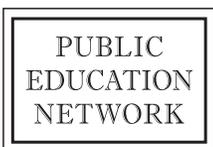


Open to the Public

Speaking Out on "No Child Left Behind"

A Report from 2004 Public Hearings

OHIO



Public involvement. Public education. Public benefit.

Sponsored by Ohio PTA, Ohio Fair Schools Campaign, Ohio ACORN and Public Education Network



Public Education Network

Public Education Network (PEN) is a national organization of local education funds (LEFs) and individuals working to improve public schools and build citizen support for quality public education in low-income communities across the nation. PEN believes an active, vocal constituency is the key to ensuring that every child, in every community, benefits from a quality public education. PEN and its members are building public demand and mobilizing resources for quality public education on behalf of 11.5 million children in more than 1600 school districts in 33 states and the District of Columbia. In 2004, PEN welcomed its first international member, which serves almost 300,000 children in the Philippines.

Our Vision

Every day, in every community, every child in America benefits from a quality public education.

Our Mission

To build public demand and mobilize resources for quality public education for all children through a national constituency of local education funds and individuals.

Hearing Held in Bedford Heights, Ohio

September 14, 2004

5:30–9:00 PM

Columbus Intermediate School,
Bedford Heights, OH

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and treasurer for Arrowhead PTA, Copley, OH

Colleen Harper, parent (mother of Afrisha Lavine),
Akron, OH

Linda Scammicca, parent, Columbus, OH

Michelle Jones, parent, Columbus, OH

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Sam Kay, Beachwood High School,
Beachwood, OH

Carly Schlotterer, sophomore, Edison High,
School, Milan, OH

Jamie Melka, senior, Bedford High School.,
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Afrisha Lavine, 7th grade, Roswell Kent Middle
School, Akron, OH

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and Witness, United Church of Christ Justice
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Deborah Tidwell, Ohio PTA

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Tim Freeman, ACORN, Columbus, OH

Scott Piepho, parent, King School PTA and chair,
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The George Gund Foundation

Open Society Institute

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No Child Left Behind In Ohio

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) addresses issues that concern parents, students, and community leaders in Ohio, but the perception is that it is adding more to already serious problems with public education in the state than it is contributing. This was a general theme of a statewide hearing on NCLB held September 14, 2004, at Columbus Middle School in Bedford Heights. National sponsor of the hearing was Public Education Network (PEN) of Washington, D.C., with local co-sponsors that included the Ohio PTA, Ohio Fair Schools Campaign, and Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN).

The hearing was an opportunity for public voices—of parents, students and community representatives—to tell their stories about NCLB’s impact. These are people ordinarily not heard by policymakers. While the people who testified discussed many issues, it is obvious that if policymakers were listening to these public voices, they would hear certain messages:



“Our concern is that while *No Child Left Behind* incorporates in its very title the language of the American dream, the law, instead, makes extraordinary demands on a short timeline, without enough funding to pay for its mandates and without first sorting out all of the complex variables... that contribute to achievement gaps.”

–Jan Resseger,
United Church of Christ
Justice and Witness Ministries

- NCLB’s emphasis on parent involvement is welcomed and encourages students, parents, and others to speak publicly about their concerns and hopes for their schools.
- NCLB’s requirements and the failure to fully fund it compound already serious school finance problems in the state, with classrooms and students being penalized most of all.
- The emphasis on testing for accountability is skewing the curriculum and demoralizing teachers.
- Communication about NCLB, school progress, and choices under the law is inadequate or, at best, confusing.
- Labeling of schools as needing improvement thwarts efforts to build community support for schools.

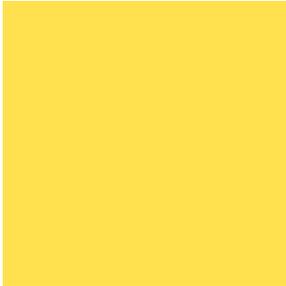


The “Why” of the PEN Hearings

Shortly after NCLB was passed in 2001, Public Education Network (PEN) began an intensive examination of the law to determine the rights and privileges it accords to parents and community members. Approximately 10,000 print copies of the resulting publication, *Using NCLB to Improve Student Achievement: An Action Guide for Community and Parent Leaders*, have been requested by organizations throughout the country, with more than 40,000 copies downloaded from the PEN website. In addition, a series of NCLB action briefs, developed by PEN in partnership with the National Coalition for Parent Involvement In Education, have been downloaded more than 25,000 times.

