

No Child Left Behind in CALIFORNIA

Where Reality is the Rub

CALIFORNIA NCLB HEARING

Koret Auditorium • San Francisco Public Library
January 18, 2006 • 4:00–7:30 PM
Local hearing partner: San Francisco Education
Fund • Berkeley Public Education Foundation •
Marcus A. Foster Educational Institute

PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

American Indian Child Resource Center •
California PTA • California Tomorrow • Chinese
for Affirmative Action/Center for Asian American
Advocacy • Coleman Advocates for Children
and Youth • East Bay Agency for Children •
Greatschools.net • La Raza Centro Legal •
NAACP, San Francisco Chapter • Parent Institute
for Quality Education (PIQE) • Parents for
Public Schools San Francisco • San Francisco
Chamber of Commerce

HEARING OFFICERS

Henry Der, Senior Program Officer, Equality
and Justice; Evelyn & Walter Haas, Jr. Fund, San
Francisco, CA
Carolyn M. Gettridge, Senior Vice President,
Urban Development; Voyager Expanded
Learning, Lewisville, TX
Hydra Mendoza, Education Advisor, Office of the
Mayor, San Francisco, CA
William Miles, Director, Policy; Public
Education Network, Washington, DC
Lisa Villarreal, Program Officer, Education; San
Francisco Foundation, San Francisco, CA

STUDENT WITNESSES

Nanor Demirjian, San Francisco Lowell High
School • Roger Le, San Francisco Balboa High
School • Leslye Lugo, San Francisco School of
the Arts

PARENT WITNESSES

María Lucero Padilla, Berkeley Unified School
District • Lateefah Simon, San Francisco Unified
School District • Kim Shipp, Oakland Unified
School District • Todd Wanerman, San Francisco
Unified School District

COMMUNITY WITNESSES

Russlynn Ali, Director, The Education Trust –
West • H. Nhi Chau, Executive Director,
Oakland Asian Student Educational Services •
Monique Dollonne, Parent Trainer/Community
Leader & Organizer, Committee for
Accountability in Education, San Francisco •
Linda Shore, Director, Teacher Institute;
Exploratorium • Christina Wong, Policy
Advocate, Chinese for Affirmative Action/Center
on Asian American Advocacy
Funding for the hearing was provided by the
George Gund Foundation.

It's fundamentally unfair to hold students accountable for test score gains if we're not providing them with highly qualified teachers.

Tara Kini, Public Advocates, Inc.

NCLB may set the right priorities for public education, but Bay Area residents say its implementation strategies are insufficient. This theme permeated a San Francisco hearing that gave students, parents, and community leaders—audiences very much affected by the law, but usually left out of the policy debate—an opportunity to tell their side of the NCLB story.

Witnesses generally lauded NCLB's ambitious goals, with the strongest support coming from Russlynn Ali, director of The Education Trust – West, who said she believes it “is working to focus more attention, energy, and resources on improving the education of poor and minority students than at any time since *Brown v. Board of Education*.”

According to Ali, California's Academic Performance Index (API) “accommodated persistent patterns of school failure,” while NCLB forces schools to do something about achievement gaps. She worries that proposals to make NCLB easier to implement could mask underperformance and perpetuate achievement gaps. Kim Shipp of an Oakland parent advocacy group stated that accountability “says that we are not going to let one group overshadow another. Everybody must perform, and everybody must get a quality education.”

Flaws in Test-Based Accountability

Most witnesses, however, were troubled by NCLB mandates, especially in areas of testing, teacher quality, and parent access to information and choice. To reward students, teachers, schools, and school districts that test well and then turn around and label, hold back, and discourage those that don't, goes against what NCLB seems to be about, said Leslye Lugo, a student at San Francisco's School of the Arts.

Adult witnesses were equally frustrated. A teacher certified by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards described enrichment activities and curriculum content that have been eliminated because his school did not meet its adequate yearly progress target. “All I'm allowed to do is read the script and hand out dittos,” he said. Sandra Halladey, founder of Parents for Public Schools in San Francisco accused the test-based system of “squeezing out the love of learning in our children.”

