

**Testimony of Leslye S. Abrutyn, Ed.D.
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Aston, PA
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Education
of the
Committee on Education and Labor of the
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Good morning, Chairman Kildee, Ranking Member Castle, and other members of the subcommittee. It is an honor to be here with you, as well as with Representative Sestak, who represents our area so effectively in Washington, D. C.

I am Leslye Abrutyn, Superintendent of the Penn Delco School District, in Delaware County, Pennsylvania. I am honored to testify today about the current Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) accountability measures under No Child Left Behind (NCLB), and to offer my conclusion on whether they are too rigid to account for individual student achievement and improvement.

I am in my 34th year as an educator, and have served 10 years as superintendent of the Penn Delco School District. My goal as an educational leader is, and has always been, to find out the answer to the question parents, educators, and legislators are asking: “What REALLY works in education?” I have some answers, and the results in my school district over the past 10 years speak for themselves in answering that question.

In Delaware County, there are 15 school districts. When these districts are compared by socioeconomic standards, the Penn-Delco School District ranks in the middle. Yet, our students far outscore their predicted berth according to these aforementioned, and usually accurate, socioeconomic predictors. In some categories instead of scoring 7th out of 15 school districts, we have scored at number 2 or 3. We are outscoring districts that spend up to twice as much per pupil as Penn Delco. No Child Left Behind calls for 100% of students scoring proficient in 2014; I am proud to say that this past year there was only one grade level, in one subject area, in one school, in one school district, in all of Delaware County where 100% of the students scored proficient on the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA). That grade was the 3rd grade in Parkside Elementary School, one of Penn Delco’s schools.

How can our success in Penn Delco help you understand the intricacies and the consequences of the reauthorization of No Child Left Behind?

First, I along with most educators applaud and support the goals of the law: to leave no child behind. We hold it as a point of personal and professional pride to be

accountable for the job we do. But, we do not want to be, nor is it fair to be held accountable when there are multiple factors beyond our control.

So, allow me to elaborate on how we have been successful and, on how you can reauthorize the law in a form that could replicate our successes for the benefit of all students in our nation.

As with any successful organization, our success starts with a vision. My vision for Penn Delco has been, “In Penn Delco we move every child forward every day.” This is a vision I created many years ago, and talk about often. How does one put this vision into action? The successful implementation of my vision relies upon robust, current, and accurate data on individual students. Over the years, as technology has permitted, we have gotten better and better at creating, compiling, analyzing, and utilizing that data. This data and its successful use have been vital in allowing us to move every child forward every day.

Contrast my vision with the practicality of what happens at most schools under the current system. Most states use either a status model or a criterion referenced model to assess students. This means that data on students is determined once per year. That data is then used to determine whether a school has met AYP. But, it is not particularly helpful in describing the achievement level of individual children, or in prescribing a plan to help improve student achievement. This is the limitation of the so called status model.

How is this limitation addressed in Penn Delco? I hope my value to this Committee today will be to describe in real and practical terms what actually happens under NCLB. As a district, we spend a lot of time preparing students for, and administering the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA). Contrary to some popular, but uninformed opinions on this subject, preparing for the test is not a bad thing. “Preparing” means teaching students critical thinking skills, reading, and math. What do we have when the results come back? We have disaggregated data which in my opinion has been very useful. This aspect of the law has motivated districts to look much more carefully at low performing groups and has been the catalyst for much of the improvement we have seen in our nation.

However, the disaggregated data from the current model alone is not enough to “move every child forward every day.” Disaggregated data is just one of the tools we use to assess and then guide instruction in Penn Delco. We add an entire additional layer of assessment over the state assessment. That layer consists of a technology-based system that would be correctly defined as a growth model because it measures students periodically throughout the school year, and provides robust, current, and accurate data that describes needed areas of improvement for each student. Our practice of using this growth model is what has made us more successful than many other districts.

Members of the Committee, I propose to you that we have before us a strategic opportunity during this period of reauthorization of No Child Left Behind. Why strategic? Because in the truest definition of the term “strategic” there are threats as well as opportunities before us. As you know, we are fast approaching the year of 2014; the deadline for 100% proficiency. In the early years of NCLB there were significant and incremental gains in proficiency across our country. But, the concept of a point of diminishing returns is becoming a reality. It is becoming increasingly more challenging for schools to make those increases to meet AYP, and to reach the lofty goal of proficiency for every child in our nation. This, I propose to you is the threat. We are set up for failure.

What is the opportunity before us? We can change from a status model of measuring achievement to a growth model. This shift in thought and assessment will accomplish three significant things:

- 1. A growth model will provide robust data on individual students throughout the school year, thus allowing all children to continually improve.**
- 2. A growth model will allow a more realistic way to describe how districts are “leaving no child behind”.**
- 3. A growth model will be more effective and efficient. You will recall how I described that we are required to participate in the PSSA, which is a status model assessment system, and how we supplement this data with our own in-house growth model assessment system in Penn Delco. If the reauthorization shifts to a growth model assessment system, the required standardized tests will be a more efficient use of time and resources. The data collected will be more meaningful and effective, because it will allow curriculum to be directed by the individualized needs of students, thereby helping students become more successful.**

Thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts and experiences with you this morning. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.