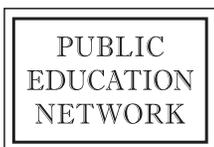


# Open to the Public

Speaking Out on "No Child Left Behind"

Summary of Nine Hearings  
May–October, 2004



Public involvement. Public education. Public benefit.

Sponsored by Public Education Network,  
Local PEN members, and Other Partner Organizations

## 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.

## Special Thanks

Public Education Network gratefully acknowledges the following funders for their invaluable support of the national NCLB hearings.

The Wallace Alexander Gerbode Foundation

The George Gund Foundation

The James Irvine Foundation

Nellie Mae Education Foundation

New York Community Trust

Open Society Institute

We are deeply grateful for the guidance and support from the following, without whom our national hearings could not have been visualized or realized:

Anne Lewis, education policy writer and author of the NCLB national and state reports.

Ron Cowell, executive director, Education Policy and Leadership Center, Pennsylvania

CommunicationWorks, LLC

PEN Project Coordinator:  
Andrea Grenadier

Our Designer:  
Kelly Griffith,  
rightbraincreative  
kelly@rightbraincreative.net

## An Open Letter To The American People On Their Views Of No Child Left Behind

Public education depends upon public support and involvement to work effectively. Schools educate our children, create knowledgeable citizens, and contribute to a qualified workforce for our communities. They are the backbone of our democracy, and a fundamental building block of our communities. Yet, the promise of good schools for all will not be fully realized until every member of the public—business leaders, parents, grandparents, community leaders, and ordinary people—demands that schools be the best they can be. Schools must have the advantage of the resources the public can provide—not least of which is our concern and active involvement.

Fortunately, the *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) Act offers the nation powerful tools to know and demand more of our schools. NCLB puts into law what the public has long believed: that every child should have the opportunity of a high-quality public education. NCLB is not self-enforcing. It must be implemented with knowledge and accountability to achieve its ambitious and worthy goals for our children and for the nation.

Over the past nine months, Public Education Network (PEN) held a series of public hearings around the country, and conducted an online survey to gauge Americans' reactions to NCLB. The purpose of these hearings was not to hear from government leaders or professional educators entrusted to manage the nation's schools, but to hear from people from every walk of life—parents, students, civic leaders, service providers, and voters—about how NCLB has affected their communities, and what is going well or needs to be improved in the implementation of the law.

We want to thank you, the American public, for coming to the hearings to tell us your views, and for responding to our online survey. Your experiences were compelling, your answers thoughtful, and your messages powerful. We will carry your words back to the public, and to policymakers and media across this country. You spoke loud and clear.

The public wants NCLB to meet its goals. The hearings and the survey also revealed that the public has serious concerns about the way the law is being implemented. And there are numerous factors outside NCLB's purview—such as local funding inequities and educators' reluctance or inability to engage with low-income parents and communities—that thwart the ability of this law to succeed.

In this letter, we want to share with you some of the key findings from the hearings and the survey, and to suggest ways that NCLB can be improved. These suggested changes would make it more likely that our collective goals would be achieved, and that the law would receive the full support of the American people. As Maria Leon, a parent from Los Angeles put it (in Spanish): "I don't want *No Child Left Behind* to stay a wonderful idea. I want it to really become as it should be and have it really serve to improve our children's education and that way, better our community as a whole."

## Gauging Public Opinion

*No Child Left Behind* has generated an often-heated public debate, probably the most intense discussion of public education policy in the last half-century. For the most part, the reported discussions have been among leaders of education organizations and elected officials. There has been little attempt to find out what students, parents, community members and the public think about the law.

To find out, Public Education Network fanned across the country from May to October 2004 and held a series of hearings in eight states: Pennsylvania; Massachusetts; California; Ohio; Texas; Tennessee; New York; and Illinois. Hundreds of people attended the sessions. In addition to the hearings, PEN conducted an online survey to which some 12,000 people responded.

Many participants said the hearings and the survey provided a very welcome opportunity for citizens to voice their opinions about an important public policy. They are rarely invited to offer their views; when they are, the invitation is often a token gesture with minimal attention given to their perspective. While not all of the participants shared a detailed knowledge about the workings of the law, parents and other members of the public have strong, valid ideas that should be heeded.

## What PEN Learned

### **Strong Support for the Goals.**

The American public strongly supports the goals of NCLB. Only one public hearing participant, and only a fourth of the survey respondents, wanted to repeal the act.

The public understands the President's and Congress' message about accountability for student performance. There was particularly strong support for the notion of holding schools accountable for improving student performance, which many participants said was far too low for too many young people. "Passing the buck cannot continue when it comes to our children," said one Lancaster, Pennsylvania parent. "There should be no reason why our children are graduating without the necessary skills to be productive members of society, and far too many are."

Parents and the public also strongly praised the idea of performance data disaggregated by racial, ethnic, socio-economic, language minority, and special education status. They said that showing the performance of each group sheds light on the inequities often hidden by reports of overall school performance.

Most expressed concern that the strength of the law—accountability for the performance of all students—could also be a weakness. The stigma resulting from a school being labeled “in need of improvement,” commonly understood as a euphemism for “failing,” is hugely demoralizing to students, parents, and communities, particularly in those places where we need the law to succeed. Students report that their diploma is “worth less” if it comes from a “failing” school, and good teachers often leave such schools.

Perhaps the most troubling issue raised in PEN’s hearings is NCLB’s unintended consequence of pitting parents’ concerns for their children against their desire for acknowledgement and respect. There is tremendous blaming of those students seen as more responsible than others for a school’s failure to meet its Adequate Yearly Progress goals. The children most often singled out are those with disabilities.

In order to ensure that accountability, the heart of standards-based reform, succeeds at the local level, and that public backlash doesn’t build sufficient momentum to eviscerate it, every means possible should be used to counteract the stigma associated with the labeling of schools.

#### **Concern over the limits of tests.**

While the public appreciates the light that NCLB shines on student performance, many are also concerned that the picture that is revealed is not always accurate. Nine of ten survey respondents said a single annual test cannot tell if individual students are performing satisfactorily, or if a school needs improvement.

Moreover, many said the tests that are in use focus on too limited a set of skills. And, they argued, test-based accountability has led many schools to resort to irrational practices. “The tests completely took over the school,” said one Columbus, Ohio student, “but if you look deeply, students haven’t really learned anything. So the school is failing, in a way.”

#### **Concern over a lowering of standards.**

Although NCLB was intended to raise standards for all students and eliminate achievement gaps, participants at the public hearings pointed out that some states, in an effort to ensure that schools meet their annual targets, have actually lowered those targets. And many schools have abandoned earlier, more ambitious learning experiences in order to achieve short-term gains in test scores.

Some pointed out that Advanced Placement classes and programs for gifted and talented students have been sacrificed to support remediation for low-performing students. Others noted that alternative programs for students at risk of dropping out, which often provide more time to reach standards, have been eliminated because of graduation-rate statistics that measure whether students graduate “on time.” Some said the proficiency demands for students with disabilities and English-language learners are unreasonable. Said one grandmother from Erie, Pennsylvania: “Setting standards that are impossible for these children to achieve only sets them up for failure.”

### **Concern over standards for teacher quality.**

Public hearing participants and survey respondents praised NCLB for focusing attention on teacher quality and for requiring states and districts to hire highly qualified teachers. Despite the law's requirement for public reports on teacher quality, few parents knew what the qualifications of their school's teachers were. Only a fourth of the non-educators responding to the survey had received information on teacher qualifications.

Although nearly all teachers are "highly qualified," according to state reports to the U.S. Department of Education, few survey respondents believe that teachers meet that standard. Only 20 percent of non-educators think all teachers are qualified, and only 54 percent think "most" teachers are qualified. And many parents testified that the standards for 'teacher quality' may be too low. In addition to certification, they want teachers who have real teaching skills and high expectations of their children.

### **Concern over the lack of information.**

Despite NCLB mandates to the contrary, few members of the public have information about the assessments, the quality of teachers, or the availability of choice or supplemental educational services in their schools and districts. Almost two-thirds of the respondents in the online survey said that NCLB had not made a difference in the amount or quality of information they received about schools.

Moreover, many said that when information is provided, it is often too late to be useful and is filled with jargon. The public must go to extraordinary efforts to become well-informed. The public wants specifics—the climate of the school, teacher qualifications, classroom size, sources and use of funding, and comparisons with schools in other districts—in accessible language.

### **Concern about an unwillingness to involve parents or community organizations.**

Although the law expressly provides for parent involvement, many schools have resisted these provisions and have worked actively to exclude parents who wish to become involved in improvement activities. Some parents said that they felt that they were allowed to participate in school improvement efforts only as tokens to fulfill paperwork requirements; others reported that they were even subjected to restraining orders.

"I went to a conference where [NCLB] was first introduced, and I was so excited because it felt like they were talking to me," said Martha Alvarado, a parent from Edgewood, Texas. "And they kept saying, 'We need parents involved!' And I said, 'I'm right here...!' But the schools don't know how to deal with parents. For some reasons, they feel threatened."

## **What We Are Asking Federal, State and Local Officials to Do**

The hearings and the survey made clear that the American public strongly endorses the goals of *No Child Left Behind* and supports its continuation. And the public has some very strong opinions about how the law and its implementation can be improved so that it achieves its goals.

In particular, President Bush, this Administration, and Congress should:

- **Enforce NCLB's parent involvement provisions.** The law includes a number of important provisions that enable parents to play active roles in school improvement. In most school districts these provisions have

languished and parents have met resistance from school officials when they tried to get involved. This is particularly true among minority parents. By enforcing the provisions already in the law, the federal government can send a strong signal to states and school districts that parents can and should be active partners in school improvement. States and districts should provide professional development for school personnel to help make this happen.

- **Enforce the law's information requirements.** Because of NCLB, states and districts have produced a wealth of information on school performance, teacher quality, and other factors. This information is not widely available, and much of it is difficult for parents and the public to understand. To make parent involvement meaningful, the Administration should enforce the law so that states and local school districts provide more information about state accountability, the uses of assessments, and teachers' qualifications in their schools in a comprehensive, timely, and accessible manner, translated into home languages as necessary. States should set and enforce standards of quality for information dissemination, and provide redress for people not receiving appropriate information.

In particular, as long as the law's choice provisions remain unchanged, school districts must provide information in a timely and accurate basis in order for placement decisions to be made before a school year begins.

- **Keep the public in the conversation.** Few states and school districts have the capacity to carry out all of the functions they are expected to perform under NCLB. They can expand their capacity by forming partnerships with community-based organizations—if the Administration would provide flexibility to allow such partnerships.

Community-based education organizations (CBEOs) can serve many roles in supporting district implementation of NCLB. They can, for example, be a channel for public voice and help communities develop a consensus about the qualities they want their school graduates to have; how assessments can support those goals; what qualities teachers need to help students attain those goals; and what responsibilities parents and communities must assume. This consensus can be integrated with NCLB reporting requirements so that it becomes part of the "report card" to the public.