With this demand for information on NCLB as background, PEN held a series of state hearings to give the public a structured way to enter the debate on the pros and cons of NCLB and the effects, both positive and negative, the law is having on students, parents, and communities. Nine hearings took place in eight states over a five-month period. Each state hearing was conducted in partnership with local organizations and presided over by a panel of state and national hearing officers.

PEN hopes these forums will broaden the public debate about NCLB and will give policymakers information on how their work encourages or discourages quality public education for children. The findings from PEN’s NCLB hearings will be transmitted to decisionmakers at the national, state, and local levels to help them determine which aspects of NCLB the public supports, what are the primary concerns, and what mid-course corrections are needed to achieve the most beneficial results for all students.



The Ohio Context

Ohio's 1.8 million K-12 students are spread out in 612 local school districts, and an increasing number of students are enrolled in charter schools (45,000 students in 175 charter schools in the 2003-04 school year). About 80 percent of the enrollment is white, with African-American students as the largest minority (17 percent). Sixty percent of Ohio's students attend schools receiving Title I funds; 13 percent have Individualized Education Plans; and about 30 percent are eligible for free/reduced lunches.

According to various national reports, Ohio is among the best performing states in terms of establishing clear and specific standards in core academic subjects. It is one of only 14 states with standards-based exams in each core subject for every grade span. As part of its accountability system, Ohio publishes test data on school report cards and assigns ratings to schools based partially on test scores. The ratings identify low-performing schools for assistance or sanctions.



Nonetheless, the achievement gap is large, as is the graduation rate for sub-groups of students compared to the statewide average. Moreover, funding equity is a crucial issue in Ohio, with less than half of the cost of K-12 public education provided by the state. School funding is still greatly reliant on local property taxes, and there are critical restraints on the process of increasing local tax support. Consequently, Ohio ranks 29th in the country in terms of equity balance, with wealthy districts having more state and local revenues for education than property-poor districts. Public forums sponsored by the Ohio Fair Schools Campaign in the spring of 2004 encouraged more than 1,200 citizens to speak out about what they considered an unworkable school finance system.

A study conducted by the Campaign on the effects of NCLB also found that school officials worried most about NCLB's unfunded mandates and the diversion of scarce resources to cover its requirements. A report prepared by the Ohio Department of Education for the state's General Assembly estimated that the projected cost of implementing the NCLB mandates would be an additional annual expenditure of \$1.5 billion. Additional federal funding is expected to be only \$44 million a year.

Testimony at the state hearing underscored the schools' financial crisis and its crippling effect on students' opportunities to learn. For most of those who testified, however, NCLB is more than about money. Its sweeping mandates embody hope for those who want excellent education for all students, but the people who came to tell their stories are struggling with its faults and unintended consequences. While the testimony ranged over many issues, most of it corresponded to the three areas of the law that PEN considers the most crucial—accountability, teacher quality, and building community.



What We Learned About Accountability

A student from Beachwood High School had done his homework. Charging that NCLB “was drafted by politicians who...don’t know the price of a gallon of milk.” He said its unrealistic expectations for full proficiency by 2014 had caused Ohio to lower the criteria in its accountability system to reduce the number of schools needing improvement. “The system moves on, and schools are left behind,” Sam Kay commented.

It was also students who objected most strongly to an overemphasis on testing. It is causing a narrower curriculum, stress on students and teachers, and teaching methods that encouraged students to cram instead of learn the material. A middle school student in Akron said everyone loses in this process: “The tests have completely taken over the school,” she said. “But if you look deeply, students haven’t really learned anything, so the school is failing, in a way.”

“A lot of our classes have been turned into OGT (Ohio Graduation Test)-oriented classes. “They have gone test crazy. We want to know about other things, you know.” –Jamie Malka, senior, Bedford High School

Passing the state graduation exams is a state policy not directly related to NCLB, but to students and adults, they are part of a testing package viewed as onerous. Carly Schlotterer, a sophomore at Edison High School in Milan, supported standards and testing, as did all those who testified, but she would have assessments be cumulative over a school year, rather than limited to a single test. A parent from Columbus wanted students to have more chances to pass the graduation tests, sufficient tutoring, and access to enrichment subjects such as art and music that boost student interest and achievement.



