

Local Perspectives on the No Child Left Behind Act
Hearing
Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary Education
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Testimony of Donald Tilley

Chairman Kildee and Members of the Subcommittee, I would first of all like to thank you for allowing me this great honor.

I started teaching in 1991 at All Saints Central High School in Bay City, Michigan. After five successful years, opportunities began to present themselves and in 1996, I accepted an offer to begin teaching in the Bay City Public Schools, where I remain today. As a high school social studies teacher, and a product of the same school system in which I teach today, I have seen many changes in education. As you may or may not know, I am a hard working, forward thinking, and self-motivated individual. A father to four children, ages ranging from 4 (she will begin kindergarten this fall) to 15, I not only educate at work, but also at home. I hope to instill the same qualities and work ethic I have developed over my lifetime to not only the children I teach, but to my own.

Since the inception of No Child Left Behind in 2002, education has gone through major changes. Some good and some not so good. As I stated before, I am forward thinking and would like to right the wrongs and build upon what is working.

First and foremost is funding. Mandates, resolutions and laws that are not supported by all of the funds needed to implement them, cannot and do not work. When I say supported by funds, that is not to imply a carrot and stick approach. For example, if classroom sizes are to be smaller under this act (as they should be), then the funds should be allotted to allow schools to hire professional educators and support staff at professional salaries to give each and every child the best possible education. I do not believe this is asking too much. Teachers in our district are not getting rich at the expense of anyone, in fact they are paying for health insurance benefits, and have been over the years by giving up increases in salaries, and have not had a pay increase in nearly two years, let alone keeping up with the rate of inflation. I do not believe that anyone in this room or watching out there looks forward to or strives to make less money next year than they did in the previous.

Correct me if I'm wrong, but Michigan was authorized to receive approximately \$758 million in Title I funding for FY 2006, but only received \$427 million. That is a funding shortfall of about \$331 million. That shortfall comes at the expense of educators and support staff. We are a service industry. The greatest portion of our funds goes directly to providing an education. Less funds, less opportunities for children, less chance of schools complying with the requirements of NCLB and meeting Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).

Secondly, No Child Left Behind, from my perspective implies that NO CHILD is to be left behind. Implementation of AYP should not penalize children or schools, it should support them.

As a teacher in a failing school, due to a sub group not having enough children take the State Assessment, I have seen first hand what such a blanket law can do to a school. Failure to achieve one of approximately 30 requirements to meet AYP denies that school AYP. School districts cannot control cultures. They can however, shape them. Public schools cannot control the raw material, or children, who walk through their doors. Unlike a business, we cannot turn away a child of any ability or lack thereof, and if a school does so, shame on them. If progress is a mandatory measurement, then schools should be at the very least measured against themselves. By marking a school as failing, communities are earmarked as failing, therefore, not having or severely limiting the ability to attract new businesses and new residents. The schools are then doubly punished as they will lose children and therefore resources. Schools that acquire the students turned away, often increase class sizes to accommodate the new students, thereby hurting another child's ability to acquire more individual assistance.

When it comes to being highly qualified, NCLB has done a disservice to many students. Teachers who were more than qualified were forced to leave their positions and take positions in either retirement or under some other qualification umbrella. One prime example I can give was an outstanding math teacher once working down the hall from me. She had 30 years of service and was one of the best math teachers I have ever witnessed in action. She was a dedicated, hard working, student advocate and she knew her subject. Because of her Physical Education major and only a minor in the math field, and regardless of her accomplishments within the classroom and the students who walked through her door, at 30 plus years she was forced into retirement. Who benefited here? While we cannot change what has been done, the future of NCLB needs to consider the accomplishments, credibility, and talents of those who are successful in the field. While a simple grandfather clause could have saved many outstanding educators across this great country, NCLB must consider some form of credit or reward for years of successful experience in the classroom. I encourage the Committee to reform the HOUSSSE process to make it easier for good teachers like my former colleague to continue in their field.

Furthermore, I am an individual who strives to achieve goals in my life. However, I am also a realist when it comes to those expectations. I will not ever play in the NBA. I can guarantee it. I was not blessed with the ability to put the ball in the net consistently (if at all). I was not born 7 feet tall. I can live with that. I do however have a goal that each and every day I walk into the classroom I will put forth my best effort and recognize the abilities of each and everyone of my students. I strive to give them the best education possible. I do not set any of my students up for failure. Everyone matters.

However, NCLB is doing just that. By setting goals that 100% of students will be proficient in math and reading by 2014 schools are set up for failure. Therefore, the students that attend those schools will be set up for failure. It is likely that schools not meeting this requirement will be penalized, instead of rewarded for the progress they have made. Constant pressures to test, test and test our students more and more frequently consistently takes away from precious classroom time. Students learn by doing. Some mandated tests such as ELA and Math Proficiency Equivalents can take up to as long as two weeks to administer. That time lost in the classroom impacts state assessment tests given later in the year. Those test results again come back to AYP and failing schools. Testing is often a necessary measure to obtain the cognitive information and abilities students have acquired. However, so is common sense. The greatest test of ability in

each an every child's life will be just that - life. But not everyone will be afforded the same opportunities, so even that test is flawed.

Education must service all students regardless of socio, economic, or academic status or capabilities. No Child Left Behind needs to recognize this, not only in the form of Individualized Educational Plans, but by creating and funding programs for pre-school children. Ones similar to the Early On and Head Start programs. Programs for children that are need based, due to a variety to socio or economic pressures. Programs for elementary school children before and after school. These programs should include staff and resources capable of providing true counseling services to children in need. Whether the need be psychological, emotional, medicinal, sustenance or as a result of neglect. As I stated before, we cannot change a culture, but we can impact children. Many children need these programs. They do not have a choice to walk out of a home where there is physical, emotional, or neglectful abuse. While as a society we do not have the capabilities or resources to likely change the present culture, we can do our part to change the children. To deliver the educational and social opportunities that can break the cycle. Teach children of pride and belonging throughout the educational process. No Child Left Behind can continue in this positive direction by ensuring that courses in Self-Esteem and Self-Awareness are taught throughout middle and high school. We as adults tend to push our children toward goals they may or may not achieve, but often overlook what is really going on. Our children are constantly driven to measurement, but often times are so consumed by their own physiological and emotional development, they lose focus on those mandated goals. If children were educated on what their bodies, minds and emotions were going through, and that they were not alone, and were going to be alright, I am a firm believer that students would be better able to focus on the academics at hand, thereby developing stronger self esteem and the capability of understanding.

The United States has always been an academic leader. The results are obvious. They are sitting and working all around us. A focus on testing and more testing, modeling the academics of the elite in China, who I understand are still a larger number than all of the people of the United States, is not where we have found our past, nor where we shall find our future. We need to continue to be leaders in this world and not the followers. We need to set precedence. We must not forget the language in the Nation at Risk report some twenty years ago. Yes, we must strive for a more intelligent and forward thinking society, but we must also develop the skills and ethics in every child. We cannot push so hard on the academic elite that it comes at the expense of our talented and skilled in all other parts of our society. We need auto mechanics, welders, builders, contractors, architects, seamstresses, painters, musicians, sculptors, graphic designers, software developers, and whatever other future generational skill our students may offer. No Child Left Behind cannot forget that. It must ensure that all students, regardless of academic ability, are given the opportunities to continue to develop and nurture those skills that make each and every one of us unique. Our future will not come cheaply, yet it is an investment we can ill afford not to make.