CBEOs can also provide information to parents and communities about the purpose and use of the assessments used by the district; they can assist in the collection, interpretation and presentation of data about assessment results, qualifications of teachers, and the designation of schools. CBEOs can educate communities about what "needing improvement" means, what the consequences of such a designation are, and what the entire community can do to help the schools.

In addition, CBEOs can support districts in implementing the supplemental services provisions of the law by issuing their own "report cards" about available supplemental services.

In addition to these administrative changes, we believe that Congress should fine-tune the law when it comes up for reconsideration, so that it works more effectively. In particular, Congress should amend the law to:

- **Hold states accountable for performance and for enforcing the law.** Currently, children, their schools, and school districts are accountable for meeting annual targets for student performance. The states, which

set the targets and establish the NCLB structure, face no consequences when large numbers of students fail to meet these targets. Penalties should be imposed upon states, parallel to those imposed upon school districts, when insufficient numbers of children within the state meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) targets. These should include the designation of states as “in need of improvement” or “in corrective action” with the concomitant assistance and sanctions described in NCLB.

In addition, the Administration should enforce states’ compliance with NCLB. And states, school districts, and schools must allocate adequate resources and equitably distribute them to ensure that all children have the opportunity to meet proficiency standards.

Federal, state, and local officials should provide financial incentives to ensure that highly qualified teachers are teaching in low-performing schools.

- **Count school progress toward AYP.** The reaction of teachers and administrators to test pressure has put enormous stress on students, and has led to significant narrowing of the curriculum, with teachers focused primarily on test preparation while ignoring other subjects. Immigrant students report being pushed out of school. To reduce these incidents, schools should receive AYP “credit” for making significant progress toward proficiency targets, as well as for crossing over the bar.
- **Provide supplemental services before allowing choice, and ensure quality services.** Although parents of children in low-performing schools desperately want improvement, they would much prefer the option of receiving supplemental education services *before* the option to transfer their child to another school. In practice, the choice option is not working because there are not enough spaces in higher-performing schools and because parents value neighborhood schools. By providing support to students first, Congress could help support neighborhood schools while giving them time to improve, rather than abandoning them. When choice is provided, if insufficient slots are available in higher performing schools, students should be permitted to transfer to schools in neighboring school districts.

At the same time, supplemental service providers need to be held to higher standards. Some parents have found that services for English language learners are not available, and that the quality of service is variable. Federal officials and states should require SES providers to adhere to the “highly qualified teacher” provisions and the research-based requirements of NCLB, in addition to the other criteria specified in the law.

Given the magnitude of NCLB’s intent to transform public education and the opportunity that the legislation proffers, it is especially critical that public officials work closely with educators, community members, parents, and students affected by this law. The main thrust of the federal law is to make public schools function transparently, on the theory that an informed public will demand that students, teachers, and schools perform as they should. If they have easy access to information on standards, teacher qualifications, curriculum designs, and test scores, then parents, policymakers, and the public will have the leverage they need to call their schools and educators to account. With the knowledge they have, the public has validated the law’s goals, and they have also demanded important changes to ensure that the needs of every segment of the community are met.

The education of our children is one of the most central responsibilities we have as citizens in a democratic society. Let us work together to make certain that this law achieves all of its promise to offer the next generation a democracy even stronger than the one we inherited.

Thank you, again, to the thousands of Americans that participated in this process,

The following served as hearing officers for the Public Education Network national NCLB hearings. They were selected for their expertise, and the organizations are listed for identification purposes only.

**Anjeanette Allen**, director of public engagement, New Visions for Public Schools, New York

**Arlinda Marie Arriaga**, student, St. Mary's University, San Antonio, Texas

**Jamie Blair**, vice chair, Massachusetts State Student Advisory Council, Malden, Massachusetts

**Gary Blasi**, professor of law, University of California, Los Angeles, California

**Amanda Broun**, senior VP, Public Education Network, Washington, DC (Ohio, Memphis, and New York hearings)

**Bernard Bowler**, former general manager, IBM, Sacramento, California

**Roscoe Brown**, executive director, Center for Educational Policy at City University of New York, New York

**Barb Bungard**, President, Ohio PTA, Columbus, OH

**Rachele Burton**, external affairs manager, PRIDE Industries, Sacramento, California

**Maria del Rosario (Rosie) Castro**, coordinator, Student Support Services, Palo Alto College, San Antonio, Texas

**Michael Churchill**, Public Interest Law Center of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

**Ron Cowell**, executive director, Education Policy and Leadership Center, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania (Harrisburg, Sacramento, Ohio, and Memphis hearings)

**William L. Dandridge**, Vice President for Urban Initiatives, Lesley University, Massachusetts

**Edward Donely**, Pennsylvania State Board of Education, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

**Gordon G. Fee**, chairman, Public School Forum of East Tennessee, Oakridge, Tennessee

**Arnold Fege**, director of public engagement, Public Education Network, Washington, DC (Chicago hearing)

**Warlene Gary**, President, National PTA, Chicago, Illinois

**Cris Gutierrez**, Community Activist, Greater Los Angeles, California

**Johnny Darnell Griggs**, Urban Education Partnership, Los Angeles, California

**Éthele Hilliard**, president, Partners in Public Education, Memphis, Tennessee

**Molly Hunter**, ACCESS network director, Campaign for Fiscal Equity, Inc., New York, New York

**Michael A. Lawson**, partner, Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP, Los Angeles, California

**Peter Martinez**, Director, Center for School Leadership, University of Illinois at Chicago, Illinois

**William Miles**, director, policy, Public Education network, Washington, DC (San Antonio hearing)

**María "Cuca" Robledo Montecel**, executive director, Intercultural Development Research Association, San Antonio, Texas

**Diana Nelson**, Executive Director, Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform, Chicago, Illinois

**Debbie Phillips**, Executive Director, Ohio Fair Schools Campaign, Athens, OH

**Wendy Puriefoy**, executive director, Public Education Network (Harrisburg, Massachusetts, and Sacramento hearings)

**Jane Quinn**, assistant executive director for Community Schools, Children's Aid Society, New York, New York

**S. Paul Reville**, executive director, Rennie Center for Education Research and Policy at MassINC, Massachusetts

**Gladys Rodriguez-Parker**, District Director, Office of Congressman James McGovern, Massachusetts

**Ken Rolling**, Executive Director, Parents for Public Schools, Chicago, Illinois

**Robert Schwartz**, director, Administration, Planning, & Social Policy Program, Harvard Graduate School of Education, Massachusetts

**John Wilkerson**, San Antonio Education Partnership, San Antonio, Texas

## Introduction

When the *No Child Left Behind Act* was signed into law on January 8, 2002, the President and Congress presented the American people with an opportunity and a challenge. The opportunity rests in an historic piece of education legislation designed to close the achievement gap between high- and low-performing students. The challenge lies in the need for parent and community leaders to become knowledgeable about and take advantage of various NCLB provisions for collaboration, engagement, and action.

NCLB is indeed a groundbreaking piece of federal legislation. It sets forth *national* expectations of high academic achievement for all public school children through a mandate that *all* children will be performing proficiently by 2014. It significantly broadens the federal role in public education and defines more stringent standards of accountability for local public schools and districts.

However, as evidenced by numerous reports and articles in the media, implementation of various provisions of the law is raising deep concerns at state and local levels. Clearly missing from this important and growing national debate are the voices of the public, particularly those from disadvantaged and disconnected communities. Parents, students and other members of the public—largely unorganized and under-represented in national education policy—are significantly affected by this law, inasmuch as the law is intended to enhance the effectiveness of public schools in every community by holding those schools accountable for educating every child to high standards.

What has been the impact of the law on students, families, schools and communities? How can the perspectives and experiences of these individuals—all directly or indirectly impacted by the law—inform and improve the law and its implementation? What role does the public play in ensuring public schools that work in the context of NCLB for *all* children?

In spring 2004, Public Education Network (PEN) sought answers to these questions by holding a series of nine public hearings across eight states. Our intention was to listen to public voices and to bring these voices to local, state and federal policymakers; to educators; to the media; and back out to the public at large. We also saw these hearings as a way to further educate the public about NCLB, building on a set of tools that PEN has produced since 2002, and to remind all Americans of the essential role that they must play to ensure a public education system that works for all children.

It was important to us to honor the time and attention that the public was giving to this task. We were intentional in structuring the hearings in a respectful and consistent manner. We chose states in which to hold the hearings based on their large percentage of low-income children. All hearings were co-hosted by a local partner organization with deep ties to the community. A set of distinguished hearing officers who would listen attentively and ask probing questions of witnesses also helped to ensure authentic and meaningful testimony. The panels who testified were composed of almost equal numbers of students (high school and early college), parents of school-aged children attending public schools, and community members (including business and civic leaders and community activists) across the nine hearings. We also conducted an online survey regarding NCLB through our online advocacy tool, [GiveKidsGoodSchools.org](http://GiveKidsGoodSchools.org), to which we received 12,000 responses. These are referenced as well in the report. Since the absence of the public is too often evident in forums on public education, we intentionally did not invite professional educators to formally testify, although some did speak during 'open microphone' time following each of the formal panels.

We are pleased to share what we heard. The findings include specific quotes from the public. We think it's important to bring the public's voice as clearly as we could. However, we also endeavored to cite findings and draw conclusions that reflect a general pattern or theme, which we heard across the hearings. We took great pains not to include opinions, experiences or perspectives that were unique to a particular family, community or district. The recommendations derive from what we heard and PEN's own understanding of and experiences with the law.

Our hope is that these representative voices from the public help inform how federal, state and local officials work to improve public education. As importantly, we hope that it serves as testimony to the deep concern and commitment that the public has about public education and about their local public schools.



## No Child Left Behind had to happen.

In the years of reform efforts before *No Child Left Behind*, no federal laws, sanctions, or incentives had been sufficient to convince the nation that millions of children do not have access to the public education quality assumed to be the standard for all. More than 1,000 pages of testimony presented across the country at Public Education Network hearings on the law in the summer and fall of 2004 dramatically confirm this. The hearings revealed the deep concerns—and ultimately, the hopes—of students, parents and communities that have been left out of even a decent standard of public schooling.

*No Child Left Behind*, however, imposes its serious flaws on a public education system already in flux. On some issues, it barely begins to address the problems.

A product of congressional policymakers frustrated by the slow response of states and districts to previous demands for reform, and a White House with a single-minded structure for change, the law developed without much understanding of what it takes to be really good at accountability and at teaching itself. It would have been a very different law if students, parents, and communities could have helped to shape it. On the basis of the spoken testimony and more than 12,000 responses to a PEN online survey, NCLB should have been able to:



- Maintain accountability as the core of reforms, but hold others, in addition to schools and students responsible for progress
- Require the use of much more sophisticated tests for accountability that are aligned to a broad range of content areas and skills and are used more for diagnosis than for penalties.
- Assure that standards are not lowered, and that all students have access to a curriculum and to teaching that challenges them.
- Focus on measuring improvement as a means of motivating schools, teachers, and students, rather than on attaining an almost impossible static goal.
- Broaden the definition of a highly qualified teacher beyond paper certification to include true competence—and commitment to high levels of learning—in diverse classrooms.
- Invest time and money in building the capacity of schools struggling to improve before taking away their resources for such interventions as choice; the goal should be all excellent schools in every neighborhood.

