

Committee on Education and Labor
Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary Education
Field Hearing: Local Perspectives on the No Child Left Behind Act
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Testimony provided by:
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I want to thank you Chairman Kildee and members of the subcommittee for this opportunity to provide this testimony as you engage in the process of reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, known as No Child Left Behind. We appreciate your decision to host this hearing in our community.

My name is Jan Russell, Assistant Superintendent, Genesee Intermediate School District.

Genesee Intermediate School District (GISD) is a Regional Educational Service Agency serving the 21 public school districts and 10 public school academies in Genesee County. Its annual budget is over \$151 Million and the organization employs over 1,000 staff members. Genesee County is located in lower southeast Michigan and is the fifth most populous county in Michigan. Its student population is 85,000.

Genesee County has urban, suburban and rural populations, adding to the diversity of cultures and accessibility to services in the county. Flint, with 29% of the county's total population, is the urban and geographic center of the county and the fourth largest city in the state.

In GISD's Department of Special Services we coordinate special education for over 11,000 students with disabilities who reside in our local school districts. We provide consultation, physical and occupational therapy, school social work services, student evaluations, and many other services on behalf of our districts. We provide classroom programs to nearly 1,000 students in three center facilities. Two of our centers, Elmer Knopf Learning Center and Marion D. Crouse Instructional Center, house programs for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder, Cognitive Impairment, and students with Multiple Impairments. Our local districts refer these students because they, and most importantly, their parents, believe that an appropriate education can only be provided in a special school: a special school that is specifically designed to meet the individual needs of each student.

These needs are addressed through Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) that focus on functional skills such as personal care and independence, feeding, basic communication of wants and needs, management of unstructured time, and fully accessing their community. Our services are provided by highly skilled teachers and support staff who also address other student needs such as toileting, seizures, mobility, communication, assistive technology, medical care for personal equipment such as

tracheal tubes and respiratory or breathing apparatus, and a whole host of other very special services that most citizens would not believe are required to be provided in schools. All of our students take the alternate assessment, called MiAccess, which is Michigan's assessment instrument for students with severe disabilities. None of our students are in a course of study that leads to a high school diploma. Furthermore, our individualized educational programs are developed and approved by parents and teachers; those closest to our students.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 requires many things of school districts. The heart and soul of IDEA is that we must provide a free and appropriate public education to each individual student with a disability in the least restrictive environment, generally up to the age of twenty-one, while Michigan requires that services be provided up to the age of twenty-six. IDEA also requires that we have a full continuum of placements and settings for our students, including special schools like Marion Crouse and Elmer Knopf.

The important issue that I want to bring to your attention today is that No Child Left Behind requires that every district and school building must make adequate yearly progress (AYP) in meeting the goal of 100% proficiency on state assessments. This is measured by standardized tests that reflect a universal standard for all students. There are no such universal academic standards for students with severe disabilities. In contrast, we are accountable to our parents for the individualized programs we develop together for our special students. Therefore we must determine our success on the achievements of each student based on his/her unique educational plan. While NCLB as implemented allows a percentage of students with disabilities to be measured against alternate or modified standards, we do not believe that the law contemplates school districts such as GISD, in which virtually all of the students for whom we are held accountable – those in our Crouse and Knopf Centers – fit under the definition of students who should be measured against alternate or modified assessments.

In conclusion, we believe that the law should recognize unique districts such as ours with an accountability system that allows for the fact that we do not fit the standard mold and incorporates our students' IEPs and measurements of progress based on each student's goals. We find it neither accurate nor appropriate that we might be designated as not making AYP because of an accountability system that doesn't match what our students and their families need.

Thank you once again for this opportunity and would be glad to answer any questions.