

Still waiting

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The education reform law, No Child Left Behind, is up against broad opposition in Congress. Its enemies include an unholy alliance of Democrats who are eager to please teachers unions, which despise the legislation, and Republicans who are going to bat for suburban parents demanding local control over their children's schools.

Even the law's provision that all students perform at grade level in math and reading by 2014 has become controversial. Imagine anyone arguing the negative - that students ought to stay below grade level.

During a recent visit to San Diego, U.S. Education Secretary Margaret Spellings told us there was "a massive, well-funded, well-orchestrated effort to undermine No Child Left Behind." But there is some good news.

The law's chief defender in Congress is Rep. George Miller, D-Calif., who is chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee. Whereas many of his Democratic colleagues are promising to scrap the law altogether, or at the very least strip it of its accountability measures, Miller strikes a more reasonable tone. Congress has to fix what's broken in the law, the veteran legislator says, but not throw the baby out with the bath water. As Miller told National Public Radio, it's critical that we never go back to the days when we were blissfully ignorant of how well schools were performing or how well teachers were teaching. Still, the pressure from the teachers unions and Miller's fellow Democrats must be significant. Those who want to kill the law have no interest in tinkering with it. And no one seems willing to give an inch.

Whatever it does, Congress had better act quickly. The law was supposed to be reauthorized last year. And now with the presidential election in full swing, it would seem to be in limbo until at least 2009.

That is regrettable. Americans shouldn't have to wait that long for the reauthorization of a law that makes this much sense.

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