“I don’t want  
*No Child Left  
Behind* to stay  
a wonderful idea.  
I want it to really  
become as it  
should be and  
have it really  
serve to improve  
our children’s  
education and  
that way, better  
our community  
as a whole.”

—Maria Leon, parent,  
(speaking in Spanish),  
Los Angeles,  
California

Finally, *No Child Left Behind* already has made transparent very troubling problems with the public education system beyond the law’s emphasis on low-performing students and schools. Given a chance to speak up about their schools, the public—whether students, parents, community leaders and advocates, or business leaders—made it obvious that:

- NCLB is being blamed for policy and funding decisions made—or more often, not made—by state and district leadership.
- Inequities persist in basic funding, access to highly qualified teachers, and sufficient resources that, among many wrongs, place unfair burdens on poor students and schools.
- The public school system has a serious communications problem, not only in explaining NCLB but also in explaining itself to the public, especially to poor families and communities.
- Despite an unprecedented emphasis in NCLB on parent involvement, public educators generally still don’t “get it” when it comes to listening, accepting, and partnering with low income/minority parents and communities.
- More than ineptness is at work in the failure to comply with some NCLB provisions, in the lowering of standards, and in the tepid approaches to communicating with parents and the public. The lack of will is evident.



The hearing testimony and survey data pinpoint specific or technical changes that need to be made to NCLB, which are discussed below. More importantly, they tell compelling stories. The parents who testified often apologized for being nervous in an unfamiliar role. A few choked up when talking about their children's needs. Some chose to speak in Spanish because they had too much to say in their brief appearances to try to find the words in English. Students, undaunted by the formal hearing process, described their school experiences with absolute candor. Businesspeople provided larger contexts for reform than the personal ones of most speakers. Community activists told of both rebuffs and promising efforts at organizing.

This was the democratic process at its best, encouraging people to talk about something deeply important to them and to speak openly from their hearts.

The report crystallizes the themes and stories from the nine hearings, held in eight states. Its unique contribution to the debate over NCLB is that it gives voice to those who ordinarily do not have access to policymakers, but who perhaps are more dependent on the promises in the law than any others—the students, their families, and their communities. They have insights policymakers need.



## The Hearing Process

The 2001 *No Child Left Behind Act* is the most recent revision of federal efforts to focus resources and attention on improving public education, especially in the most disadvantaged communities. The initial law, the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA)*, sought to equalize opportunities for children in low-wealth districts. Each reauthorization has used lessons learned about change to enhance or alter priorities. The 1994 revision required all children to be subject to the same set of educational standards, and states began work on accountability systems that set higher standards and applied them to all students. Few states acted forcefully enough, however. The academic disparities among students on the basis of race/ethnicity and income, which had narrowed in the 1970s and 1980s, actually grew larger. Moreover, at least half of the states had not complied with the 1994 accountability and testing provisions of the law by the time it came up for reauthorization again in 2000.

The message Congress and President Bush conveyed to the public education system through *No Child Left Behind* was unequivocally clear: establish comprehensive reforms that all schools must act on; use certain interventions such as transfer options, supplemental services, and eventual takeovers for schools that do not meet accountability goals over time; and assure a level of proficiency of all students in reading, math,



and science by 2014. In some states, the new federal law interrupted carefully crafted accountability and reform plans. In others, it forced attention to major issues addressed in the law, mainly test-based accountability, teacher quality, and transparent reporting of progress to the public. For the whole country, it meant a rearranging of our federalist system, granting more authority to the federal level than at any time in the history of education policymaking.

By the spring of 2004, after two years of experience in implementing the law, schools, districts, and states were getting a firmer grip on understanding its strengths and weaknesses. Opposition developed, but many groups and associations also weighed in with their recommendations for changes. None, however, reflected the feelings and views of the constituencies most affected by the law—students, their families, and their communities.

With foundation support, Public Education Network set up hearings to listen to the public and to gather information useful for policymakers as they consider refinements in the law. Local PEN members or other advocacy groups co-sponsored each of the nine hearings (held in eight states, with two hearings in one state). These were formal occasions, not impromptu informational meetings, with a panel of hearing officers listening and asking questions. Those testifying were kept to a strict time schedule. Even so, as many as 100-200 people attended the hearings in some places to be part of a public accounting by panels of their students and fellow citizens who had volunteered to testify.

### Lead local partners collaborated with PEN for 4-to-5-hour hearings held at:

Harrisburg, PA <b>May 20</b>	Pennsylvania Public Education Partnership
Boston, MA <b>June 2</b>	Rennie Center at Massachusetts Institute For a New Commonwealth
Sacramento, CA <b>June 8</b>	Linking Education and Economic Development
Los Angeles, CA <b>June 21</b>	Urban Education Partnership
Cleveland, OH <b>Sept. 14</b>	Ohio PTA/Ohio Fair Schools Campaign
San Antonio, TX <b>Sept. 28</b>	Intercultural Development Research Association
Memphis, TN <b>Sept. 30</b>	Partners in Public Education
New York, NY <b>Oct. 7</b>	Campaign for Fiscal Equity
Chicago, IL <b>Oct. 13</b>	Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform



Most of the lead partners already were active in organizing and disseminating information on NCLB. The Pennsylvania Public Education Partnership, for example, held seven forums around the state on NCLB, leading up to the PEN hearing in Harrisburg. More than 700 people came to the forums. In the spring of 2004, Ohio Fair Schools Campaign drew hundreds of citizens to meetings on school finance, which often covered NCLB as well. It also issued a report on interviews with school officials about the impact of NCLB on Ohio. Memphis, Tennessee's Partners in Public Education gathered the opinions of parents and community leaders through a series of focus group discussions on NCLB and people's aspirations for their schools.

PEN has prepared individual state reports that summarize the testimony and basic state demographic and performance data. Before the hearing project began, PEN had selected three provisions of NCLB to focus its work on—accountability and testing, teacher quality, and building committed communities. The testimony was not always organized around these three themes, but they ultimately proved to be the central issues raised by the panelists.

"NCLB is a wonderfully written law that is all about parent involvement, school choice, and supplemental services. However, like with most things, the devil is in the details."

—Robin Foley, Federation for Children with Special Needs, Boston, Massachusetts



## Testing and Accountability: Identifying and Responding to Low-Performing Students and Schools

There is no doubt that the American public wants public schools to be accountable for the performance of all students. "Passing the buck cannot continue when it comes to our children," a Lancaster, Pennsylvania, parent said. "There should be no reason why our children are graduating without the necessary skills to be productive members of society, and far too many are."

### A Witness's Story: Welcome Change

"Ten years ago I complained at a conference with a teacher that my 10th grade son's paper was unintelligible. I was told that many 10th graders were not able to write any better than that. I currently have a daughter in 10th grade and have seen her rewrite papers this year for grammar, punctuation, and logic that I know would have been passed over in 1994. So, personally, I see this as an improvement—that the teachers finally have expectations for my children as high as my own."

—Leigh Bowser, parent, Altoona, Pennsylvania



The underpinning of accountability under NCLB is the disaggregation of data on the performance of certain groups of students—by income level, those with disabilities, limited English speakers, and racial/ethnic status. While the PEN survey indicated a majority endorsed the disaggregation of data (53 percent), educators are slightly more in favor than non-educators. As an official of Chicago's Community Renewal Society put it: "Probably the best thing NCLB has done is shed light on the fact that there are many schools that have labored under the misconception they're the greatest places to be, when they're actually not serving large sectors of their population."

One problem that surfaced in the hearings, however, is the stigma attached to a group of students seen as more responsible than others for a school's failure to meet its Adequate Yearly Progress goals. The group most often singled out is children with disabilities.

Parents of children with disabilities and their advocacy groups are often conflicted over the testing requirements and the results revealed as part of a school's disaggregated data report. They have been zealous about attaining inclusion for children with disabilities, and holding higher academic expectations for them. Such efforts may be threatened when children with disabilities must attain what most of those testifying described as "unreasonable" test scores. On one hand, parents support higher standards for their children. On the other, they find the new accountability policies to be, at times, inappropriate and unfair. Also, not only are the children and teachers demoralized, they fear being excluded—again. A Boston parent who works with the Federation for Children with

Special Needs was unsure about the impact of NCLB. He welcomed the increased cooperation between regular and special education teachers, but he "cringed" at what might happen if he used the choice option to transfer his child to a higher performing school. He asked: "Will the leadership in a higher performing school really honor a school choice request from a family from an under-performing school if the student has a disability? Will the students with disabilities be left behind at under-performing schools? Once enrolled in another school, will the teachers really welcome students with disabilities into the general curriculum?"

With the statistical prospect that few schools in the whole country eventually will be able to meet their AYP goals, disaggregation of data presents some problems not yet faced by policymakers. Gretchen McDowell, representing the Illinois PTA, endorsed standards and tests aligned with them, but she anticipated a dilemma ahead. "If the expectations for some groups seem unrealistic to parents and the general public," she testified at the Chicago hearing, "then the force of not meeting AYP will be lost. If everyone is said to be failing because of a subgroup, even schools that the public understands to be succeeding with a vast majority of their students will pay less attention to their AYP status." A Buffalo, New York, parent raised the prospect of another dilemma. She lamented that the NCLB testing policies were not being used to determine successful schools and practices that could serve as models for struggling schools. If disaggregated data reporting ultimately will cause most schools to miss AYP targets, "Where will the models come from?," she asked.



While the use of test-based disaggregation of data is important, much more troubling to most of those who testified is the overall dependence on *test-based accountability* under NCLB.

State assessment systems have existed at least as long as the minimal competency testing of the 1970s. Also, more than two-thirds of the states subjected themselves to comparisons of achievement as participants in the National Assessment of Educational Progress for more than a dozen years (all are required to do so now under NCLB). The 1994 ESEA revisions stimulated many states to develop or revise assessment systems supposedly more aligned to their standards.

Still, the punitive consequences of testing results under NCLB shocked the public education system throughout the country. On the plus side, they probably stimulated the first national debate about assessment policies from a grassroots point of view—that of students, parents, and communities. At the PEN hearings, people were taking an initial step at influencing policy by reaching a consensus about what they do not want in an assessment system.

- **They do not want assessments to focus on a limited set of skills.** Even business leaders on several panels called for tests that measure skills beyond basic reading and math. “We’re very supportive of the accountability aspects, and we’re okay teaching to the tests,” said the managing director of a \$3 billion corporation in New York City. “But once you have the basic skills, it’s how well you get along with other people, your public speaking skills, your understanding from other disciplines such as art and music that make the difference.” A representative of La Raza, testifying in Los Angeles, endorsed NCLB’s testing as long as it is “authentic” and measures a broad range of skills.