A Bedford parent whose children received special education services for several years believes the testing mandates under NCLB for students with Individualized Education Plans are unfair. Children often know the tested knowledge but cannot perform under typical testing procedures, pointed out Susan Dewitt. “We expect them to go from having all these crutches in their classes to being mainstreamed and being able to run a 10K. It can’t happen, and it’s not happening,” she said. Standards must not be lowered, she added, and all high school graduates should know the basics, but better ways of assessment must be used. In higher performing schools that fail Average Yearly Progress (AYP) because of their special education students, the students get labeled and blamed, she said.

A Columbus parent longed for the time when teachers and schools offered more personal attention—and parents were more responsible. If there were more homework, more tutoring, more involvement with teachers, perhaps there would not need to be as much testing, said Michelle Jones.

Jan Resseger, representing the United Church of Christ Justice and Witness Ministries, found little positive in the testing system imposed or fostered by NCLB:

“We are very concerned about the standardized testing regimen, concerned that a system driven by standardized tests may incorporate cultural bias; emotional pressure on children; extreme pressure on English language learners who must take the test before they learn English; dropout rates, especially for children who are retained in grade; pressure increasing to intolerable levels on educators; and a singular focus on reading and math with accompanying disinvestments in art, music, and the social sciences.”



What We Learned About Teacher Quality

Ohio state officials have implemented policies that put the state in the top quarter of all states in terms of efforts to improve teacher quality. It requires all high school and middle school teachers to pass subject-matter tests before beginning teaching. The state uses the Praxis III: Classroom Performance Assessments to evaluate the skills of new teachers and provides mentoring for all new teachers. Teacher preparation programs must have passing rates of at least 80 percent on subject-matter licensing tests and 85 percent on the Praxis III exam.

As far as NCLB is concerned, however, the state plan lacks some provisions, according to the Education Commission of the States. ECS could not find evidence in Ohio's state plan of annual measurable objectives for each district and school to show an annual increase in the percentage of highly qualified teachers nor of annual increases in the percentage of teachers receiving high-quality professional development.

Just as those who wrote NCLB, the people who testified at the Ohio hearing believed high-quality teaching is at the core of student success. They are not sure, however, that the paper certification requirements in NCLB sufficiently ensure quality teaching. They also are sympathetic to teachers about the pressures caused by the NCLB testing and other requirements.



Students, again, provided the most candid comments about teacher quality: teachers should not stay in front of classrooms, said Afrisha Lavine, a middle school student from Akron. Students should be engaging in problem solving together and in applied learning, she said. The Bedford High School senior said some teachers know only one way of presenting material, but sometimes “I need to learn it a different way, and they don’t know any different ways to explain it.” In addition, the young man who studied the NCLB issues beforehand criticized the law for allowing states to determine the standards and process for testing teachers, saying that this does not assure teachers will know their subject matter.

Students and adults recognized pressures faced by teachers. Moreover, budget cuts reached the classroom level where there are not enough textbooks to go around, school facilities are unsafe, and the loss of teaching staff meant overcrowded classrooms and demoralization of the remaining teachers, according to those presenting testimony. The under-funding of NCLB just added to the problems. Legislators generalize about schools, noted Debbie Tidwell of Fairview Park, who is director of advocacy for the Ohio PTA. If they went into low-income schools more often, she said, “they would find parents who care about their kids, for the most part, and teachers who really want those kids to succeed.”



Building a Committed Community

The premise of NCLB is that if parents have sufficient information about the quality of their schools, they will take action on behalf of their children. The law offers them choices if their children attend a consistently low-performing school—first, to transfer to a higher performing school; and secondly, to choose providers of supplemental education services, primarily after-school tutoring.

Those who testified at the Ohio hearing were uneasy about this whole thrust of the law. Parents were not receiving clear information. No one had experience with supplemental education services. And the transfer option was promoting an unintended consequence—a weakening of community commitment that would make it even more difficult for schools to improve. This last item perhaps was the most troubling of all the issues heard by the Ohio hearing officers.

Because NCLB reporting focuses so much on test results, this becomes all that parents and communities look for in terms of the quality of the school, said Debbie Tidwell of the Ohio PTA. Although her organization has prepared a variety of resources for parents on school improvement, it is the once-a-year test results that get the most attention. In her view, NCLB covers many issues that parents should know about and provides an opportunity for communities to become well informed. While the PTA favors broader involvement, no one who testified mentioned any efforts on the part of schools and districts to use NCLB as a tool for community awareness and support. One parent found the communication about testing somewhat offensive.



