

# No Child Left Behind in OHIO

## But Communities Are Feeling Left Out

### OHIO NCLB HEARING

Columbus Africentric Early College •  
Columbus  
December 5, 2005 • 2:00–4:00 PM  
*Local hearing partner: KnowledgeWorks  
Foundation, Columbus*

### HEARING OFFICERS

**Jim Kohlmoos**, President, National Education Knowledge Industry Association, Washington, DC • **Emby Miller**, Director, Education & Technology Training; Columbus Urban League, Columbus, OH • **Guitele Nicoleau**, Director, Research and Member Development; Public Education Network, Washington, DC • **Terry K. Peterson**, Senior Fellow, Education Policy and Partnerships; University of South Carolina Educational Foundation, Kiawah Island, SC

### STUDENT WITNESSES

**Tiffany Smith**, **Alexandra Sanley**, Brookhaven Leadership Institute, Columbus • **Dwayne Sunita Denton**, **Katrina Woods**, Marion-Franklin High School, Columbus • **Heather Loomis** (*school not given*) • **Jasmine**, **Ryan Brown**, **Christian Colson**, **Jesrusa Clark**, Dayton Early College Academy • **Lakita Williams**, Brookhaven Leadership Institute, Columbus • **Janesa McPherson**, Columbus Africentric Early College • **Rachel Sanchez**, **Travis Cushing**, Lorain Early College High School • **Ashleigh Hart**, **Tarshay Dennard**, **William Owens**, School of Multiple Intelligences, Lima

### PARENT WITNESSES

**Bonita Johnson**, Toledo • **Tammy Avila**, Toledo • **Laura Pryor**, Toledo

### COMMUNITY WITNESSES

**Claude Cliborne III**, Public Affairs Manager, Sprint, Lima • **Mary Cofer**, Director of Diversity Culture, American Electric Power, Columbus • **Eddie Harrell**, Executive Director, Project GRAD, Columbus • **Kent Friel**, Cincinnati Citizens School Committee • **Bob Faulkner**, Mahoning Valley Vision for Education • **Norris Finley**, Project Coordinator, Coalition for Quality Education, Toledo • **Gary Williams**, Director of Outreach, Washington State Community College, Marietta • **Holly Fidler**, Educator, Columbus • **Eileen Cooper Reed**, former Director, Children's Defense Fund, Cincinnati • **Trisha Jackson**, **Dexaray Porter**, Academy of Creative Expression, East High Education Campus, Cleveland

*I think the schools should want to change for the better.*

Travis Cushing, Lorain Early College High School

**N**CLB is changing Ohio's schools, and these changes threaten critical components of school improvement. This theme characterized an Ohio hearing that gave students, parents, and community leaders – audiences very much affected by the law, but usually left out of the policy debate – an opportunity to tell their side of the NCLB story.

Calling NCLB a “momentous piece of legislation,” Chad Wick, president of KnowledgeWorks Foundation, said that NCLB had ushered in a new era of public school accountability, but “true accountability has to reach beyond results of tests, report card scores, and state sanctions” and called for policies that “truly serve the people.”

### Positive Signs but Caveats

Students testified that the learning environment was improving. They report receiving more attention from teachers and more focused teaching. Kent Friel, a civic leader, praised the increased accountability under NCLB, and Norris Finley, a Toledo community organizer, noted that the law had generated an unprecedented amount of conversation about schooling. Almost none of the witnesses, however, gave the law an unqualified endorsement. While its goals are laudable, implementation is not working out.

### Testing Problems

Witnesses testified that by basing accountability solely on state test scores, NCLB was having negative consequences. Denying students a diploma because they cannot pass a test “is totally a contradiction of No Child Left Behind,” said Heather Loomis, a Brookhaven Leadership Institute student. Alexandra Sanley added that it was “ironic” to have high-stakes testing at a time when schools were pushing alternative assessments.

The emphasis on standardized tests is watering down the curriculum, according to several witnesses. Travis Cushing said he was repeating material he learned in the eighth grade. Eileen Cooper Reed, former director of the Children's Defense Fund in Cincinnati, believes NCLB's narrow focus ignores other purposes of schooling. “To develop [as] whole, productive adults,” she said, “children need to do more than pass tests. They need physical, social, and academic and mental development from schools.”