“Coming from my background in the creative field, I will say that one of the critical areas for success of people in this field is being able to think on your feet, being able to respond to situations, and being able to really go in and analyze a situation that’s based on all of the information you’ve been able to gather...I think it’s extremely important that we realize that being able to pass a test isn’t necessarily sufficient to qualify a student as prepared for success in the real business world.”

—Advertising businesswoman,  
San Antonio, Texas



Students recognized the limitations of current tests easily. All students do not do their best on traditional tests, pointed out a Philadelphia high school student, who was accustomed himself to such tests as the SAT. He urged the use of portfolios as alternatives. A Los Angeles high school student supported testing, as did all the students, but a single test, he said, should not be used to indicate a school's performance. The quality of the education at a school "also comes down to the kind of community services students do, their engagement in extra-curricular activities." One of his fellow panel members added: "Some of my friends are really just amazing in what they can do with their time and how they manage it, but their test scores are just the opposite of what they can do."

Parents also argued for more sophisticated assessments. A New York City parent who has formed a math education advocacy group said the assessments being used by the state for reading and math "need an utter overhaul. To talk about third through eighth grade test performance at this point...is meaningless. We can't begin to glean from them what we need to in terms of student achievement." A community witness in Pennsylvania contended that the country has experts who can develop tests that measure student progress in terms of writing samples, creativity, and problem solving. "Let's use the brains that we have as adults," she said, "and create some effective measurements that will (produce) the kind of graduates we need..."

Many parents and community groups wanted test results to be used more for diagnosis—determining student and school weaknesses and strengths—and less as the basis for punitive actions. Even though there was strong support of accountability and having more data available, no one said

schools were using the test information to change priorities or practice. If it was happening, it was invisible to them. If the data show low performance by race or economic status, "then let's do something productive and positive with it," said a San Antonio parent. Use the information to identify the problems instead of create wider disparity, she said. "Let's not just say: 'Oh. Okay. Well, you know, those Latino kids over here are not doing well, and they're not going to get any more funding unless they improve their scores'"

A representative of the Chicago Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights, as well as witnesses in Massachusetts, California, Texas, and Pennsylvania, believed NCLB would be more effective if it were used to stimulate local accountability and local assessments. Local values are being left out of the NCLB process, said the Chicago lawyer. "If, for instance, a local community really values citizenship as something to be learned by the time children graduate, then that would be built into judging whether or not the schools were meeting their goals and functioning successfully," she explained. Moreover, because of the tests used in Massachusetts, said a representative of the Boston Private Industry Council, "community engagement takes a back seat," and many skills valued by employers, such as critical thinking, are not being assessed.

Survey results showed that on average, educators and non-educators both feel that a single annual test cannot assess student body performance. This trend is mimicked with regard to the ability of such a test to assess individual student performance. The charts below show beliefs among all respondents (educator and non-educators) regarding administration of a single test:



**FINDING:** Approximately 9 out of every 10 respondents believed that a single annual test CANNOT tell if the entire student body needs academic improvement.

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

	Percent
Yes	5
No	92
Unsure	3

**FINDING:** Approximately 9 out of every 10 respondents believed that a single annual test CANNOT tell if individual students are performing satisfactorily.

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

	Percent
Yes	7
No	90
Unsure	3

- **They do not want irrational responses to test-based accountability.** Many parents told of children who became ill or regressed because of the pressure to perform on tests, but if one digs deeper on this issue, it is not the tests per se that are the problem, but, it is due more to the reaction of teachers and administrators to the test pressure themselves.

### A Witness's Story: Panic Over the PSSA

"At my school we are in Correction Action 2. The principal and everyone else has been going crazy trying to bring up test scores. So, they spent millions of dollars for test prep classes that counted as electives. They tried to bribe us by saying that if we took the first test for three days straight, then we would receive \$5. The test in March was for six days, and if we took it for all of those days without having to do makeups, then we would receive \$30. The kids who did above average would receive \$200...They should have put the money into more up-to-date textbooks."

—Mary Wells, Philadelphia high school student



A teacher in Brooklyn was assigned a self-contained classroom of 32 eighth graders six weeks before citywide exams, and told to teach exclusively test prep materials until the exams. “The principal, fearful that their status as a most improved school would disappear, blew common sense to the wind, forcing students and staff to engage in meaningless repetition of facts for six hours a day in the same room for six weeks,” a colleague reported. “Not surprisingly, the school’s scores did not dramatically improve.” A Philadelphia high school student said the focus on testing and narrowing of the curriculum turned off students who already lacked self-confidence as learners. Such school policies only made them feel worse, he said, especially when they were told that the test would determine their future. “A lot of students weren’t coming to school,” he said, “and there was anarchy when it came to attendance at the test.”

This was the kind of story told over and over again, mostly by students who saw opportunities for real learning subsumed by low-level drills. Students reported an insidious process going on in their schools—intense test prep teaching that guarantees students will become disengaged from academic learning, so teachers and administrators

---

“I feel as if I am going to school for the sole purpose of learning how to pass the tests. At Austin, only 6 percent of the students can read at grade level. Why are they teaching us to pass a test? Why aren’t they teaching us to read?... Please stop teaching me the strategies to pass the test. Teach me how to solve the equation. Teach me the formulas. Teach me how you came to the conclusion that is the right answer. I can pass the test. Teach me what I need to know so that I can understand what I’m doing.”

—Jamie Smith, junior at a Chicago high school

---

respond with even more of the same. “The tests completely have taken over the school,” observed a Columbus, Ohio, student, “but if you look deeply, students haven’t really learned anything. So, the school is failing, in a way.” The testing mania, said a graduate of the Los Angeles schools, now a student at Georgetown University, “is getting in the way of true teaching”

- **They do not want the accountability and testing mandates to lower standards.**

While NCLB imposes a single process and goal on the nation’s schools, states set their own standards and design their own assessment systems. Each was required to prepare a plan for achieving the NCLB goals, which was submitted to the U.S. Department of Education for approval.

Faced with an unacceptable number of schools not meeting AYP goals, some states have lowered their standards and/or taken full advantage of revised regulations to reduce the number of schools needing improvement. Any increase in schools meeting AYP goals probably will be temporary because the rule changes are a one-time fix—and the progress targets are getting tougher. Not as well publicized are effects in classrooms and on policies that states were



developing. A California teacher and parent from a rural area east of Sacramento said educational leaders in his home district realize that achieving 100 percent proficiency is “nonsensical.” They had been enthusiastic about the state’s accountability system and were working hard to meet its quality standards, until NCLB was implemented. “They could all see that they would never be able to have 100 percent of students proficient,” said the parent, “and so now they focus on short-term results. They just want to make sure that this year things look a little better than they did last year.”

### A Witness’s Story: Abandoning Illinois Standards

“I served on a task force that was designing the next generation of tests for Illinois. It was going to furnish all the standardized testing that school districts would need to meet NCLB provisions and assess students based on all of the Illinois learning standards. This would have saved districts money and testing time and provided a sense of how the district’s students were doing compared to the rest of the state on all of the Illinois learning standards. However, in spite of monies for testing provided by NCLB and using the testing requirements of NCLB as a rationale, our state legislature has eliminated all testing except that required by NCLB. We are not going to test writing or social studies, or fine arts, or health, or physical development. I know this...cannot directly or totally be blamed on NCLB, but it is another object lesson in unintended consequences and one that will not lead to greater efforts at educating a well-rounded population. School districts are very likely...to concentrate on what is tested, not what any of us would wish for our children.”

—Gretchen McDowell, Illinois PTA



Teachers informed a businesswoman from Sacramento, California, who had taught a Junior Achievement program for five years which focused on hands-on learning and practice in teamwork, that there is no time for such things anymore. Project-based learning, teachers said, does not fit “with the other stuff we have to do to make sure that the academics are met.” A fellow panelist and author of a book on parents' rights in California's public schools has found that the only time the window is open for enrichment, applied learning, and parent contributions is a few weeks at the beginning and end of the school year. “Otherwise, it's just preparation for tests...They won't let you in for anything.” A senior at Bedford (Ohio) High School complained that “a lot of our classes have been turned into only test-oriented classes.”

Many parents believe the costs associated with more testing undercut school improvement plans and basic programs, even though the full impact of the cost of increased testing will not be known until the 2005-06 school year when testing in math and reading in grades 3-8 becomes mandatory. Still, the NCLB environment is considered responsible for some of the funding woes. “We have suffered irreparable damage with teacher loss, courses cut, crowded classrooms, and lack of adequate supplies,” testified a western Massachusetts parent.

Students in several sites were upset that Advanced Placement and honors courses had been sacrificed to focus on remedial work for low-performers. At almost every hearing, parents or advocates testified about the loss of enrichment and other supports for gifted children because of the change in priorities. A pediatrician testified that she was unable to get diagnostic services for her dyslexic but gifted student patients because they were considered likely to do well on tests. Resources were diverted, instead, to more severely disabled children for test preparation.

“I grieve that NCLB has turned our classrooms into pressured assembly lines whose job it has become to turn out rote robots who have learned what to do and how to do it to pass a test and save a school from being labeled a failure. What about the children? It saddens me to hear fifth graders no longer talking about a poem they wrote for their creative writing lesson or their amazement at learning a really cool fact about history.... Instead of these things, which make a well-rounded, more civically engaged person, fifth graders in the current environment of today's classrooms now talk about in what percentile they scored.”

—The Rev. Sallie Jo Snyder,  
Erie, Pennsylvania



Students who have dropped out or are barely hanging on—but have found a way to work toward high school graduation through alternative schools—feel vulnerable under NCLB. One of its accountability measures looks at the number of students who graduate from high school “on time.” Some alternative schools, which often give struggling students more time to finish, will have trouble meeting this requirement, as well as adequate yearly progress goals applied to an enrollment that constantly turns over. No one was more eloquent on the issue than an alternative school student from San Antonio:

“For most students, graduating from high school doesn’t seem like too daunting a task, but for those of us who are homeless, gay, lesbian, bisexual, or of transgender, a teen parent, parent-to-be, who have emotional or mental illness, who have one or more parents in prison, one or both parents deceased, who are dealing with or have parents dealing with an addiction or disease, for those of us for whom English is not our first language, or for those of us of lower socio-economic status, graduation from high school seems to be impossible... Adequate yearly progress will ruin alternative high schools and send the students back into.... our previous high schools that were not helping us achieve our common goal to graduate.”

- **They do not want assessment systems that are unfair to children with disabilities and English-language learners.**

The public testimony strongly supports accountability and high standards for children with special needs, either the disabled or second-language learners. In fact, parents of children with disabilities, as a group, were more positive and hopeful about NCLB than any others. The witnesses, however, did not believe current assessment policies or the assessments themselves are benefiting these children.

