

No Child Left Behind in MICHIGAN

The Public Questions Its Promises

MICHIGAN NCLB HEARING

Fellowship Chapel Village • Detroit
January 27, 2006 • 2:00–4:00 PM
*Local hearing partner: Youth Sports and
Recreation Commission, Detroit*

HEARING OFFICERS

Tonya Allen, Program Director;
Skillman Foundation, Detroit, MI
Reginald M. Felton, Director,
Federal Relations; National School Boards
Association, Alexandria, VA
Henry L. McClendon, Jr., Director,
Youth Development; New Detroit, Inc.,
Detroit, MI
Guitele Nicoleau, Director, Research &
Member Development; Public Education
Network, Washington, DC
Judy Y. Samelson, Advocacy in Action,
Flint, MI

STUDENT WITNESSES

Kamilia Landnem, Cass Technical High
School • **D'Ante Whitney**, Detroit Academy
of Arts and Sciences • **Brittany Rogers**,
Detroit Academy of Arts and Sciences

PARENT WITNESSES

Dorene Smith Bey, Afterschool Consultant,
Detroit Parent Network
Terrance Collier, President, Local School
Community Organization, Coolidge
Elementary School
Iris Essex, Parent/Mentor

COMMUNITY WITNESSES

Sharon Clayton Peters, President, Michigan's
Children
Charlie Anderson, Executive Director,
Communities in Schools
Harrison Blackmond, President & CEO,
Black Alliance for Educational Options –
Detroit Chapter
Deborah Omokehinde, former Community
Liaison, Detroit Public Schools

The Michigan hearing was one of nine
hearings on NCLB held across the country
from September 2005 to January 2006. This
is the second set of hearings organized by
PEN to convey the public's concerns and
recommendations to policymakers in advance of
the scheduled 2007 reauthorization of the law.

Funding for the hearing was provided by Philip
Morris USA.

*The call was needed that we were not doing our job, but the approaches [in
NCLB] are not helpful.*

Charlie Anderson, Director, Communities in Schools, Detroit

The achievement gap addressed by No Child Left Behind (NCLB) is very real
to Michigan residents, but the law's remedies, and the way they are being
implemented, are not what people expected.

This was the overall theme of a hearing held in Detroit, 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.

While NCLB was the focus of the hearing, witnesses made it clear that issues relating
to public education often reflect community values and actions that NCLB does not
address and sometimes even impedes. In some respects, the hearing was as much
about public and personal resolve as about federal interventions.

The Testing Issue

Michigan witnesses were very supportive of accountability in general. Indeed, the
Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) was one of the first assessment
tools in the country. But the sanctions imposed by NCLB were seen to generate
excessive attention to the test at the expense of the regular curriculum and students
were feeling the brunt of this change.

The students generally agree that the law is well intentioned about raising the
achievement levels of inner-city students. But Kamilia Landnem, a junior at Cass
Technical High School, believes the law encourages schools “to push students through
just to get federal dollars.” As a result, she said, students are learning how to pass
tests but not what they need to prepare for college. She also feels that the pressure of
high-stakes testing was causing some students to drop out.

Student panelists were also concerned about students enrolled in comprehensive
technical education programs, those taking courses in an arts career path, or those
with non-academic interests and talents. They wondered if those students would be
able to do well on tests designed for students pursuing post-secondary education. One
Cass student faulted testing policies that require limited-English proficient students to
be assessed in English. Many such students are dropping out, she said, because they
believe they cannot pass the tests.

This test-driven curriculum did not win any accolades from adult witnesses either.
Sharon Clayton Peters, a former Lansing school board member and president of
Michigan's Children, a statewide independent voice for children and families, said

the law's "noble" intent was being undermined by its over-emphasis on a single test. She believes this flies in the face of research that shows test-dominated instruction neglects "culturally influenced learning styles and information processing."

