

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

Mr. Chairman, I wish to thank the Committee for giving me this opportunity to speak on behalf of the nearly eighty five thousand members of the Michigan State PTA and the 5.5 million PTA members nationwide. I am glad to see Congress working so hard for our children.

My name is Andrea Debardelaben and I am a member of the Michigan PTA. I have been a member of the PTA for about 8 years. I have been a daycare provider for about 5 years. I have 3 children of my own - 2 boys, 1st and 5th graders that attend Longfellow Elementary and a daughter that attends Saginaw Arts and Science Academy.

Mr. Chairman, numerous studies have documented that regardless of the economic, ethnic, or cultural background of the family, parent involvement in a child's education is a major factor in determining success in school. Successful parental involvement strategies vary from region to region, school-to-school, parent to parent. However, it is important that Congress find ways to help provide parents more opportunities to get involved. As you begin work on the upcoming reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act I ask that you pay special attention to the role parents and our local communities have in trying to improve the academic achievement of all students.

As a member of the Michigan PTA and a strong advocate for our children, I have first hand knowledge of the importance of parent involvement. Moving beyond the normal definition of involvement has been key to helping many schools across Michigan. Still, there is much work left to do.

The state of Michigan has the 3rd worst economy in the entire United States. What makes this statistic even more staggering is the two states ranked below Michigan have been devastated by hurricanes which were the immediate cause for their setback. Not surprising, a lot of the reason for Michigan's poor economic status has to do with its education system.

Years back, Michigan was a thriving blue collar state. Manufacturing jobs flourished and a person with a high school education could make a decent living. That is no longer the case. With jobs leaving the state, Michigan is having a tough time filling the void and changing the mindset of the importance of a good education.

So how exactly has No Child Left Behind affected Michigan's schools and more specifically has it helped improve parent involvement state-wide? From PTA's perspective we have seen some successes and some failures. No Child Left Behind has

done a good job in trying to get more parents to care about their child's education. This will hopefully help turn around our education system to provide an education which provides the skills and knowledge needed for children to succeed in a new, invigorated economy.

Michigan PTA believes that parent engagement starts at the very beginning. As the owner of a daycare center I can tell you we work very hard in preparing young children to be ready for school. At a young age we are trying to instill upon them the skills which they will need to build a solid foundation for their education. A strong part of this preparation begins at home. Trying to get parents involved in what their children are learning is very important. I am proud to say that many of the practices we use are helping kids and parents alike.

One of the biggest roadblocks I have found in trying to get parents more involved is their work schedule. Parents work an awful lot and find it difficult to take time off to help support their child's learning. Parents always want to be there for their child; however a lot of this decision is made for them by their long work hours and commute times. I am encouraged by the actions teachers are making in my child's school. Many will take meetings during lunch time or make other arrangements to accommodate a parent's schedule. However, these meetings still do not provide the parent or teacher enough time to cover every concern and aspect of the child's education.

On a personal note, I would like to tell you a story about my own child. This story I believe highlights an intrinsic flaw in No Child Left Behind, one that I hope the reauthorization will help fix.

My child attends an elementary school that just has achieved Adequate Yearly Progress for the first time. I wish to compliment the leadership of my child's school in turning around the school and truly making a difference in many of the students' lives.

My son however is a unique case. He has a very tough time at school. I cannot tell you how hard he tries. There are certain courses which just give him trouble, and he needs some extra help in these subjects. The resources to help my son used to exist in his school. No Child Left Behind mandated that since the school didn't make AYP, Supplemental Education Services must be provided to help those kids who needed more attention. Obviously the SES services helped the school improve. Yet in achieving AYP, the school no longer offers these important services, services that my son needs to be successful.

Although the law passed 5 years ago, many children are still being left behind. And the irony is that many of these students are coming from schools that are found to be achieving academically. I would ask the Committee to move beyond how the overall school is doing and pay more attention to the individual student. By identifying those students who need the most help, bringing their parents into the classroom, and tracking their progress throughout their education career, we can truly begin to make a difference in Michigan's education system.

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, I thank you for this chance to speak on behalf of the parents and children of Michigan and PTAs across the nation. I believe your efforts to improve the law can help provide a better education for every child and allow our children to be more competitive in a world-wide marketplace. Parent and community involvement must be viewed as part of the solution.

People in every community across the country are trying to increase parent involvement. If this Committee can help provide these partnerships with more resources and more flexibility, innovative solutions will emerge and our children's academic achievement will rise. Thank you again for this opportunity. I look forward to further discussions on this important issue.