Even though the U.S. Department of Education has eased some regulations on assessing children with disabilities and English-language learners, the basic requirements remain. Witnesses disagreed with them philosophically. An Erie, Pennsylvania, grandmother whose young granddaughter had to take a grade-level test instead of one aligned to her Individualized Education Plan pleaded with the hearing officers to understand what that means. “Setting standards that are impossible for these children to achieve only sets them up for failure,” she said. “You can never know unless you have special challenged children how heartbreaking it is to watch them struggle to succeed.” She and witnesses in almost every state asked for alternative tests that encompass the goals in IEPs, which would allow students to be evaluated on the basis of individual progress. Also, the students should be allowed to fulfill state testing requirements using the same kinds of accommodations regularly available to them in classes.

The assessment of English language learners is equally inappropriate, according to the testimony. Not only are the available tests inadequate, the testing policies ignore what is best for the children. A former teacher in Chicago explained that English-language learners are being assessed with tests normed on monolingual populations, and even if specially designed tests for these students are



used, they should be limited to diagnostic evaluations and not applied to high-stakes decisions. Regular standardized tests in academic subjects actually assess learners' abilities in the English-language, not what content they know, ignoring the possibility that they may have content knowledge in another language.

Hispanic parents and advocates for Hispanic students often spoke proudly of language and culture as being self-identifiers for students and families. For many, NCLB seems to have hastened efforts to minimize the importance of the family language and dim hopes for bilingualism in education. "We know from research that dual language programs are the best bilingual programs for all children and especially for the language minority children," said a San Antonio parent. *"No Child Left Behind* is running roughshod over those programs. We're going to early exit transitional programs, which we all know are the worst thing that we can do to our language minority kids."

---

We're using one test for all, regardless of language, regardless of whether a child was brought up in an English-speaking home or in a Spanish-speaking home. This is unfair and is culturally biased. This act adversely affects Mexican-American students.

—Iris Salinas,  
parent and United  
Farmworkers activist,  
Mission, Texas

---

Immigrant students are unfairly being held responsible for not doing better academically and are being pushed out of the school system, charged the director of the New York Immigration Coalition. Instead, it is the school system that has failed them. Because of the requirements, she explained, "they are now being counseled as early as 10th grade that they are never going to make it and that they should just go and get a GED. Of course, there are no GED programs available to them. Guidance counselors are telling them to go and find a Spanish language GED program. It is a joke that any of these programs are actually available for them, even if they were an appropriate option."



## Strengthening the Classroom: Teacher Quality

NCLB rightly places teacher quality at the center of improving student and school achievement. Research indisputably supports common sense in this matter—that teacher effectiveness has more to do with student learning than any other variable. The federal law defines a “highly qualified teacher” as one who holds at least a bachelor’s degree in a core academic subject, has full state certification or licensure, and has demonstrated competence in the core subject areas which he/she is teaching. States determine how the competence will be measured and must have all classrooms staffed by highly qualified teachers by the 2005-06 school year. New teachers in Title I schools already need to be highly qualified. Also, teacher aides/paraprofessionals must obtain at least an associate degree or certification.

The focus on teacher quality was welcomed by many of those who testified. A high school teacher from Lancaster, Pennsylvania, noted that in the past, school districts routinely hired long-term substitutes who might not be certified in their subjects, or shifted teachers around on a temporary basis. “Now, it is law that requires a more uniform stringent standard,” she said. “Proficiency has replaced convenience and cost savings.”



NCLB, however, gives little guidance related to the quality of state certification systems or teacher preparation programs. Although it includes a provision for standards-based professional development, the quality of the teacher preparation programs are left for state and local school districts to determine.

The PEN hearings revealed two shortcomings about the highly qualified teacher provision in NCLB:

- Few parents/communities had information either about it or about the quality of teachers in their schools.
- They did not agree with the definition of a qualified teacher; they had higher expectations.

“I’m not sure if this would change the amount of money that it costs to follow NCLB, but perhaps we should...go to actual classrooms to watch teachers and make sure that they are really good teachers instead of just certified teachers.”

—Meredith Carter, student,  
Mohawk Trail Regional School  
District, Massachusetts



## Teacher Quality: Parents' Right to Know

### What NCLB Says

Parents with students in Title I schools must be notified that they may request information about the qualifications of their child's teacher(s) and paraprofessional(s)

### Who Is Responsible?

Title I Schools

### When?

At beginning of every school year

Teacher and paraprofessional information must be in a language and format that parents can understand.

Title I Schools, to the extent practicable

At beginning of every school year

As part of the local school district report card, the school district must include information on teachers and the percentage of classes taught by highly qualified teacher on a district and individual school breakdown.

Local School District

Annually or when requested

As part of the state report card, the state must include state-wide information, as well as report on every school district and individual school, on teachers and the percentage of classes taught by highly qualified teachers, and must disseminate widely.

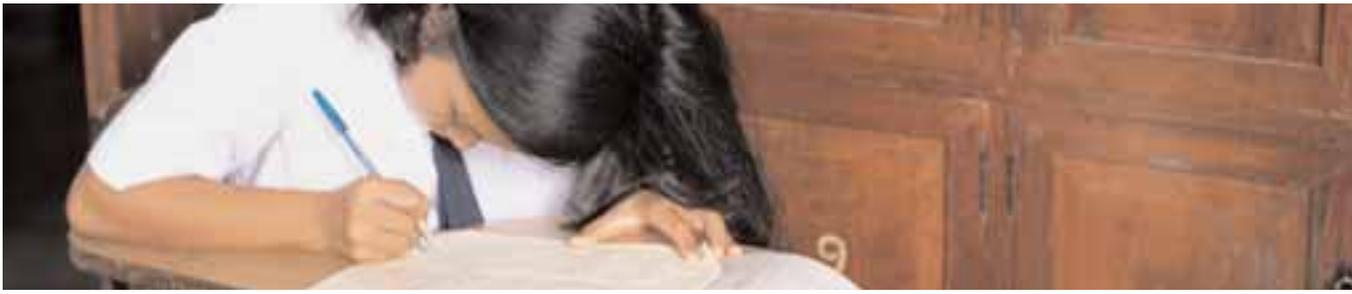
State Education Agency

Annually

Provide information to the US Secretary of Education, and make widely available to the public, information on the progress of every state, every school district, and every Title I school in meeting the NCLB Highly Qualified teacher objectives.

State Education Agency

Annually



### Information that Title I parents may request:

- Whether the teacher has meet state qualifications and has a license for the grade level and the subject he or she teaches
- Whether the teacher has an emergency or provisional license
- What degrees the teacher holds and the field of discipline of his or her certification or degree
- Whether the child is being taught by paraprofessionals and if so, their qualifications

Survey results confirm the absence of knowledge about the status of teachers in a school. Only about one-fourth of non-educators had received information concerning the qualifications of teachers in their schools, even though these data are supposed to be part of a school's report to the public. (On the other hand, 57 percent of educators had the information, indicating a lot more data were available than were accessible to parents and communities).

In Boston, Hispanic parents, unaware of the NCLB requirements, "were shocked" to find out that their children's teachers might not be qualified, according to a community organizer. Her comment under-

scores the absence of public discussion about the quality of teachers and of teaching in lower income communities where parents are more inclined to defer to "expertise" within schools and often put safety ahead of other considerations when rating schools.

While state reports to the U.S. Department of Education indicate that almost all teachers across the country are "highly qualified," there appears to be some disagreement over what that means.

The PEN online survey results (see chart below) show that while over half of respondents believe that many teachers in their schools are qualified, only one-fifth of respondents believe all teachers in their schools are qualified. Educators generally had more positive views of the qualifications of teachers in their schools than did non-educators. A total of 86 percent of educators believed that there were either "many" or "all" qualified teachers in their schools, as compared to 60 percent among non-educators.

### How would you rate the teachers in your local schools?

	All Respondents	Educators (in percentages)	Non-Educators
All qualified teachers in local schools	21	27	11
Many qualified teachers in local schools	55	59	49
Some qualified teachers in local schools	14	8	22
No qualified teachers in local schools	0	0	1
I have no way of judging	10	6	17



## A Witness's Story: Snooze Time

Do we care whether our teachers are qualified or not? The students are not doing what they should, but are we putting too much blame on the students? My algebra teacher is excellent. He's engaged. He's just into it. He's demanding, but everyone shows up for this class on time....But I go to a snooze fest [in another class]. This teacher acts like a spokesman for the Clear Eyes commercials, and we sit there and listen, but half the class is asleep....If my algebra teacher was not qualified but he's teaching me what I have to know to graduate in the next two years, would I care? Would my mother care? So, if you say: 'we went back in his records and saw that he's not qualified to be your teacher, so we're going to take him out and bring in the Clear Eyes man because he's qualified. He apparently knows what he is doing because we say so. He took the test! You all understand what I'm saying?

—Richard Guss, 10th grader, Harlen Community Academy, Chicago

Given an opportunity to define a highly qualified teacher in a public venue, parents, students, and community activists had strong opinions. As with testing, students proved to be keen observers.

Students raised a fundamental issue about the worth of the current certification process in deciding who is a good teacher and who isn't. A basic quality for them is the teacher who goes the extra mile. A Memphis student entered high school far behind academically because "not all of my previous teachers taught me the required curriculum," but, fortunately, "the teachers with higher qualifications made my education a better experience," she said. "Highly qualified teachers should have the training and the professionalism to understand that teachers need to devote quality time with their students. I know everyone does not learn at the same pace. It is helpful and much appreciated when teachers take extra time out of their schedule to help students in need."

A Philadelphia high school senior also was adamant that "sometimes qualified doesn't mean certified." In an algebra II class, he said, "we didn't do any math. We just sat in there and watched TV and stuff. I got a million of those stories. I mean, we have the teachers, but they're not teaching." A Sacramento, California, high school student compared two of his teachers—one on an emergency certificate and the other with a doctorate degree. Students "really understand" the former but not the latter, he said, but the uncertified teacher was dismissed. Regardless of a teacher's qualifications, the student added, "it's always going to come down to their ability to teach the students what they need to know."



“It is great rhetoric and a great concept when we talk about students achieving and everyone reaching this ultimate goal of success in closing the achievement gap. I think true success comes from within the classroom and the interaction and the learning environment that both the students and the teachers have with one another. When we talk about the highly qualified teacher who has a doctorate in a certain subject and a teacher who understands students, the teacher who understands the students is the one who’s going to get through.”

—Lamonte Jones, recent graduate and student member of the Sacramento school board

In a more formal sense, parents and other adults wanted teachers to have a sense of personal responsibility, too, toward student learning and to be competent in classrooms with a great deal of diversity. They were not sure teachers received preparation for either skill. A Sacramento mother confessed that she was not a psychologist, “but I’ve had enough experience with my seven children that suggests to me that learning takes place in a variety of ways and there is no one approach that best fits all. But we need to prepare our teachers in a way that is going to be meaningful to the student, not to the process.” A frustrated Chicago parent described double-digit dropout numbers from the high schools in her neighborhood, “yet we have qualified teachers, according to the information we receive in the mail. But if our qualified teachers aren’t engaging these young people to stay in the system, so what?”

