

Prepared Statement

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Roundtable: "NCLB Reauthorization: Strategies that Promote School Improvement"

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Chairman Kennedy, Senator Enzi, and distinguished members of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee: I am extremely honored and pleased to participate in your kick-off round table discussion on the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, and specifically the amendments that were made to it in 2001 with the passage of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act.

On behalf of Governor Jennifer M. Granholm and Michigan's State Board of Education, I thank you for providing the Michigan Department of Education this special opportunity to testify here today on the successes the State of Michigan has experienced with the implementation of NCLB as well as sharing the challenges we have encountered that make it difficult to provide a fair and reasonable accounting of all schools and almost 2 million students in Michigan.

I applaud the committee's interest in hearing from those of us who have worked diligently throughout the country to implement this groundbreaking legislation. As the Superintendent of Public Instruction of the State of Michigan for just the last 18 months, although always an NCLB advocate, I have had literally a crash course in understanding the critical role of states is in providing the direction and leadership necessary to assist schools and districts in meeting the goals of the No Child Left Behind Act.

Michigan chose to immediately embrace the new law -- viewing it as an opportunity to create a statewide focus on school improvement and student achievement for every child. Michigan was one of only a dozen or so states that already had begun to determine Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), as prescribed in the Improving America's Schools Act of 1994. As a result, many of our highest-need schools began the NCLB era further down the federal "sanctions" path than similar schools in other states. As such, Michigan has helped blaze a trail for NCLB and stands as an innovator and model for other states to follow.

Michigan has embraced the moral imperative of NCLB that schools must provide the highest quality education for every child, regardless of race, culture, background, or learning ability. And I mean every child -- ALL means ALL. Clearly, NCLB has served as a catalyst for reform focusing on the importance of instructional excellence and student achievement, and brought attention to every child in the classroom.

Initially, I want to embrace the recommendations developed by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) that include positions and strategies leading us as a nation from No Child Left Behind to 'Every Child a Graduate'."

Michigan has made tremendous strides in increasing student achievement and re-tooling its K-12 education system over the past three years.

Michigan has implemented among the most rigorous high school graduation requirements in the nation; developed grade-level standards in math and reading that have resulted in statewide increases on our state assessment scores in grades 3-8; instituted a strong support system for our High Priority Schools that has resulted in 163 schools coming off the federal sanctions list last year; and will administer a new high school test this spring that will help drive more students into post-secondary education.

Michigan also has begun to intensely focus on improving teacher preparation programs in Michigan to ensure that we have educators who will deliver instruction to our students in innovative and relevant measure for our 21st Century learners.

Michigan's formula for building success in our schools has been steady and growing. In 2002, we were one of the first states to adopt the Reading First program. Today, Reading First is in 168 schools in high need geographic areas; encompasses 2,000 teachers and 40,000 students; and has resulted in significant increase in the percentage of students reading at grade level each year.

We have developed a School Improvement Framework – A research-based model of the proven components of school improvement that now serves as the blueprint to be used to develop improvement plans in our High Priority Schools (those schools not making AYP).

The Michigan Department of Education also has provided direct intervention and support strategies for our High Priority Schools, including: Principals' Academies; Coaches Institutes; and School Support Teams assigned to the most critical schools.

These School Support Teams represent a collaboration with the Michigan Department of Education, the state's Intermediate School Districts, and the school accrediting organization North Central Association. The teams conduct Comprehensive School Audits to investigate why a specific school is not making AYP, and assist the schools with developing an improvement plan based on audit findings.

Michigan's NCLB system of AYP sanctions has been established as "Phases," where after two consecutive years of not making AYP a school goes into Phase 1 (school choice and transportation); after three consecutive years, Phase 2 (Supplemental Educational Services, plus school choice and transportation); and so on, through the federally requirements for sanctions.

Michigan's Phase 1 and 2 schools are provided with training and their own nationally-recognized MI-MAP Kit. Developed by educators for educators, MI-MAP provides over 300 practical strategies and activities to shape, support, and sustain systemic reform and academic achievement.

For schools in Phases 3 – 5, in collaboration with the College of Education at Michigan State University, we developed a Coaches' Institute and trained 93 turn-around specialists to work with principals and school improvement teams as an alternative governance option.

Michigan has schools in NCLB Phases 6 and 7 that are placed on a "critical list". For these schools, we administer a comprehensive school audit, and turn-around specialists are assigned. This year, we're collaborating with the North Central Association to identify audit teams from their cadre of ambassadors.

Creating this kind of statewide capacity requires solid partnerships with our intermediate school districts (education service agencies), the professional education organizations, and universities.

As Michigan has led the way in meeting the requirements of NCLB, we have recognized and understood that it is a complex and comprehensive law that has been a true work-in-progress. Through the first few years of setting rules, regulations, and guidance, adjustments and amendments have had to be made at the federal, state, and local levels.

NCLB was fostered with the intent of transparency and accountability on the nation's public schools. Yet as my colleagues at CCSSO have agreed, each state is allowed different standards by which to determine AYP and each state has had different experiences in having their state plans for accountability approved.

By and large, the USED has been helpful to us as we have tried and tested; discovered what works and what doesn't work; what is fair and what is not fair for all schools; and continued to improve our state plan of implementation. However, like all things, there is room for improvement.

Michigan has urged the U.S. Department of Education to allow English Language Learners to be proficient in English before being tested, only to be denied. Our efforts to allow students to take five years to complete high school in some cases, in order to reflect the realities of today's evolving high school models, also have been rebuffed.

Michigan needs to be able to assess less severely cognitively impaired students with "in between" assessments that are rigorous but not necessarily tied to our grade level standards. These less severely impaired students should not be measured by regular state assessments and are not likely to achieve regular grade level standards. Yet they are not so severely impaired as to be eligible for the lower-level alternate assessments currently in place for "severely cognitively impaired."

Supplemental Education Services (SES), or tutoring, should be the first provision required on the federal sanctions list, rather than the second phase; and states should be provided adequate resources to administer and monitor these services. SES providers also should meet the same highly-qualified standard in their subjects as classroom teachers.

SES is an expensive, time consuming, and administrative-heavy option. In Michigan's successful experience, clear learning expectations, improved classroom instruction and effective school

leadership has had a much greater impact in turning around achievement than SES or choice and/or transportation. We would like to see the Regional Assistance Centers playing a more significant and increasing role in helping states with monitoring and evaluating SES providers.

Again, I would like to echo my colleagues in a call to strengthen resources to fully recognize the increased roles and responsibilities of states and the ever increasing challenges for districts to meet the NCLB requirements.

Every reform initiative has its challenges. NCLB is no exception. However, in Michigan we are encouraged by our results and believe that this endeavor will have a positive impact on our state for generations to come. Thank you for affording us this opportunity to share our experiences.