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The Resource Page

... creative and practical ideas

Brought to you this month
by Prissy Tunnell



No child left behind?

It's the first day of school for your second grader and she is so excited. You are on your way out of the room after saying goodbye and the teacher stops you for a moment. She hands you a sheet of paper and tells you this is a list of the things your child should learn during the year.

You move on down the hall with your fourth grader and the situation is quite similar. Now you have two lists to refer to during the year. You look over each one trying to decide, "If they really do learn everything listed on these pages, are they going to know more than I do?"

Promotion Sunday in your church arrives. One child is excited because she is moving up and things will be new. The other is not quite sure of change. You are still remembering what happened at the school, so on the way home from church after the worship service you ask your children, "Did the teachers say anything in Sunday School about what you will be learning?" Both children look at you with questions on their faces and answer with a "no."

Many of our churches have not decided what should be taught or learned by their children — or youth or adults. We do not have a mechanism to evaluate our teaching approaches. We do not know if we have moved a second grader to a third grade level.



We don't know if their faith has grown or even been exercised. Have we succeeded or failed? We won't really know until these children reach adulthood and we ask them to share their Christian experience, teach a class, go on a mission trip, chair a committee or become a deacon. That is when they say, "I'm sorry, but I just don't know enough to do that" or "I'm just not strong enough in my faith to tackle that job."

The whole "No Child Left Behind" issue familiar in public school circles has its pros and cons, but what is wrong with using the idea as a tool and adapting its concepts to the church? Why not work so that no one is left behind in his faith/spiritual development?

There are four pillars of the "No Child Left Behind" initiative. Following are some suggested questions to ask yourself as you seek to adapt these pillars to your church's educational ministry:

1. Teaching and evaluating for faith development
 - Do we teach the student or the material?
 - Do we evaluate each session?
 - Do we work from a goal base in our Sunday school or Bible study programs?
 - Do we know what a student is capable of learning, experiencing and internalizing?
 - Do we know when progress has been made?
 - Do we know when we have missed the mark? What is the mark?
2. Freedom to use the best resources for children, youth and adults
 - Who chooses curriculum?
 - Is curriculum chosen with the student in mind?
 - Is curriculum chosen with the teacher in mind?

- Is curriculum chosen because of cost?
- Do we provide additional learning and teaching resources?

3. Using proven teaching methods and tools

- Do we teach the way we have always taught? Why?
- Do we teach the way we learn?
- Have we looked at new and innovative approaches and teacher training opportunities?
- Have we asked someone to observe and evaluate our classroom?

4. Providing educational choices

- How do the students in our classes learn?
- Do we know how to decide?
- Do we know there are many different approaches to teaching and learning?
- Do we feel comfortable giving students a choice?

Also consider these questions as they relate to "No Child Left Behind":

- What special arrangements do we have for children from divorced families?
- Do we provide additional helps for grandparents who are raising grandchildren?
- Do "special needs" children and families feel welcome?

When considering the "No Child Left Behind" idea, a book by George Barna comes to mind, *Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions: Why Children Should Be Your Church's #1 Priority*. From years of experience in research for Christian ministries, he explains why we need to invest early and well in the lives of children and evaluate often. How much more should we be concerned about our children than the educational systems in our communities? Give the best you can to the best you have! **BT**

THE RESOURCE PAGE is provided by the Congregational Life office of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship in partnership with *Baptists Today* and for those dedicated lay leaders working in the educational ministries of local churches. This month's page was written by Prissy Tunnell, minister of faith development at First Baptist Church of Rome, Ga.