A Los Angeles parent called for redesigning teacher preparation to condition teachers for urban areas where counseling is as important as instruction. “They have to know about the community and how they can inspire kids to make a difference in their communities,” she said. Others wanted to be sure teachers were “culturally competent” and especially that they held high expectations for all students. The youth development director for the Memphis Urban League cited a PIPE study in which teachers and principals held low expectations for students and did not believe they could overcome socio-economic disadvantages. “We must have teachers who believe that all students can learn and who teach to that possibility,” she said. “If we don’t, it won’t happen...For that to not be a part of the criteria (for highly qualified) is a huge failing.”



On the other hand, witnesses expressed genuine empathy for teachers trying to cope with NCLB requirements. Most did not believe teachers approved of narrowing the curriculum and spending so much time on test prep, but, “it’s the fear of losing their jobs” that causes them to bend to the pressure. A student from Milan, Ohio, told of good teachers leaving, once a school was labeled as failing to meet AYP. “The teachers ask,” she said, “why would I want to teach at a failing school when I can make much more money if I’m over there at a passing school?... You label it failing, and everybody runs away.” A New York City student said she lost opportunities to learn more in academic classes because “my teachers felt they were forced to teach towards the Regents Exams. “When we asked questions about things that might be a little more off topic but definitely significant to our education,” she testified, “they would say: ‘I’m sorry, but we don’t have time for this because you are getting the Regents in June and we have to stick with the curriculum and learn this now!’” This student did not even believe the Regents were “smart tests.”

---

“I see teachers who are just becoming incredibly frustrated and burned out—very, very gifted teachers who feel as though society doesn’t appreciate them anymore. And that’s a deep, deep concern because a lot of these people are very dedicated and very skilled, and we are just undermining the profession of teaching in a terrifying way.”

—Jan Resseger, United Church of Christ Justice and Witness Ministries, Ohio

---

Educators who testified wearing two hats—as teachers and as parents—told of their frustrations. Teachers trying to use themes to differentiate instruction for students who need extra help “are hard-pressed to do so,” because the only priority in the school is raising basic skills test scores. A Brookline, Massachusetts, teacher described teachers as “appalled at what the high-stakes testing demands are doing to children in classrooms.” A teacher educator from the University of Illinois, who was trying to prepare her students for high-level teaching in diverse classrooms, described the frustration of her student teachers because the only instruction they saw happening was drill and more drill. “Such experiences are causing future teachers in the last year of their training program to panic about their career choices,” she said. “And it also makes them question why their teaching training program is too often not compatible with the reality of teacher-directed instruction that is focused on high-speed test instruction at the expense of quality, challenging instruction on a daily basis.”



## Building a Committed Community

The theory of action behind parent involvement in NCLB is very simple. Provide parents and communities with reliable information so that they can make informed decisions about the two major intervention strategies embedded in the law—the choice of moving their children to a higher performing school and/or a choice of providers of supplementary education services. That is why references to parents and parent involvement occur throughout the law, more than 150 times.

Testimony at the PEN hearings, however, strongly indicated that the theory is not working out. Parents must go to extraordinary efforts to become well informed. Choice of another school not only is a hollow opportunity, it goes against the values of the parents and communities who want their schools to be excellent. Few had been able to access supplemental education services. If information is power, then the people in schools and communities most impacted by NCLB remain powerless.



Still, it is the hope of becoming empowered that brought people to the PEN hearings. The emphasis in NCLB on parent involvement emboldened parents who had never spoken up before. They wanted to tell their stories and present their ideas on school improvement. In some places, such as New York City where community school boards no longer exist, access to top school officials seems out of their reach, but NCLB gives them a wedge. "For far too long," testified a parent from Lancaster, Pennsylvania, "parents have allowed local districts to make decisions for our children. As a parent, I felt they knew what was best for my child. Now I know that I can have input in the decisionmaking process and that all decisions that are made are not necessarily in the best interest of my child." Attending a school fair, a Los Angeles parent found out that all of the schools where her children were "needed improvement." She then attended a school meeting and realized she and other parents were not getting full information. "I decided that I had to demand that my children get a quality education and not leave it up to teachers," she said.

This parent, who had participated in a parental involvement policy committee, learned what her rights were and organized a small group of parents to educate others. At several hearings, witnesses told stories about grassroots organizing stimulated by the message in NCLB that parents are important. A parent from the Washington Unified School District in northern California also had organized "a handful of strong parents" who are using phone trees and other personal contacts to inform parents. Across the river, parents, businesses, and college campuses in Sacramento are collaborating as never before on standards and supports for students. The leadership of business and faith communities in Memphis testified in favor of the parent involvement provisions of NCLB, saying they meshed with their growing collaboration around student support.

"My primary reason for supporting the formation of the Edgewood Family Network (San Antonio) was because a lot of promises were made, and nothing was happening. When I started asking what the problem was, I didn't see any results of all that was promised with this *No Child Left Behind* that had brought so much hope to us. I went to a conference where it was first introduced, and I was so excited because it felt like they were talking to me. And they kept saying, 'We need parents involved.' And I said, 'I'm right here...!' But the schools don't know how to deal with parents. For some reasons, they feel threatened."

—Martha Alvarado, parent,  
Edgewood district



The reality of the typical relationships between schools and their parents/communities, however, is sad and the reasons almost unfathomable. Those who testified were passionate about their faith in education, their children's welfare, and their willingness to help. Yet, they told of being excluded, even of being subjected to restraining orders; of feeling they were token participants in order to satisfy paperwork compliance; and of having no way of either accessing or understanding information about their schools. Those who are trying to organize other parents experience problems seldom found in higher wealth districts. They need increased resources beyond the one percent set-aside provided in *No Child Left Behind* to cover the time, program, and methods to meaningfully involve parents. Information needs to be translated into families' languages. Perhaps the most serious barrier is the lack of trust between parents whom the advocacy groups try to involve and the schools, born out of years of the parents being treated as if they "don't matter." A parent organizer in Boston even said that parents need a place to meet away from schools "where it is safe to talk."

Speaking with difficulty in halting English, a Los Angeles mother told about wanting to work with her school. She won trophies as a parent volunteer, but the school ignored parent ideas and her criticisms of how money was being spent. "On dishes," she said, and "on programs that are not good for the children. Maybe they don't care."

More than disdain for parent and community involvement surfaced at the hearings. In some places, school officials were out of compliance with NCLB requirements on providing information, involving parents in decisionmaking, and monitoring interventions available to parents. Moreover, the online survey results substantiated how seldom people are being included in NCLB's school improvement efforts. Three-fourths of the respondents have not participated in any of them, even though 87 percent report they know either something or a great deal about the law.

### A Witness's Story: "I Don't Have Two Heads"

"Because I was chair of the site council this year, I refused to sign the site plan because I knew from *No Child Left Behind* that was the only tool I could use to hold the school and the district to make changes.... After fighting all I could to get the changes made for parent involvement in the budget, I had to use that tool. And I had to bring a mediator in to help me get the information.... There is not enough training for teachers and the principals to (keep them) from looking at parents like we have two heads.... I'm on a district committee for accreditation, and the teachers attacked me, saying that 'Well, this isn't how it is.' They were trying to script me. And I was trying to show them evidence that what they were saying is not working."

—Loretta Bonilla, parent, Washington Unified School District, California



## Online NCLB Survey on Community and Parent Involvement

Have you been asked to become involved in any of the following educational activities related to NCLB?	Percent Responding Yes
Developing state standards	7%
Developing the state test required by NCLB	3%
Developing the state and/or local report cards required by NCLB	4%
Developing the district Title I parent involvement policy	6%
Giving input into the district Title I program	9%
Making recommendations for what constitutes a "highly qualified teacher" under NCLB	5%
Participating in the improvement team for schools that were identified as needing improvement under NCLB	13%
None of the above	75%

The issue of listening to parents and communities and respecting their involvement reflects far deeper problems than a law can resolve, commented an Ohio social justice activist. This report, therefore, focuses on those areas where parent interests and NCLB intersect.

- Becoming informed.** Few parents or students who testified knew much about the details of NCLB. While they could speak to the issues it addresses, eloquently at times, they either did not know how to access information about NCLB or were confused by it. Students said their peers ought to be informed about the law and its consequences so they would understand about the importance of testing. Because students are unaware of the law and reason for testing, "they just disapprove of it and do not take it seriously," said a Los Angeles high school student. Nor did she see any change in reporting to parents, who are just as uninformed as students.

Educators seem unaware of how confusing the information is to parents. Parents in some states receive data from two different assessment systems, described in different verbiage. "We at least need a common language," suggested a Pennsylvania parent. One-third of the parents who contact an advocacy group in Boston for special needs children "are confused, not informed or misinformed about their rights under the education reforms," reported a parent who works with the group. A community activist in Chicago has worked with parents on the process of drawing up school plans, "then we look at what the mandates from central office are and how they conflict with our plans, and then we look at the mandates from Springfield and how they conflict with our plans, and that's really disempowering."



School report cards fail to provide all the information parents and communities want and what is reported is written in jargon, many complained. Witnesses in New York City particularly criticized the lack of information on school report cards. They wanted specifics—the climate of the school, teacher qualifications, classroom size, sources and use of funding, and comparisons with schools in other districts—“in user-friendly language that the ‘common Joe’ can understand.”

Information sent to parents about transfers or supplemental education services, often stuffed in children's backpacks, is late and garbled. A Chicago local school council parent representative complained that parents learned about supplemental services in a legal format. “You needed a Mississippi lawyer to decipher it,” she said. Many parents already feel disconnected from the schools, said an Erie, Pennsylvania, community representative, and then they are given data that “seem put down on them from some entity they know nothing about, and they completely withdraw.” Outside advocacy/parent groups seem to be the only sources for parents wanting intelligible, useful information, but they also acknowledged that their efforts usually reach only a small percentage of parents. No one reported extra efforts on the part of school districts or states to use non-traditional means—such as different kinds of media—to inform parents about NCLB and their rights under the law.

- **Transfer Provisions.** At the time of the hearings, the transfer provision under NCLB—allowing parents to transfer their children to a higher-performing school after their current school failed to meet adequate yearly progress for two years—was not a viable option at any of the hearing sites. First, it was not working as intended. Second, it was not the option most parents and communities wanted.

“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 when I tried to get as much information to my parents as I could, repeatedly. I have found as a parent myself that it’s pretty confusing trying to understand *No Child Left Behind*. And (I object) to constantly reminding our children that it’s for their academic achievement and it’s to pass tests. And when I got a flier sent home telling me to teach my child stress relaxation techniques before his 4th grade proficiency test, I knew that there was a big, big problem.”

—Maria Valore, parent,  
South Euclid/Lyndhurst  
School District, Ohio



According to a December 2004 General Accountability Office study, about 1 in 10 of the nation's 50,000 Title I schools were identified for school choice in each of the first 2 years since enactment of *No Child Left Behind*. The proportion of schools identified for choice varied by state. Yet only about 1 percent of eligible children, or 31,000 students, transferred in school year 2003-2004.