“There is so much information about *No Child Left Behind* that so many parents do not have. I ran into that as PTA president last year in trying to get information out to my parents, repeatedly....It’s pretty confusing. And it (the communication) constantly reminds our children that it’s for their academic achievement and it’s to pass tests and to do this and to do that. And when I got a flier about teaching my child stress relaxation techniques before his 4th-grade proficiency test, I knew that there was a big, big problem.”

–Maria Valore, parent,
PTA Advocacy Committee

It is the threat to community cohesion that the Ohio testimony found most disturbing about the law. In a state where the local community largely determines the resources schools will have through annual tax votes, anything that promotes negative perceptions of schools, particularly without any context, hurts the chances of the community to adequately support schools. Parents and activists from the Columbus area, for example, said that an analysis of the performance of the 31 school districts in Cuyahoga County would show that all those labeled low-performing serve poor children and children of color.

Even high performing districts are threatened by labeling, according to a parent from the Copley/Fairlawn district, a suburb of Akron. She praised the law for forcing attention on the performance of individual children and for helping to bring intervention programs to her schools. These are costly, however, and federal monies contribute little. The district raises 97 percent of its education costs from local taxes, said Maria Arnaiz. Because of NCLB, “the district will be forced to put a levy on the ballot sooner than it had planned. And it will be asking for more money because *No Child Left Behind* will continue to ask for more money as the years go by. At some point, our taxpayers will balk. As generous as they are, they are going to say ‘no’ because it will cost increasingly more to get the next child to meet Adequate Yearly Progress.”

“For the most part, our schools are doing a very good job. But we have become labeled, and when it comes down to seeking additional funding so that we can support the values that our community wants for our schools, it makes it very difficult to go back to our community because the people compare us to other school districts and they say:



'Well, you are not doing a good job.' But our teachers are doing a very good job. It's just that the schools are pitted against each other because of the testing."—Debbie Tidwell, Fairview parent and Ohio PTA representative

Echoing her comments, Jan Resseger of Columbus said that community cannot be built through a law, only through relationships. The emphasis on standardized testing and on ranking and rating the schools might create community spirit in Shaker Heights, she said, because it can say: "Phew, we got better scores than Cleveland. Maybe that builds community in Shaker Heights, but it doesn't build community across Cuyahoga County, and it doesn't build concern for all of our neighbors."

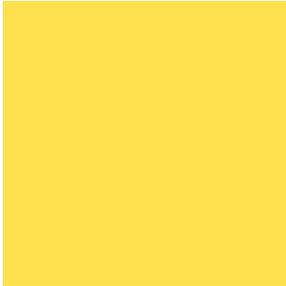
Students felt that labeling a school as low-performing led to cutting programs. According to Jamie Malka of Bedford High School, when a school is labeled, "the students and parents lose confidence in the school, and they almost give up. They start cutting programs that affect the students. I know from personal experience that when I did not do sports and extracurriculars, my grades went down significantly." Afrisha Levine compared the environment in a high-performing school and one that is labeled as low performing: "The labeled schools are at such a disadvantage. If there were more opportunities in them, as in the good schools, then the failing schools could become good."

Some parents and one student feared a domino effect because of the transfer policies under NCLB. Carly Schlotterer of Edison High School said if her high-performing school accepts transfers to the point of being overcrowded and overwhelmed, "we, too, may fall under and have our school closed or reconstructed." Scott Piepho, a parent at the King School in Akron, said that

because of compounded financial and other problems, his well-performing school is losing parents to private schools. "The combination of the unfunded mandates of *No Child Left Behind* and the money being drained by charter schools and money lost due to the changes in the personal property tax and the money lost due to the drop in the state's share, we are drowning," he said.

Still, the Ohio hearing ended on a more positive note, offered by one of the hearing officers, Barb Bungard, president of the Ohio PTA.

"I think No Child Left Behind has raised awareness in the community. It has gotten the community's feathers ruffled. It has gotten parents to now become involved in their child's education where they may not have before. It has encouraged and/or sometimes given that extra nudge to some school districts that weren't as proactive in engaging their community as they should be, and it has taken us in the direction that we need to go if we truly want to believe that all children should succeed.... No Child Left Behind is a piece of legislation that we can continually raise questions about in a negative way, or we can turn it into a positive way where we can become true, active advocates on behalf of our children to promote public education."



Public Education Network Online Survey Results

From August 10 through November 17, 2004, Public Education Network, through its GiveKidsGoodSchools.org advocacy website, conducted a survey on various aspects of *No Child Left Behind*. The online survey garnered 12,000 responses from people around the country who joined in this vibrant and vital national debate on public education.