But not all parents objected to test-based accountability. Harrison Blackmond, president and CEO of the Detroit chapter of the Black Alliance for Educational Options, said the law gave parents "the degree of accountability to which they are entitled." Because testing is so central to the law, he said, there should be a single set of national standards to guide measurement in all states. Deborah Omokehinde, a former Detroit Public Schools community liaison, also supports standardized testing. Noting that, of the 10 middle schools in the area, only one met NCLB's adequate yearly progress (AYP) mandate, she said:

We are talking about basics that kids need in order to advance to abstract or higher-order thinking needed for success in tomorrow's world. We must stop blaming testing for failures and pull parents together to support academic achievement, not just when there are negative incidents.

Reginald Turner, a member of the state board of education, and a former school board member from Detroit, wondered if testing students throughout the elementary and middle school years and then once in high school was effective. Though he believes assessments can determine needs at all levels, he was concerned that testing under NCLB, limited to reading and math, might not be compatible with the enhanced core curriculum recently passed by the state board. Accountability for learning must start very early, according to panelist Sharon Peters, who fears there might be "a real crisis when lots of kids" fail to meet the new graduation standards.

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 ²
Michigan 2003–04	3,599	10.8%	10.2%	540	20.2%	0%	Not avail. ³	\$8,671
United States 2003–04	90,237	24.7%	11.4%	13,959	28.5%	12.8%	74.9%	\$8,308
Michigan 2004–05	3,670	11.9%	13.3%	542	4.4%	0%	Not avail.	\$8,909
United States 2004–05	89,493	25.6%	12.9%	13,878	23.7%	12.4%	Not avail.	\$8,618

The Teacher Quality Issue

NCLB mandates that all teachers of core academic subjects must be highly qualified by the end of the 2005–06 school year. The law defines such teachers as those with a degree and/or certification in the subject to which they are assigned and have satisfied state standards beyond that, such as passing a content test

This definition, however, does not cover some of the teaching issues that worried the hearing witnesses. Students enrolled in advanced courses testified that they were able to do so because of their parents and because they had teachers who took a personal interest in them. "A qualified teacher is someone who has been in the place you've been," said one student. Highly qualified teachers go beyond knowing their subject and making it interesting, said another student, "they know how to be creative and to motivate students."

Teachers were not held accountable if children did not learn basic skills in the early grades, said Dorene Smith Bey, an after-school consultant and member of the Detroit Parent Network. Children and parents participating in her after-school program complained about unchallenging academic work that was repeated year after year in their schools. Other adults and students called for intensive professional development in cultural competence for teachers. Citing research on cultural competencies, Sharon Peters said that "we must address the cultural fit if we are to close the achievement gaps." Another witness suggested that teachers should be the ones being tested, not students.

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

² NEA, *Rankings & Estimates Update (2005)*. Figures, computed from NEA Research, Estimates databank, are based on reports through August 2005.

³ Graduation rate for the 2002-2003 school year, the most recent year for which statewide data is available, was 84.8%. This information was taken from the 2003-2004 State Report Card.

*Hearing attendee who spoke from the audience

Parents, Choice & Community Involvement

Hearing witnesses praised the emphasis on parent involvement in NCLB. Not only does the law refer to parent involvement several hundred times, its two major interventions require parental action. Parents can request that their children be transferred out of persistently low-performing schools. If the school's poor performance continues, they can then request that their children receive supplemental educational services (SES), usually in the form of after-school tutoring, and they can select the provider of these services.

The problem, explained many Michigan witnesses, is that NCLB's provisions are either not being carried out or are falling short of what is needed. Bedriya Sabree,* a representative of the Detroit Public Schools central office, admitted that the district faced many problems implementing NCLB, particularly when it came to parental choice provisions, but said "we're getting better." When some of the parent witnesses complained about the lack of communication about parental choice and other NCLB provisions, or that the information provided is difficult for parents to understand, she advised them that 80,000 notices that had previously gone out were being rewritten to make them clearer.

	Student Enrollment ¹ 2004-2005	Per Pupil Expenditure 2004-2005	Students in Title I Schools ²	Students Eligible for Free/Reduced Lunch	Students with IEPs	English Language Learners	2002 Graduation Rate ³			
							All	Black	Hispanic	White
Michigan	1,726,204	\$8,909	(*)	34.5%	13.9%	7.0%	78%	56%	48%	78%
US	48,367,410	\$8,618	49.7%	36.3%	13.6%	10.6%	71%	56%	52%	78%

Dorene Smith Bey, the after-school consultant, was frustrated because, as she described it, parents were not being informed correctly about SES provisions and many were not aware of their options. Forty providers showed up at a meeting to describe their programs, but only two parents attended. Parents don't understand the applications, she said, and the district is "game playing" to prevent students from benefiting from NCLB interventions. She was instructed to recruit high school students for tutoring, she said, but was then told they could not be approved for tutoring because they were not covered in the budget.