At the PEN hearings, not only did witnesses say information about the transfer options was unavailable or late or incomplete, they believed it was a hollow promise. Some parents, living in urban fringe as well as rural areas, have no schools to transfer to. Others said there were very few openings at available schools. Students, teachers, and parents talked about the negative effects on receiving schools—overcrowding and attention diverted away from successful programs to help incoming students who were seriously behind academically. Transferring students were boarding buses before dawn for long rides to a different school.

Most witnesses, however, did not focus so much on the shortcomings of the choice option. They had another message. They wanted their neighborhood schools to have the resources to become good schools instead of abandoning them.

---

It will be a glorious day in America when parents in the inner city are justifiably able to take as much pride in their community schools as are the parents in our more affluent neighborhoods. We must provide every community with a school worthy of their respect.

—The Rev. Sally Jo Snyder, Erie, Pennsylvania

---

"Leaving one school and going to another does not guarantee success for students," said a Springfield, Massachusetts, parent. "We need to know what is wrong in schools that are failing." A Boston parent termed moving students to other schools like "an underground railroad." It results in creating "a majority of under-performing schools rather than working with the schools to become performing." Another Boston parent realized the "high price" his daughter paid in participating in an inter-district transfer program—boarding buses before dawn, no chance to participate in high school activities, isolated from friends. She was admitted to a four-year institution, however. He placed his son in the local city school, but he did not do well academically. "Why," the father asked, "did the schools not give my son a better education without his having to go to another community?"

Witnesses particularly objected to the loss of resources from schools that were struggling to meet their AYP goals. Obviously, they were unaware of any new monies available to these schools but were troubled that schools lacking adequate support to begin with were now facing the possibility of losing funds because of transfer transportation costs and/or loss of the average per pupil funding for transferring students.



The President of the National Association of Women Business Owners, testifying in Los Angeles, said that as a business owner, she knew that “it is counter-intuitive to sanction or withdraw resources from an underperforming entity or department. It makes far more sense to use tests that measure performance as a means of determining what kind of targeted assistance is necessary to actually improve the education of children in that particular school.” Her group, she said, has serious reservations about simply moving children from one place to another as if this were a “magic wand.” Instead, “we believe that children should be educated in their school, in their community.” An Austin, Texas, youth community organizer believed the choice option will cost American society because it undermines the country’s social and equity efforts ever since the Brown desegregation decision. “Allowing parents to pull their children out of underperforming schools at the school district’s expense may result inadvertently in segregating low-income students and students of color into underperforming schools,” he said. Without the needed resources, the choice policies may create “a cycle of failing schools in urban low-income neighborhoods... (and), ironically, cause greater numbers of children in these neighborhoods to be left behind.”

• **Supplemental education services.**

Parents’ other option under NCLB is to select a provider of supplemental education services, usually for after-school tutoring. The transfer option was available in schools failing to make adequate yearly progress in the first year; the supplemental services became available in the second year (the timing varies among states because they had different starting points for determining which schools need improvement).

Testimony at the hearings about supplemental education services duplicates somewhat the experiences with transfers—not enough information, received too late, or without enough time to reply. However, some witnesses preferred this intervention to transfers. New York City parents revealed a flaw in NCLB, or how New York interprets it, when they told about using the transfer option, then finding out children were no longer eligible for supplemental education services at the new schools.

States have approved about 1,300 supplemental education services providers, but according to some witnesses, the quality of the services is not being monitored by districts or states. “Who is responsible for holding the providers accountable?” asked a Chicago parent. The previous year, she said, the supplemental services started months late “and parents are still waiting for reports on their children.” After the Chicago hearing, the U.S. Department of Education disallowed the Chicago Public Schools from being a supplemental services provider because the district was not making adequate yearly progress.

Some providers could not serve students with special needs. A survey in Buffalo found that “half of the private providers were unaware of the needs of their students and less than half actually had services to accommodate special population students.” In New York City, providers assured authorities they would serve English language learners, but a survey by the Immigrant Council found out differently.



## The Effects of Stigma

The choice provisions—to transfer and to obtain supplemental services—are individual decisions made by parents on the basis of test score results. Perhaps the most troubling issue raised in the PEN hearings is NCLB’s unintended consequence of pitting parents’ concerns for their children against their desire for acknowledgement and respect. This is not what the public wants to happen. When schools are stigmatized, students, parents, communities, and the public feel the pain in various ways.

Labeling schools as failing, or “needing improvement,” is a stigma that tears communities apart. Perhaps the theory is that, once labeled, communities and schools will rally and turn around. In a few instances, parents and students believed the labeling had increased parent involvement at the schools and heightened teachers’ attention to student needs. For the most part, however, students, parents, and communities become demoralized. School personnel panic and react in ways that divert resources from good instruction. Public education supporters have a more difficult challenge in raising local support for schools from taxpayers and community resources. Before attaching failing labels to schools, a community representative from Erie, Pennsylvania, said that schools must have adequate resources. To do otherwise, “is cruel and it is unjust.”



“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 people compare us to other school districts and they say: ‘Well, you are not doing a good job.’ But our teachers are doing a good job. It’s just that the schools are being pitted against each other because of the testing.”

—Debbie Tidwell,  
Fairview Park, Ohio

Parents and students described conditions in low-performing schools that help explain why the schools have not been able to get better. Inexperienced teachers are assigned to needy students and schools, students often must share outmoded textbooks, classrooms are overcrowded, computers are broken, and teachers lack basic resources. A Philadelphia high school student, who had a balanced view of NCLB—“a good law that is badly implemented”—was critical of incompetent teachers but sympathetic toward others, explaining that they needed more resources. “You can be the best basketball player in the world,” he told the hearing officers, “but nobody would know you unless you have a court and a basketball. That’s how it was in my high school career. We’ve got a lot of smart students in West Philadelphia High School, it’s just that they don’t have a lot of resources.”

Without knowing the context that schools operate in, it is unfair to publicly label schools, said a Los Angeles businesswoman. Because the labeling encourages flight from the school, efforts to deal with the contexts that contribute to its failure—internal and external—are undermined, she said. The context does not always stem from urban blight. A Memphis high school student, attending what he said was called the “gem” of the city school system, felt the sting of labeling when his school did not make AYP because it houses the school system’s hearing impaired program. His private school friends teased him, and he only found out the background because he insisted upon an explanation from his principal. This student studied the issue and decided that the shorthand used in sign language did not prepare hearing impaired students for the state’s writing test. The public didn’t know this, however, and not allowing for special circumstances, he said, undermines public faith in public education.



Adults in Memphis blamed the stigma of failure for demoralizing the community and discouraging economic investments. Said a great-grandmother, who was proud of the standards the schools once held, even though in a segregated system, and sure that the schools her children and grandchildren attend will improve:

“Both schools are moving forward.... I foresee both schools in the future off the list, if and when NCLB supplies the resources and funding that are needed to make this possible. The concern I have about the effects of NCLB is the stigma of the high school being listed on the failing list even though they are improving and are getting more help with tutors and mentors and parent concerns.... If we lose students because of this low scoring it will tend to split the community because some students in a family will enroll in higher performing schools and others will have to stay in their old school.”

A representative of the Memphis Urban League, as well as testimony from other sites, also called for balancing the public accounting of schools. “We don’t need to overly stigmatize,” she said, “and we know there are success stories in every group at every school, and we need to hear those stories.... There are students succeeding and parents working diligently and educators working diligently in every one of our schools. We need to lift up those examples and help them learn from each other.”

The Memphis Urban League and the Business Council of New York State were two groups that had acted upon a strong recommendation from several hearing sites—that progress and success be the basis or part of the assessment of schools. Both groups sponsor recognition programs. Other witnesses, however, wanted specific changes in NCLB that would take progress on improvement into consideration when assessing students and schools, as in a value-added system.

All those who commented on the negative effect of stigmatizing schools and communities also strongly supported accountability. They recognized the dilemma of not tolerating failure but keeping community hopes up. The answers seemed to be two-fold: give the schools the resources they must have to improve and use the strengths that parents and communities are waiting to provide.



## Conclusion: Messages for Policymakers from the Hearings

So far, this report provides a summary of ideas, opinions, and stories taken directly from the testimony about NCLB. The PEN hearings, however, revealed issues not specific to the federal law but certainly relevant—even essential—to achieving its goals.

The public wants to talk about the “big picture” that is public education, freely and openly. Through the hearings, they had an opportunity to extend beyond a particular local problem and share their concerns, and also to have a platform for their passions, whether it was school libraries, or funding for Even Start, or opposing the access of military recruiters to high school lists. To the witnesses, the hearing officers represented a link from their hopes to policymakers they would never have a chance to meet. Their testimony turned into several crucial messages for these policymakers.



- Frustrations directed at NCLB, especially over funding, stem from inadequate state actions. The poor facilities, old textbooks, unprepared teachers, as well as budget cuts that were devastating some schools, result from years of under-investment in public education. Not by design, but also not surprising, all eight states where hearings were held were—or recently had been—in the throes of school finance lawsuits brought by school districts. Witnesses tended to expect the support from NCLB to do more than possible, even if fully funded, but that probably is because local and state sources have never been sufficient. The fiscal year 2005 federal budget provides even less NCLB funding to almost every school; only the highest poverty schools received increases. Now that federal mandates and their ensuing costs cover every school, not just the most impoverished, it will be up to states to fill in the gaps. If state policymakers avoid addressing this problem, they risk further frustrating a public that is finding its voice.
- The general lack of understanding by many witnesses about the sources of funding for public education reflects another issue—truly inadequate communications. It is understandable that the public does not have a full grasp of the 1,200 pages of NCLB federal law and 3,000 pages of federal regulations concerning it. There are certain assurances in the law, however, that parents and communities will receive reliable, consistent information about the essentials of school improvement such as teacher quality and data on school achievement. The testimony revealed that neither parents nor communities knew enough to develop informed understandings of school progress. Even students seemed left in the dark about the underlying reasons for accountability and testing. What also became obvious in the hearings is that the American people do not understand the public education system very well.



They are not clear about what level makes what decisions, whether it is about funding or selection of assessments. The language used to communicate with parents and communities often is inarticulate and unclear. Yet, the outpouring of feelings and passion for good schools at the PEN hearings indicates there is a deep well of support for public schools, if people have enough sound information. It also is important for policymakers to remember that three-fourths of the audience for information about schools has no personal way of getting that information because they have no school-age children. To enable them to act responsibly toward the schools as a common good requires thoughtful and thorough communications.

- Communities, parents, and advocacy groups have the power to insist that states monitor the implementation of NCLB. The law supports their demands in many areas including parent involvement, teacher quality, and reporting to the public. The testimony at the PEN hearings and the public controversy over NCLB indicate that some people and groups are more concerned about avoiding the law than with using it to address deep problems in the public schools. While NCLB represents an unprecedented top-down strategy that states are responsible for carrying out, it also encourages grassroots involvement. It offers policymakers and the public education system an opportunity to create a public dialogue about what qualities the community wants schools to foster in children, what values it wants to guide schooling, and what roles everyone should be playing to support children as they grow into adulthood. Depending on the spirit with which policymakers go about implementing the law, this opportunity could become the most valuable tool they have for assuring excellent schools for all.

