

No Child Left Behind in NEW YORK STATE

A Matter of Priorities

NEW YORK NCLB HEARING

St. John's University, Manhattan Campus • New York City
September 29, 2005 • 5:30–8:30 PM
Local hearing partner: Campaign for Fiscal Equity, New York City

PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

National Center for Schools and Communities at Fordham University, New York City
Good Schools for All, Buffalo

HEARING OFFICERS

Elise Boddie, Director, Education Group; NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc., New York, NY

Dr. Roscoe C. Brown, Jr., Executive Director, Center for Urban Educational Policy; CUNY Graduate Center, New York, NY

Amanda R. Brown, Senior Vice President, Public Education Network, Washington, DC

Lee Daniels, Vice President, Research & Publications; National Urban League, New York, NY

Fred Frelow, Director of Early College Initiatives, Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation, Princeton, NJ

Michael Rebell, Executive Director and Counsel, Campaign for Fiscal Equity, Inc., New York, NY

STUDENT WITNESSES

Terel Watson, Queens Vocational and Technical High School • **Margarita Henderson**, EBC Bushwick High School • **Abeo Richards**, Democratic and Leadership School • **Princess Taylor**, Democratic and Leadership School • **Marlowe Williams**, New Rochelle High School • **Rebecca Berkman-Rivera**, La Guardia High School • **Tapasya Wancho**, Bronx High School of Science • **Antonia Donato**, St. Vincent Ferrer High School • **Elizabeth Slater**, Bronx High School of Science • **Nadiya Chadha**, Bronx High School of Science

PARENT WITNESSES

Victoria Bousquet • **Carol Rogers**

COMMUNITY WITNESSES

Wayne Ho, Executive Director, Coalition for Asian American Children and Families

Jennifer Cowan, Program Specialist, The After-School Corporation

Kenneth D. Cohen, President, Northeast Queens Branch and Education Chair, Metropolitan Council of the NY State Conference of NAACP Branches

Jan Atwell, Coordinator, New Yorkers for Smaller Class Size Coalition

Funding for the hearing was provided by the New York Community Trust.

I want to make it really clear that I'm not opposed to accountability, but I'm opposed to accountability when there are a lack of resources and a lack of funding and a lack of clarification on what it means to this community.

Wayne Ho, Executive Director, Coalition for Asian American Children and Families

New York State residents still believe in NCLB's goals but are more critical than ever of its priorities. This theme characterized a hearing held in New York City that gave students, parents, and community leaders – audiences very much affected by the law, but usually left out of the policy debate – an opportunity to tell their side of the NCLB story.

Their testimony revealed deepening concern that NCLB has serious shortcomings resulting in misguided priorities: Students and schools being held accountable for academic improvement, but without the resources to improve; testing skewing the curriculum and causing students to become disengaged; communication about NCLB leaving parents and communities feeling left out of the process by an unresponsive bureaucracy; conformity that threatens personal and community strengths.

Resource & Testing Issues

Students say large classes, lack of textbooks, assignment to schools outside their neighborhoods, and overcrowding are reasons why so many students drop out. Terel Watson, a junior at Queens Vocational and Technical High School, noted that schools have new metal detectors, but still have 20-year-old textbooks. “We should have more computers, more books, and qualified teachers,” she said. Princess Taylor, of Brooklyn’s Democratic and Leadership School, spoke for all students “who have had to deal with old textbooks where pages are ripped out, marked up, or glued together; where you can sit in classrooms for two periods, two hours doing absolutely nothing; and [have] teachers who are either under skilled or have no credibility whatever.”

Parent and PTA president Victoria Bousquet said NCLB required accountability before resources were in place. Their principals and teachers are so “zealous” about making annual yearly progress that “no thought is given to the areas which provide social skills and personal growth such as art, music, gym, science, health, and language.”

Adults and students alike testified that NCLB testing practices were doing more harm than good, and that test-based accountability not only distorts what students are learning but undermines the wider purpose of a public education.