NCLB is the reason organizations such as the Detroit Parent Network were formed, said Terrence Collier, a network member. "This was the most positive effect of the law," he said, and, while he believes the network has empowered parents, he also feels that "the language of NCLB is not easy for parents to understand, so they go along with anything principals say. Principals have too much power over parent involvement money."

Iris Essex, whose son was a victim of violence at his school, found out through the Detroit Parent Network that she could send him to another school. After visiting seven other high schools to try to find a safe environment, Essex came to the conclusion that "NCLB is inadequately funded, and I want the Detroit Public Schools to get it together."

NCLB requires states to take extreme measures, such as reconstitution, toward schools that fail to improve over time, but as one student testified, NCLB also indirectly leads to schools being closed. The testing programs are encouraging students to drop out, said Brittany Rodgers, a senior at the Detroit Academy of Arts and Sciences, and then the district closes schools because of lower enrollment thus "throwing students and parents into confusion." It would be better, she said, to increase funding for better textbooks and "upgrading" teacher competence so that students would be better prepared for the tests.

The lack of adequate funding to cover NCLB mandates caused Charlie Anderson to question the sincerity of the law's

¹ National Education Association, *Rankings & Estimates Update (2005)*. Figures are computed from NEA Research, Estimates databank. The figures are based on reports through August 2005. This source provided the Student Enrollment and Per Pupil Expenditure data.

² Hoffman, L. and Sable, J. (2006). *Public Elementary and Secondary Students, Staff, Schools, and School Districts: School Year 2003-04* (NCES 2006-307). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. Data were taken from this source for the following columns: Students in Title I Schools, Students Eligible for Free/Reduced Lunch, Students with Disabilities, English Language Learners.

³ *Public High School Graduation and College-Readiness Rates: 1991-2002*, Manhattan Institute for Policy Research (2005). Figure calculated using the Greene method, which estimates the number of students who enter a ninth-grade class, makes some adjustments for changes in population, and divides the resulting number into the number of students who actually graduated with a regular diploma. It is not a four-year graduation rate; as long as there is not a substantial change in the number of students in each class that graduates in more than four years, such students are included in the calculation.

⁴ Data were missing for more than 20 percent of schools.

supporters. “We can do anything we want to in this country when we want to,” he said, “but if NCLB is really to be believed, why would we be seeing unfunded mandates and teachers doing more and more without resources?”

Anderson also noted that state funding for education was unequal in Michigan, and that the “solutions” mandated by NCLB generate more and expensive problems. The “ideal” solution, he said, would be to do more to empower schools and communities with resources to create their own solutions. Deborah Omokehinde noted that the district receives \$153 million a year from Title I, “but the district is not performing. We need to hold the school board, principals, and superintendent accountable, as well as the students.”

This emphasis on community and family responsibility was a strong theme at the Detroit hearing even though “community” receives little attention in the law. A mother* of five Detroit public school students commented that “kids are raising kids” without being involved in their children’s lives or in their schools. Dorene Smith Bey described the neglect she sees in the children who come to her after-school program. Most “are very grateful” to have a place to go to, she said. Other witnesses called for parent involvement to be mandated and employers to give parents time off to become involved.

Because the community rallied around a low-performing school, according to Lynn Smith* who is with the Southeastern Village community agency, it was saved from closing and has made adequate yearly progress since then. “We have to look at what is needed in the community other than academics,” she said. “Poverty has a tremendous impact on why a child doesn’t come to school every day, comes hungry, and is ill-prepared when he does come.” She recommended that all services for low-income families be integrated with school funding in order to have more wraparound assistance for families. “If we continue to work separately,” she said, “we are going to be having this same conversation 10 to 20 years from now.”