---

If we're looking at 100 percent of our students at the advanced or proficient level by the year 2014, then we better start looking at 100 percent parent involvement, community involvement, and government leadership because...that's the only way we're going to get there.

—Antoinette Kostelnik,  
Connellsville  
(Pennsylvania) Area  
School District

---

## NCLB Resources

Public Education Network has developed NCLB resources and publications that are available on its website (as well as hard copy) to inform parents and community members about the law so they are equipped to make decisions, and take action.

Using NCLB to Improve Student Achievement:  
An Action Guide for Community and Parent Leaders

<http://www.publiceducation.org/tools.asp>

This guide outlines the rights, roles, and responsibilities of community and parent activists and leaders, and highlights ways that NCLB can serve as a “launch pad” for strengthening the public voice in education.

## Action Briefs

[http://www.publiceducation.org/nclb\\_actionbriefs.asp](http://www.publiceducation.org/nclb_actionbriefs.asp)

NCLB Action Briefs, a project of Public Education Network (PEN) and the National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education (NCPIE), are designed to keep community and parent leaders up to date on various provisions of NCLB. The action briefs are written in easy-to-use language focused on specific sections of the law and include pertinent regulations, a glossary of terms, action steps, and additional resources. Topics include: overviews of Title I, Teacher Quality, Parents' Right to Know, Community and Parent Decision-Making, Standards and Assessment, Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), English Language Learner (ELL) provisions, Public School Choice, Parent Notifications Required by NCLB, Supplemental Educational Services (SES), Recruiter Access to Secondary School Students, and state and local report cards.

## Website Resources

The following national educational organization websites are useful resources on various aspects of *No Child Left Behind*. They do not include all of the many resources available about NCLB, but they comprise a representative sampling that parents and the community can use to help them better understand some of the major provisions of NCLB. Many of these are cited in PEN's Action Briefs.

## General NCLB Information

Alliance for Excellent Education  
<http://www.all4ed.org/>

Council of Chief State School Officers  
<http://www.ccsso.org/>

The Learning First Alliance  
<http://www.learningfirst.org/>

Education Commission of the States  
[http://nclb2.ecs.org/Projects\\_Centers/index.aspx?issueid=gen&IssueName=General](http://nclb2.ecs.org/Projects_Centers/index.aspx?issueid=gen&IssueName=General)

Title I Report  
<http://www.titlei.com/>

US Department of Education  
<http://www.ed.gov/index.jhtml>

National Center for Educational Statistics  
<http://nces.ed.gov/>

Northwest Regional Education Laboratory  
<http://www.nwrel.org/planning/reports/pi/pi.pdf>

National School Boards Association  
<http://www.nsba.org/site/doc.asp?DID=11662&CID=654%20-%2050k>

## Teacher Quality

American Association of Colleges  
for Teacher Education  
<http://www.aacte.org/>

American Federation of Teachers  
<http://www.aft.org/>

National Board for Professional  
Teaching Standards  
<http://www.nbpts.org/>

National Council for Accreditation  
of Teacher Education  
<http://www.ncate.org/>

National Education Association  
<http://www.nea.org/index.html>

Southwest Center for Teacher Quality  
<http://www.teachingquality.org/>

## Testing and Accountability

Achieve, Inc.  
<http://www.achieve.org/>

Center for Law and Education  
<http://www.cleweb.org/disabilities/NCLB%20Choice%20and%20disability.pdf>

Citizens Commission on Civil Rights  
<http://www.cccr.org/education/index.cfm>

Education Trust  
<http://www2.edtrust.org/edtrust>

FairTest  
<http://www.fairtest.org/nattest/Kappan.pdf>

Supplemental Educational Services Quality Center  
<http://www.tutorsforkids.org/>

## Building a Committed Community: Parents and the Public

Children's Defense Fund  
<http://www.childrensdefense.org/education/education/otherpubs.asp>

ASPIRA  
[http://www.aspira.org/public\\_policy.htm](http://www.aspira.org/public_policy.htm)

National PTA  
<http://www.pta.org/>

Parent Information Resource Centers  
<http://www.pirc-info.net/>

Parent Training and Information Centers  
<http://www.taalliance.org/centers/index.htm>

Parent Leadership Associates  
<http://www.plassociates.org/>

The Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence  
<http://www.prichardcommittee.org/>

Wrightslaw  
<http://www.wrightslaw.com/nclb/index.htm>

National Coalition for Parent  
Involvement in Education  
<http://www.ncpie.org/>

A Parent's Guide to NCLB  
<http://www.wrightslaw.com/info/nclb.parent.guide.heath.pdf>

The Rural School and Community Trust  
<http://www.ruraledu.org/issues/nclb.htm>

National Association for Bilingual Education  
<http://www.nabe.org/>

National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction Educational Programs (NCELA)  
<http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/>

National Council of LaRaza  
<http://www.nclr.org/>

Office of English Language Acquisition,  
U.S. Department of Education  
<http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oela/index.html>

## Elected Officials

National League of Cities  
<http://www.nlc.org/Issues/Education/index.cfm>

U.S. House of Representatives  
<http://www.house.gov/>

U.S. Senate  
<http://www.senate.gov/>

National Governors Association  
<http://www.nga.org>

National Council of State Legislatures  
<http://www.ncsl.org/>

The White House  
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/>

## NCLB Hearings and National Hearing Partners

**Harrisburg, Pennsylvania**  
May 20, 2004  
1:00–4:00 PM  
Temple University, Harrisburg, PA

Pennsylvania Public Education Partnership,  
Jackie Foor, coordinator

Lancaster Foundation for Educational Enrichment  
445 North Reservoir Street  
Lancaster, PA 17602  
Phone: 717-391-8660  
Fax: 717-391-8659  
[www.lfee.org](http://www.lfee.org)

Laura Olin, executive director  
Carolyn Karl

Mon Valley Education Consortium  
336 Shaw Avenue  
McKeesport, PA 17602  
Phone: 412-678-9215  
Fax: 412-678-1698  
[www.mvec.org](http://www.mvec.org)

Linda Croushore, executive director

Philadelphia Education Fund  
Seven Benjamin Franklin Parkway  
Suite 700  
Philadelphia, PA 19103-1294  
Phone: 215-665-1400  
Fax: 215-864-2494  
[www.philaedfund.org](http://www.philaedfund.org)

Carol Fixman, executive director

Pittsburgh Council on Public Education  
2934 Smallman Street  
Pittsburgh, PA 15201-1523  
Phone: 412-434-1652  
Fax: 412-281-6683  
[www.Ed4AllKids.org](http://www.Ed4AllKids.org)

**Boston, Massachusetts**

June 2, 2004  
4:00–7:30 PM  
Old South Meeting House, Boston, MA

Rennie Center at Massachusetts Institute  
for a New Commonwealth  
18 Tremont Street, Suite 1120  
Boston, MA 02108  
Phone: 617-742-6800, ext. 102  
Fax: 617-589-0929

S. Paul Reville, executive director

**Sacramento, California**

June 8, 2004  
4:00–7:30 PM  
West Sacramento Civic Center,  
West Sacramento, CA

Linking Education and Economic  
Development (LEED)  
10680 White Rock Road, Suite 110  
Rancho Cordova, CA 95670  
Phone: 916-858-0686  
Fax: 916-858-1371  
[www.leed.org](http://www.leed.org)

Deanna Hanson, executive director  
Elizabeth Horan, director of communications

**Los Angeles, California**

July 21, 2004  
4:00–7:30 PM  
WATTSHHealth Foundation, Inglewood, CA

Urban Education Partnership  
315 West 9th Street, Suite 1110  
Los Angeles, CA 90015  
Phone: 213-622-5237  
Fax: 213-629-5288  
[www.urbanedpartnership.org](http://www.urbanedpartnership.org)

Johnny Darnell Griggs, CEO and president

**Bedford Heights, Ohio**

September 14, 2004  
5:30–9:00 PM  
Columbus Intermediate School, Bedford Heights, OH

Ohio PTA  
40 Northwoods Blvd  
Columbus, OH 43235  
Phone: 614-781-6344  
Fax: 614-781-6349  
[www.ohiopta.org](http://www.ohiopta.org)

Barb Bungard, president

Ohio Fair Schools Campaign  
94 Columbus Road  
Athens, Ohio 45701  
Phone: 740-592-2866  
Fax: 740-593-5451  
[www.ohiofairschools.org](http://www.ohiofairschools.org)

Debbie Phillips, executive director

Ohio ACORN (Columbus)  
Columbus ACORN  
379 N. 20th, Lower Level  
Columbus, OH 43203  
Phone: 614-258-8854  
Fax: 614-258-9487  
[ohacorncoro@acorn.org](mailto:ohacorncoro@acorn.org)

Katy Gall

**San Antonio, Texas**

September 28, 2004  
3–8 PM

Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center Theater,  
San Antonio, TX

Intercultural Development Research Association  
5835 Callaghan, Suite 350  
San Antonio, TX 78228-1190  
Phone: 210-444-1710  
Fax: 210-444-1714  
[www.IDRA.org](http://www.IDRA.org)

Aurelio Montemayor, director, PIRC

**Memphis, Tennessee**

September 30, 2004

4:00–7:30 PM

Teaching and Learning Academy, Memphis, TN

Partners in Public Education

The Clarke Centre

5101 Wheelis Drive

Suite 200

Memphis, TN 38117

Phone: 901-682-8100

Fax: 901-682-7004

[www.pipememphis.org](http://www.pipememphis.org)

Éthele Hilliard, president

Dorothy Alston, director, Parent Education

Programs

**New York, New York**

October 7, 2004

4:30–8:00 PM

St. John's University, Manhattan Campus, NY

Campaign for Fiscal Equity, Inc.

317 Madison Ave, Suite 1708

New York, NY 10017

Tel: 212-867-8455

Fax: 212-867-8460

[www.cfequity.org](http://www.cfequity.org)

Michael Rebell, executive director and counsel

Molly Hunter, ACCESS Network Director

Wendy Lecker, attorney

Samira Ahmed, deputy director

New Visions for Public Schools

320 West 13th Street

New York, NY 10014

Phone: 212-645-5110

Fax: 212-645-7409

Robert Hughes, president

Anjeanette Allen, program officer

Good Schools for All

712 Main Street

Buffalo, NY 14202

Phone: 716-843-8895

Fax: 716-843-8899

Helene Kramer, executive director

**Chicago, Illinois**

October 13, 2004

4:00–7:00 PM

Garfield Park Fieldhouse, Chicago, IL

Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform

407 South Dearborn Street, Suite 1500

Chicago, IL 60605

Phone: 312-322-4880

Fax: 312-322-4885

[www.crosscity.org](http://www.crosscity.org)

Diana Nelson, executive director

Lauren Allen, senior program director

Dion Miller Perez, Chicago coordinator

Janet Lyons, administrative director