 points on the 2009 NAEP while Hispanics scored 238, and Texas, where whites scored 254 points while Hispanics scored 233. Nationally, white fourth-graders scored 248 points on NAEP while Hispanics scored 227 points on the exam, both higher than that for Idaho.

Or look at eighth-grade math. Idaho's whites eighth-graders scored 292 points, while its Hispanic students scored just 264 points; for Hispanics, the scores have been flat for the past four years. Meanwhile in Texas, white students scored 301 points on NAEP while

Hispanics at scored 277 points. And in Florida, white eighth-graders scored 289 points while Hispanics scored 274 (and increasing). Nationally, white eighth-graders scored 293 points while Hispanics scored 266 points, scores that are all higher than that for Idaho.

Bottom line: Idaho is not making progress with its principal and growing minority group, its Hispanics, and wants to be let off the hook. It's a matter for debate as to whether the state has a right to do that. But let's at least disclose the facts for everyone to make a judgment about why they're suddenly so interested in relief from AYP.