

Testimony to the U.S. House Education and the Workforce Committee
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Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify on a topic of historic significance: whether our nation can move forward on elementary and secondary education reform at current and likely future levels of federal spending.

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), approved by a bipartisan majority in Congress, represents an important break with the past. For the first time, Congress and the President demanded educational results in exchange for federal K-12 spending. In particular, students from historically disadvantaged groups are to be educated to common, state-established standards of proficiency. Well-established patterns of unequal educational opportunity are to be broken, replaced by an adequate education for all students regardless of race or background. In today's competitive workplace, where skills are ever more critical, NCLB calls for all children to have a meaningful opportunity to succeed.

This reform built on a history of promising state and local efforts in the 1990s, as well as previous federal initiatives, which included standards-based reform and assessment at selected grade levels. In addition to increased attention to disadvantaged groups, NCLB also included two very important changes related to accountability: first, students are to be assessed at every grade (3 through 8) to ensure that no child falls through the cracks; second, meaningful consequences exist for schools that persist in demonstrating inadequate performance.

We are now faced with a new and vitally important challenge: the oft-repeated educational mantra "all children can learn" has now been modified to "all children *must* be taught successfully." NCLB calls on us to do whatever it takes to educate our children.

Now that the magnitude of this change has become apparent, it should not be surprising that there is much consternation as well as serious debate over what it will take to achieve this goal. For many, the first impulse has been to argue that massive new funding, particularly federal funding, is essential. The implicit assumption—sometimes even stated explicitly—is that current practices are as effective and efficient as they could possibly be, meaning that improvement could only result from large new expenditures. If such increases do not then, in fact, materialize, the result is that failure becomes defensible.

Educational spending—*if* properly directed and managed—can improve results. Yet, elected officials and policymakers must consider many non-educational factors when setting educational funding levels, including trade-offs with other worthy expenditures (such as homeland security or health research).

The issue of whether federal funding for NCLB and related activities is sufficient is a serious question, worthy of careful consideration and debate. In our work in this area, my organization has reviewed a number of analyses that purport to find that far greater federal expenditure is necessary—that NCLB is an “unfunded mandate.” Further, we reviewed other widely cited studies that do not focus on NCLB per se, such as the various “educational adequacy” analyses, but that come to more or less the same conclusion. We also conducted our own estimates of the costs and revenues associated with NCLB. I am attaching and submitting for your review some of our detailed work in this area.

Frankly, we were surprised to discover the extent of the weaknesses in the studies calling for large increases in federal education funding. These studies typically suffer from some of the same limitations. They:

- ignore the extensive research documenting that current expenditures are not being used nearly as effectively as they could be;
- almost *never* provide solid evidence supporting the relatively expensive additions they propose (especially, in comparison to other less costly approaches);
- usually overlook some of the available federal revenues while misinterpreting what is truly required to comply with the federal statute;
- sometimes attribute to NCLB the cost of compliance with mandates from previous federal statutes, such as the Improving America’s Schools Act (IASA);
- too often contain computational errors that inflate costs or underestimate revenues.

In the study by Driscoll and Fleeter that we were asked to review for the Ohio state department of education, we found that only 7% of the estimated costs were based on compliance with specific NCLB mandates. While one could question some of those, a far bigger concern is the other 93% of estimated costs. This far larger sum is assumed for the general effort to increase student achievement so that all students achieve competence in reading and math, including achievement increases long after the expiration of NCLB.

One could reasonably question whether the passage of NCLB altered the historically limited federal role in funding K-12 education and resulted in broad federal responsibility for general academic improvement. But, even on the merits of the arguments presented, we found little reason to accept the study’s conclusion that NCLB is an unfunded mandate.

The study simply asserts, contrary to much evidence, that no academic improvement could be achieved as a result of reforms to allocate current expenditures more effectively. Further, the study provides no research citation, or any other type of evidence, to support the pricey tutoring and other interventions that consume 93% of the estimated costs. It simply states that such programs are believed to be necessary by unnamed educators with which the authors happen to interact. A compelling argument for additional expenditure would, instead, rigorously review the achievement gains that could be accomplished through the reform of current expenditures and, if additional improvement is still

necessary, would determine which additional reforms are the most cost effective. Quite a contrast.

I focus on this study not because it is unusually weak—in fact, it demonstrates an extensive development effort by the authors and is arguably more sophisticated than many of the other studies that come to the same conclusion. Yet the conclusion is simply not supported by the evidence provided. There are similar problems in the other studies.

In developing our own analysis of the cost and revenues associated with NCLB, we found that recent funding increases, as well as likely future increases for the duration of the statute, were sufficient to pay for ambitious initiatives to comply with all of the specific mandates. While every state is addressing NCLB requirements in different ways, we assumed some reforms that implied fairly conservative (high) cost estimates where these would benefit students, but we did *not* assume unnecessarily expensive options with limited benefits.