Students feel great pressure to prepare for a single test or for the Regents’ Exams, which they do not believe prepares them for college or lifelong learning. According to Tapasya Wancho, a Bronx High School of Science senior, annual testing under NCLB has shifted the emphasis “from doing well in class and actually learning the material

to working toward that test.” With classes in the arts, music, and photography being eliminated, fellow student Nadiya Chadha explained that by “limiting students’ exposure to these topics, we thereby prevent students from generally developing into well-rounded people.”

The emphasis on test scores in the Asian-American community has created inequities and unfairness, according to Wayne Ho, executive director of the Coalition for Asian American Children and Families. Some Asian-American families spend precious resources on test prep programs, he said, but “student academic success should not be based solely on the ability to pay for test preparation.” Nor should schools push academics in lieu of building student leadership skills, involvement, and relationships with adults. Ho relayed a conversation with a principal who told him student field trips had been eliminated “because field trips aren’t on the test.” That, said Ho, is “the real educational experience of our children.”

Statistics	Total Schools ¹	% fail to make AYP	% schools in improvement	# LEAs	% LEAs fail to make AYP	% LEAs in improvement	Graduation rate	Per pupil expenditure ²
New York 2003–04	4624	32.2%	10.9%	730	NA	7.7%	76%	\$12,325
United States 2003–04	90237	24.7%	11.4%	13959	28.5%	12.8%	74.9%	\$8,308
New York 2004–05	4499	24.7%	11.4%	730	32.2%	7.7%	Not avail.³	\$12,879
United States 2004–05	89493	25.6%	12.9%	13878	23.7%	12.4%	Not avail.	\$8,618

Bureaucratic Bungling

NCLB assurances of parental choice have fallen short of the mark and hearing witnesses fault school bureaucracies for the lack of translation services and for a failure to communicate.

“Parents have been left out of the loop,” said Victoria Bousquet; they know little about NCLB or how to exercise choice. She candidly states that “administrators don’t want parents in the schools.” Wayne Ho also expressed deep concern over the transfer option, saying immigrant families do not get information translated into the languages they speak.

Parent Carol Rogers noted that school policies and communications failed to recognize the changes in families such as grandmothers raising their grandchildren, mothers afraid to go out at night, families unable to attend meetings because of younger children. She said that funds for parental involvement in Title I schools were being falsely restricted. Kenneth Cohen, education chair of the Metropolitan Council of the NY State Conference of NAACP Branches, pleaded for building community around failing schools instead of transferring students out. Groups that want to help “are not invited to the table” when decisions are made about closing schools, he said.

Witnesses were also troubled by the conformity being imposed by NCLB. Elizabeth Slater, a Bronx High School of Science student, wants NCLB to be amended to consider community circumstances. Other students said individual strengths were being ignored because of the one-test-fits-all mentality. “You see some students in classes who are... handing in their homework, they are studying, they take education very seriously,” said student Abeo Richards. “But what if you put a standardized test in front of them...and they just don’t get it and have to repeat a grade even though they are so good in academic work?”

Most critical is the effect on non-native English speakers who are being pushed into mainstream classes before gaining proficiency and expected to take the same tests as native speakers. Wayne Ho challenged the hearing officers to put themselves in the following situation: “If I dropped you in the middle of China and gave you one year to learn the language and after that year you are going to take a test on math, in science, on Chinese literature, and you are going to write essays in Chinese and you are going to solve word problems in math from Chinese, could you succeed?”

The New York hearing was one of nine held on NCLB across the country from September 2005 to January 2006. This excerpt was taken from the full New York State hearing report, which can be found on the PEN website, www.publiceducation.org, along with a national hearing report and eight other state reports.

¹ Title I Report, Vol. 7 Iss. 4 (LRP Publications 2006). Data for columns 1-6 were taken from this report.

² NEA, Rankings & Estimates Update (2005). Figures, computed from NEA Research, Estimates databank, are based on reports through August 2005.

³ Although a graduation rate was not part of the NY State Report Card for the 2004-2005 school year, the NY State Department of Education recently released information about graduation rates of specific cohorts of students. Of the state’s students who started 9th grade in 2001, only 64% graduated by 2005 (in 4 years). In addition, 74% of the students who started 9th grade in 2000 had graduated by 2005 (taking 5 years to complete high school).