

The Washington Post

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All**



## Tutoring Mandate Is a Diversion

Many education advocates are alarmed by the provision in the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) that requires struggling schools to pay for private after-school tutoring. But Post readers have no reason to know that, despite two recent pieces about this rather obscure federal mandate: a May 22 op-ed column, "More Children Left Behind," by Eugene W. Hickok, a lobbyist paid by tutoring companies; and a June 6 news story, "Mandate Aside, Private Tutors Aren't Always an Option," by staff writer Amy Goldstein.

Neither writer made clear the most important element of the program. Every dollar paid to tutoring companies is taken away from the public schools.

Yes, under NCLB, school districts must set aside hundreds of millions of dollars to pay for-profit tutoring companies — dollars that should be used to hire well-qualified teachers, replace tattered books, and repair decrepit buildings.

In addition, neither writer explained that NCLB prescribes no minimum standards for tutoring programs. While public school teachers must be "highly qualified," tutors need not be qualified at all. They left unmentioned a study by Harvard University that found that most of these tutoring programs are not integrated with classroom curricula and that very few tutors communicate effectively

with teachers. And they failed to note that, unlike classroom teachers, tutoring companies are not held accountable in any way by NCLB.

Of course there are dedicated and qualified tutors, and no doubt a select few students benefit. But the goal of public education should be equal opportunity for all. There's no way that shifting large sums away from our children's schools and into the coffers of for-profit tutoring businesses helps to level the playing field.

— Bernie Horn

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