Gary Williams, director of outreach for a community college, explained that business people “don't want to hire test takers.” They want to hire “people who have a work

ethic. They want people to show up on time with the basic skills necessary to do the job. They want creative people. They want problem solvers. They want people who can work in teams, and they want lifelong learners.”

| Statistics            | Total Schools <sup>1</sup> | % fail to make AYP | % schools in improvement | # LEAs     | % LEAs fail to make AYP | % LEAs in improvement | Graduation rate <sup>2</sup> | Per pupil expenditure <sup>3</sup> |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <b>Ohio 2003–04</b>   | <b>3901</b>                | <b>17.0%</b>       | <b>12.5%</b>             | <b>608</b> | <b>36.0%</b>            | <b>8.1%</b>           | <b>84.3%</b>                 | <b>\$9,035</b>                     |
| United States 2003–04 | 90237                      | 24.7%              | 11.4%                    | 13959      | 28.5%                   | 12.8%                 | 74.9%                        | \$8,308                            |
| <b>Ohio 2004–05</b>   | <b>3838</b>                | <b>24.3%</b>       | <b>13.1%</b>             | <b>609</b> | <b>44.5%</b>            | <b>9.7%</b>           | <b>85.9%</b>                 | <b>\$9,557</b>                     |
| United States 2004–05 | 89493                      | 25.6%              | 12.9%                    | 13878      | 23.7%                   | 12.4%                 | Not avail.                   | \$8,618                            |

## Teacher Quality

Witnesses agreed that all students should be taught by highly qualified teachers, but they felt that teacher quality is far more complex than mere certification can address. Resources should be directed less to testing and more toward developing stronger relationships between teachers and students, urged Gary Williams. That teacher-pupil relationship was very important to students, who felt that the primary criteria for a qualified teacher should be support for students and the ability to get material over in a variety of ways.

Williams finds the teacher quality benchmark unrealistic. In Appalachia's high-poverty schools, he said, up to 42 percent of secondary teachers lacked a major or minor in the subject matter they teach. Because of the low tax base, teachers are underpaid and schools will not be able to attract enough teachers to meet the benchmark. Certification was not the problem he explained: *“Real change happens when an educator is given training, the time, the tools, and the resources to allow that human connection between the teacher and the child to occur that sparks the child’s enthusiasm, and sets the mind free to dream and think about the future....”*

## The Community-Building Factor

Perhaps no issue impinged upon people's values and beliefs as deeply as NCLB sanctions on schools and communities. Witnesses were troubled by the effect of labeling on schools and communities. Business people want schools to be viewed as community assets, not failing institutions. Eddie Harrell, executive director of Project GRAD, added that “if our schools are viewed as community assets regardless of their performance...I think we can impact the schools to help them turn the corner to achieve the progress that we hope they will achieve.”

Norris Finley noted that failure to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) under NCLB should trigger higher levels of assistance, not remove student and parent assets from the schools. Eileen Cooper Reed of Cincinnati observed that, because there is little space available in better-performing schools, students are not likely to be able to move from a low-performing school so “the bottom line is to take it [resources] to the students where they are.”

Students were unanimous in their opposition to labeling of students and schools. “When district and school report cards are negative,” said high school student Heather Loomis, “it reflects on the community. Who wants to attend a failing school? Better yet, what parent wants to live in a community where the schools are failing?”

Efforts to improve student progress, many testified, should be more helpful and less punitive. “We all want a good education,” said Ashleigh Hart, a junior from Lima, who went on to explain how she sees the problem: “Just in our group of 13 students who have been preparing for this event, we have one who wants to be a veterinarian, one who wants to attend West Point, and one who plans to be singing and dancing on Broadway. So what is a good education? One that can open our chosen doors. Can a school that is driven to ensure adequate performance on standardized tests prepare Shannon, Billy, and Charis all equally well? No Child Left Behind seems to believe that education is one size fits all.”

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

Funding for the hearing was provided by the George Gund Foundation.

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

<sup>2</sup> Data taken from Ohio State Report Cards, available at [http://www.ode.state.oh.us/reportcard/state\\_report\\_card/](http://www.ode.state.oh.us/reportcard/state_report_card/).

<sup>3</sup> National Education Association, *Rankings & Estimates Update (2005)*. Figures are computed from NEA Research, Estimates databank. The figures are based on reports through August 2005.