PEN analyzed the data, which was disaggregated by state, to provide a snapshot of knowledge and attitudes about *No Child Left Behind*. The results for Ohio are on the following pages.



Demographics (501 respondents)

Age

Under 18	0%
18-24	2%
25-34	19%
35-50	41%
50-65	34%
Over 65	4%

Gender

Female	82%
Male	18%

Race/Ethnicity

African-American	5%
Asian or Pacific Islander	0%
Hispanic/Latino/Mexican	.5%
Native American or Alaskan Native	.5%
White	90%
Other	4%

Education

Less Than High School	0%
High School Grad or GED	6%
Some College	19%
Four-year College Degree or More	75%



Please identify yourself
(check all that apply)

Educator	57%
Elected Official	3%
Parent/Guardian of Current Public School Student	41%
Parent/Guardian of Former Public School Student	23%
Community Activist	14%
Concerned Community Member	51%
Business Person	8%

Did you vote in the last election?
(check all that apply)

School board election	74%
Mayor	62%
State legislator	77%
Governor	73%
US Congress	75%
US President	78%
None of the above	8%

Please identify the type of school(s) your child(ren) attend.
(check all that apply)

Public school	66%
Private school (non-religious)	3%
Parochial or religious school	8%
Home school	1%
Too young to attend school	7%
I do not have children	18%



How They Responded to the Survey Questions

Have you heard of the NCLB Act?

Yes	98%
No	2%

What do you know about NCLB?

Have heard of the law, but know little about its provisions	12%
Know about some provisions of the laws	51%
Have an in-depth knowledge of the law	37%

Where have you received most of your information about NCLB? (check all that apply)

Parents	15%
Teachers	40%
Administrators	55%
Other school personnel	28%
Community organizations	13%
Local newspapers	43%
Local television	24%
Radio	15%
National media	42%

Do you believe NCLB is:

A good law and should be continued without change	6%
A law that needs changing	66%
A law that should be repealed	28%

Does NCLB require too much testing, too little, just right?

Too much	80%
Too little	3%
Just right	5%
Don't know	12%

Do you believe that EVERY child in the country will score at grade level or above by the end of the 2013 school year, as required by NCLB?

Yes	1%
No	93%
Unsure	6%



Should states and school districts be required to report test scores on the basis of disability, income, English language proficiency, race/ethnicity?

Yes	48%
No	32%
Unsure	20%

Do you believe that a single test can tell if the entire student body needs academic improvement?

Yes	3%
No	94%
Unsure	3%

Do you believe that a single test can tell if the individual students are performing satisfactorily?

Yes	6%
No	91%
Unsure	3%

Do you believe that every child should have a qualified teacher?

Yes	98%
No	1%
Unsure	1%

Do you believe that, by 2005, every school will meet the NCLB requirement that all teachers must be qualified in the core subjects that they teach?

Yes	18%
No	70%
Unsure	12%

Have you received information from you school district about the qualifications of teachers in your schools?

Yes	48%
No	52%



How would you rate the teachers in your local schools?

No qualified teachers	0%
Some qualified teachers	11%
Many qualified teachers	57%
All qualified teachers	21%
I have no way of judging	11%

Have schools in your community been labeled as “needing improvement” or “failing” because of NCLB?

Yes	53%
No	33%
Unsure	12%

Are you getting enough information about the performance of the schools in your community?

Yes	68%
No	32%

**Has NCLB made a difference in any of the following areas?
(check all that apply)**

Access to information about schools	34%
Student performance	20%
Parental involvement	9%
Teacher quality	15%
None of the above	50%



Have you been asked to become involved in any of the following educational activities related to NCLB? (check all that apply)

Developing state standards	9%
Developing the state test required by NCLB	4%
Developing the state and/or local report cards required by NCLB	4%
Developing the district Title I parent involvement policy	4%
Giving input into the district annual Title I program	8%
Making recommendations for what constitutes a “highly qualified teacher” under NCLB	2%
Participating in the improvement team for schools that were identified as needing improvement under NCLB	13%
None of the above	74%

NCLB gives parents and students attending low-performing schools a choice option (transferring to another public school within the school district).

Do you think this option will help students perform better academically?

Yes	26%
No	74%

NCLB gives parents and students attending low-performing schools a supplemental educational services option (providing tutoring beyond the regular school day to help students meet the standards).

Do you think this option will help students perform better academically?

Yes	73%
No	27%



For More Information . . .

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Ohio State Government and Services

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