

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

Funding for the hearing was provided by
Philip Morris USA.

The call was needed... but the approaches [in NCLB] are not helpful.

Charlie Anderson, Director, Communities in Schools, Detroit

The achievement gap is very real to Michigan residents, but NCLB's remedies are not what people expected. This theme characterized a Detroit, MI, 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.

The Testing Issue

Michigan witnesses support accountability. Indeed, the Michigan Educational Assessment Program was one of the first in the country. But NCLB's sanctions are generating excessive attention to the test at the expense of the regular curriculum and students are feeling the brunt of this change.

Kamilia Landnem, a junior at Cass Technical High School, said the law encourages schools "to push students through just to get federal dollars." She believes students are learning how to pass tests, not what they need to prepare for college, and that the pressure of high-stakes testing is causing some students to drop out.

Student panelists wondered if students enrolled in technical education programs, or following an arts career path, would do well on tests designed for students pursuing post-secondary education. They faulted policies that require limited-English proficient students to be assessed in English and said that many of these students drop out because they believe they cannot pass the tests.

This test-driven curriculum did not win accolades from adult witnesses either. Sharon Clayton Peters, a former Lansing school board member, said the law's "noble" intent was being undermined by over-emphasis on a single test, which flies in the face of research that shows test-dominated instruction neglects "culturally influenced learning styles and information processing."

Not everyone objected to test-based accountability. Panelist Sharon Peters believes accountability must start early, and fears there will be "a real crisis when lots of kids" fail to meet new graduation standards. Harrison Blackmond, president of the Detroit chapter of the Black Alliance for Educational Options said the law gives parents "the degree of accountability to which they are entitled."

Deborah Omokehinde, a former Detroit Public Schools community liaison, noting that only one middle school made adequate yearly progress, explained: "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."

| 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 | 3599 | 10.8% | 10.2% | 540 | 20.2% | 0% | Not avail.³ | \$8,671 |
| United States 2003–04 | 90237 | 24.7% | 11.4% | 13959 | 28.5% | 12.8% | 74.9% | \$8,308 |
| Michigan 2004–05 | 3670 | 11.9% | 13.3% | 542 | 4.4% | 0% | Not avail. | \$8,909 |
| United States 2004–05 | 89493 | 25.6% | 12.9% | 13878 | 23.7% | 12.4% | Not avail. | \$8,618 |

The Teacher Quality Issue

NCLB requires all teachers of core subjects to be highly qualified by the end of the 2005–06 school year; the law defines a highly qualified teacher as one who has satisfied state standards and has a degree and/or certification in the assigned subject matter.

But students enrolled in advanced courses testified that they were successful because teachers took a personal interest in them. In their view, highly qualified teachers go beyond knowing their subject and making it interesting: “they know how to be creative and to motivate students.”

Teachers are not being held accountable if children do not learn basic skills in the early grades, said after-school consultant Dorene Smith Bey. Other adults and students called for intensive teacher professional development in cultural competence. Citing research on cultural competencies, Sharon Peters said “we must address the cultural fit if we are to close the achievement gaps.”

Parents, Choice & Community Involvement

The emphasis on parent involvement in NCLB won praise, but Michigan witnesses felt that NCLB’s provisions are either not being carried out or are falling short. Bedriya Sabree, * a Detroit Public Schools representative, admitted that the district had problems implementing NCLB’s parental choice provisions, but said “we’re getting better.”

NCLB requires states to take extreme measures when schools fail to improve. But NCLB can also cause schools to close if testing programs encourage students to drop out and then the district closes schools because of lower enrollment. It would be better, said Detroit Academy of Arts and Sciences senior Brittany Rodgers, to increase funding for better textbooks and “upgrading” teacher competence so students are better prepared for tests.

The lack of adequate funding caused Charlie Anderson of Communities in Schools to question the sincerity of the law’s 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 “solutions” mandated by NCLB generated more and expensive problems. The “ideal” solution, he said, would be to empower schools and communities with resources to create their own solutions. Deborah Omokehinde said 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....”

Community and family responsibility was a strong hearing theme. A mother* of five 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 children in her after-school program. Other witnesses called for mandatory parent involvement and for employers to give parents time off to become involved.

Lynn Smith, * from the Southeastern Village community agency, described how a low-performing school was saved from closing because the community rallied around it. “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 services for low-income families be integrated with school funding to provide families more wraparound assistance. “If we continue to work separately,” she said, “we are going to be having this same conversation 10 to 20 years from now.”

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