

No Child Left Behind in ILLINOIS More Unfulfilled Promises?

ILLINOIS NCLB HEARING

Garfield Park Fieldhouse • Chicago
November 17, 2005 • 4:00–7:00 PM
*Local hearing partner: Cross City Campaign for
Urban School Reform, Chicago*

HEARING OFFICERS

Richard Guss, Student, Harlan High School,
Chicago, IL • **Wendy D. Puriefoy**, President,
Public Education Network, Washington, DC •
Ken Rolling, Executive Director, Parents for
Public Schools, Chicago, IL • **Beth Swanson**,
Director, After School and Community School
Programs; Chicago Public Schools, Chicago,
IL • **Careda Taylor**, Deputy Chief, High School
Programs; Chicago Public Schools, Chicago, IL

STUDENT WITNESSES

Maria Salgado, Senn High School • **Michael
McDowell**, Austin High School • **Terri Shields**,
Dyett High School • **Brandi Jones**, AASTA
High School

PARENT WITNESSES

Chris Brown, Local School Council; Jones
College Prep High School • **Wanda Hopkins**,
Parents United for Responsible Education •
Ana Cepeda, Funston Elementary School

COMMUNITY WITNESSES

Idida Perez, West Town Leadership United •
Andrea Lee, Grand Boulevard Federation •
Kathy Posner, City Club of Chicago • **Jim
O'Neal**, Civic Leader • **Ken Farmer**, Colorado
College student on semester program in
Chicago • **Julie Woestehoff**, Parents United for
Responsible Education (PURE) • **Travis Stein**,
John Paul Jones, **Alfred Rodgers**, Group
Neighborhood Capital Budget Group • **Wanda
Evans**, **Antoinette McMorris**, Purple Rain •
Samuel McDade, **Sha Calhoun**, **Claudia
Ingram**, TARGET Area Development Corp. •
Denis Ferguson, Chicago Commission on
Human Relations • **Eddie Brant**, Student
Teacher • **J.E. Terrell**, Garfield Boulevard
Federation • **Steven Evans**, Just Us Fellas

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

*From what I've seen with the parents we work with...parents are still very
uninformed and misinformed. So that means year after year, nothing different
is being done that is effective.*

Sha Calhoun, TARGET Area Development Corporation

After almost four years of experience with No Child Left Behind, students,
parents, and community leaders in the Chicago area view its promises as yet
another disappointment for Illinois children.

As with previous waves of reforms that have swept the state, it seems that NCLB has
done little to address the inequities experienced by students in low-income schools or
to improve the trust between schools and parents and communities. Moreover, many
of its provisions are seen as counterproductive. This theme characterized an Illinois
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.

With 58 percent of Illinois' urban students attending Title I schools – and Chicago
having the highest percentage of Title I schools – the testimony of Chicago students,
parents, and community representatives is particularly relevant to understanding
whether NCLB is improving the academic progress of the state's low-performing
schools and students. From their testimony, it is apparent that members of the
Chicago community are terribly disillusioned by the failure of NCLB to make a
difference. Indeed, the reform-weary residents of Chicago see little attention being
paid to the concerns they have with the law.

Information Is a Problem

NCLB reforms are based on the belief that if parents and communities have reliable
data, they will make demands that will lead to improvements in their children's
education. In Chicago, however, information is neither reliable nor accessible.

Students said they did not receive their state assessment scores and had not been
told the reasons for NCLB's accountability measures. Advocates worry that only a few
parents actually understand their rights, even though NCLB refers to parents more
than 300 times. "We have to ask what happens to the parents who don't understand
their rights, who don't understand the tutoring, who don't understand that you have
an ability to make a change," said Andrea Lee, education organizer for the Grand
Boulevard Federation.

Closely tied to the lack of information is concern that reliance on test scores does not
give parents the kind of information they want. John Paul Jones, father of 10, testified
that test scores fail to tell him things he wants to know about his children's schools

and that he was “just not getting the full knowledge of what I would like to see occurring with my child in the public schools.”

This testimony points to a general dissatisfaction with test-based accountability. Wanda Hopkins, who is active in local school councils and parent organizations, noted that several years ago PURE filed a civil rights complaint against the Chicago public schools for using a single test to determine whether or not a student got promoted. Chicago public schools then began using more than one measure, but NCLB overturned that policy. “Standardized tests are all about sorting children out and not about finding out what helps them,” Hopkins said, adding that “high-stakes testing is already increasing the dropout rate, and it forces low-performing schools to push out struggling students. And these are the students that should be benefiting from the...act.”

Statistics	Total Schools ¹	% fail to make AYP	% schools in improvement	# LEAs	% LEAs fail to make AYP	% LEAs in improvement	Graduation rate ²	Per pupil expenditure ³
Illinois 2003–04	3767	26.3%	17.5%	886	37.8%	27.3%	86.6%	\$9,189
United States 2003–04	90237	24.7%	11.4%	13959	28.5%	12.8%	74.9%	\$8,308
Illinois 2004–05	3767	26.3%	19.4%	879	27.0%	27.3%	87.0%	\$9,591
United States 2004–05	89493	25.6%	12.9%	13878	23.7%	12.4%	Not avail.	\$8,618

Making Do With Less

Students testified about being pressured to do well on tests “so the school will look good” and using what should have been learning time for test practice. More importantly, they felt that test-based accountability was unfair because students did not have equal access to the resources needed to do well on tests. Terri Shields, a senior at Dyett High School, testified that she is three years older than some of her textbooks, while a friend in a wealthier neighborhood has new textbooks. “We’re taking those tests based on reading and learning from these old books, but if my books are from 1990 and their books are from 2004, I’m [more than] 10 years behind,” she said.

Students in low-income schools feel most cheated when it comes to competent teachers. Despite NCLB’s emphasis on highly qualified teachers, experienced teachers are not being assigned evenly across the system in Chicago. Furthermore, students cited instances of teachers who were able to get students engaged in the content but who were then transferred or dismissed because of their lack of credentials. “The teachers with the heart and the teachers dedicated to us – they’ve been taken away from us,” said Brandi Jones, a senior at the Applied Arts and Science Technology Academy.

What Happened to Parent Involvement?

NCLB seeks to give parents a greater voice, but many policies seem to be undermining a sense of community. The right of parents to transfer their children to a higher-performing school under NCLB was strongly criticized by PURE’s Julie Woestehoff. “The parents who call us,” she said, “are sending the federal government a clear message: ‘Don’t tell me to move my child to another school – help me make my child’s school better.’” The choice provision also was criticized for fostering an increase in student mobility, already a major problem for Chicago schools.

Ana Cepeda, a parent volunteer at Funston Elementary School, described what strong community involvement can accomplish. The Logan Square Neighborhood Association, she said, has opened five community learning centers, a literacy home visit program, parent tutoring in five schools, and opportunities for parents to take college classes in the neighborhood to become teachers. She wondered why, if the federal government is so concerned about schools and children’s education, “doesn’t it contribute to programs like these that really work instead of using money to come up with complicated laws that do nothing but take jobs away from good teachers, over-test our kids, and suggest that states take over struggling schools?”

Funding for the hearing was provided by the Washington Mutual Foundation.

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

² Figures taken from Illinois State Board of Education, State Report Card, available at <http://webprod1.isbe.net/ereportcard/publicsite/getSearchCriteria.aspx>

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.