The Teaching Crisis

NCLB requires all teachers of core academic subjects to be “highly qualified” by the end of the 2005–06 school year. Witnesses say California faces two major issues

regarding highly qualified teachers: 1) there aren't enough of them, and (2) the state definition falls far short of what "highly qualified" should mean.

Linda Shore, director of the Exploratorium Teacher Institute, described a "staggering" problem in California: "It is estimated that at least 30,000 teachers across the state – or 10 percent of the workforce – have not been formally prepared to teach the subjects they are assigned. In the sciences, the situation is even more serious where surveys suggest that 25–35 percent of the state's teaching workforce is teaching out of field. In large urban districts serving traditionally underserved at-risk students, the number of unqualified teachers may well exceed 50 percent."

Placing qualified teachers in schools is complicated, Shore explained. California's middle school science curriculum is multidisciplinary, so science teachers must pass at least three, and as many as five, individual subject matter exams. Due to shortages, teachers are often assigned out of field. Professional development to help teachers pass content exams costs about \$3,000 per teacher, she said, but state and federal funding has dried up.

Good teachers know more than content, many witnesses added. Student Leslye Lugo told of having a math teacher who "was disrespectful to the Latinos, African-Americans, and underprivileged youth who made up half the class." She had to repeat the class and only passed because of tutoring offered by Mission Dignity, a community-based organization. "You're testing teachers' knowledge of a subject," she said, "but you also need to make sure they know about the students, where they come from."

This concern about teacher "cultural competency" came up many times. Student Omega Lockhart said that "highly qualified" means nothing if a teacher has "a phobia of the neighborhood, or the predominant population, or even the culture." Parent Lateefah Simon described teachers with effective classroom skills: "They both knew how to build a learning community that's holistic and where children...from different socioeconomic groups, and with language barriers, and different learning styles know how to learn from one another and push each other academically."

Statistics	Total Schools ¹	% fail to make AYP	% schools in improvement	# LEAs	% LEAs fail to make AYP	% LEAs in improvement	Graduation rate	Per pupil expenditure ³
California 2003–04	9207	35.4%	17.4%	1039	41.0%	13.7%	85.1%	\$7,584
United States 2003–04	90237	24.7%	11.4%	13959	28.5%	12.8%	74.9%	\$8,308
California 2004–05	9395	38.9%	18.6%	1035	40.3%	14.6%	Not avail.²	\$7,815
United States 2004–05	89493	25.6%	12.9%	13878	23.7%	12.4%	Not avail.	\$8,618

Parent and Community Engagement

An underlying precept of NCLB is that the more involved and informed parents become, the more they will pressure schools to improve and/or make choices about appropriate interventions for their children. This does not appear to be working in California.

Despite hundreds of references to parent involvement in NCLB, witnesses said there was little change in school and district policies, which particularly affects language-minority parents. Some districts give translation services a priority, but others rely on parent volunteers, said Asian-American activist Christina Wong. One survey found that two-thirds or more of Asian-American families in San Francisco did not receive sufficient help communicating with schools and teachers. A majority of parents, she said, were unaware of school site councils, English literacy advisory councils, and the district's parent advisory council.

Activist Kim Shipp said NCLB put "stronger teeth" into parent involvement, but "I'm finding that this aspect of the law has not caught up with state departments of education, school districts, and definitely not at the school level."

The California hearing was one of nine held on NCLB across the country from September 2005 to January 2006. This excerpt was taken from the full California hearing report, which can be found on the PEN website, www.publiceducation.org, along with a national hearing report and eight other state reports.

¹ Title I Report, Vol. 7 Iss. 4 (LRP Publications 2006). Data for columns 1-6 were taken from this report.

² California Department of Education, State Accountability Report Card 2004-2005. <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/ac/sc/documents/reportcard0405.pdf>

³ National Education Association, *Rankings & Estimates Update (2005)*. Figures are computed from NEA Research, Estimates databank. The figures are based on reports through August 2005.