For example, NCLB requires that “highly qualified” paraprofessionals demonstrate competence in core subjects, either through the attainment of two years of undergraduate credits or by passing an assessment of core skills. For many reasons, including the fact that some paraprofessionals without two years of higher education are already competent in core skills, an assessment is the more cost efficient approach for satisfying this mandate. If the chosen assessment is of high quality, it is also likely to be the more reliable approach.

Further, we assumed that state and local policymakers should be expected to implement whatever policies would benefit students or taxpayers, even if such reforms break with established practices or require some political courage. There are many innovative reforms, such as alternative routes for qualified non-traditional teacher candidates, which could be implemented to recruit and retain highly qualified teachers. But given the possibility that even such bold reforms may be insufficient to address shortage areas where there is a substantial pay differential between public schools and the private sector—such as math and science—we included the cost of *eliminating* this pay differential. Some studies assume across-the-board increases for *all* teachers because that is the accepted, politically easier approach; but there is no reason to think that such broad increases are truly necessary to meet NCLB requirements (even if they might be socially desirable).

These are just some of the costs included in our detailed analysis. Other included costs address new testing requirements, databases to disaggregate and report test scores and other areas.

In addition, we found extensive evidence that the reform of *existing* expenditures, policies, and practices could lead to substantial progress toward the goal of helping all students achieve proficiency in reading and mathematics.

Here in Ohio, a number of predominantly low-income, minority schools are succeeding at current expenditures where many others are not. For example, 21 Ohio elementary schools serving majority low-income, minority students surpass state averages in 4th grade math. Eight such schools even performed in the top 25 percent of all schools in the state. As The Education Trust and NCEA have documented, such successful schools exist in every state. The challenge is to restructure our school system so that such schools are the norm rather than the exception.

I will summarize just a few examples of reforms in our *current* federal, state or local expenditures that could lead to substantially improved achievement results. There are many others.

Public dollars currently subsidize the cost of pre-service training for elementary teachers. Goldhaber and Brewer, as well as others, have demonstrated that fully certified elementary teachers are no more effective in raising student achievement than elementary teachers on emergency certification (teachers who have not yet completed the requisite coursework). We should either demand that the funds spent on pre-service training actually improve teacher effectiveness, or we should re-direct those funds towards other uses that can raise student achievement.

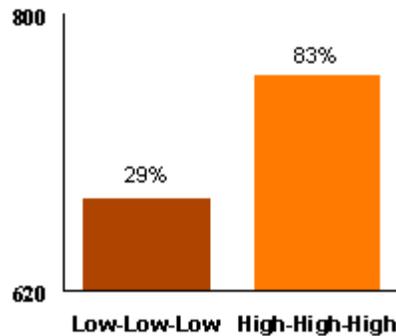
The poor use of funds related to the preparation, ongoing professional development, and curriculum tools provided for teaching reading are especially well-documented. These weaknesses have led to ineffective reading instruction, remedial efforts to teach reading, and other expensive consequences. The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) has noted that:

...a chasm exists between classroom instructional practices and the research knowledge-based on literacy development. Part of the responsibility for this divide lies with teacher preparation programs, many of which, for a variety of reasons, have failed to adequately prepare their teacher candidates to teach reading...

(see "Teaching **Is** Rocket Science: What Expert Teachers of Reading Should Know and Be Able to Do," by the AFT)

The AFT goes on to summarize the limitations of many of the most widely used reading curricula as well as much ongoing professional development in reading. If the large current expenditures devoted to ineffective reading preparation, instruction and remediation were re-directed to scientifically-validated approaches, we should see substantial improvements in student achievement. Some of this has begun to change in recent years, but much still has not.

Sanders and Rivers, and others, have identified the enormous performance gap between effective teachers and ineffective teachers in our schools, as well as the impact on our students.



Children assigned to three effective teachers in a row scored at the 83rd percentile in math at the end of 5th grade, while children assigned to three ineffective teachers in a row scored at the 29th percentile.

We currently do not recognize effective teachers with higher compensation, so current expenditures on ineffective teachers are as high as expenditures on effective teachers. It should be unacceptable to continue to spend educational dollars in perpetuity on ineffective teachers. Well-designed training and support should be focused on assisting under-performing teachers to reach their full potential. Those who still do not perform adequately should be replaced.

As one more example, Harvard economist Caroline Hoxby has found that wider parental choice among schools is associated with higher student achievement. If this is correct, NCLB's public school choice and supplemental services provisions for low-income families should increase equity and benefit all students in the affected schools. State and local initiatives to extend choice could also lead to gains.

Given our finding that new federal dollars are sufficient to cover specific new requirements in NCLB, as well as the evidence that the reform of current federal, state and local expenditures could lead to substantial achievement gains, it would seem fiscally prudent to first determine what could be accomplished as a result of these reforms before assuming that large additional expenditures are necessary.

Our nation has increased its investment in elementary and secondary education steadily over many decades. This has been true at the federal, state and local levels. There is little reason to doubt that such real, non-inflationary increases are likely to continue. I am certainly not arguing against continuing this historical trend.

Yet, we are at a crossroads. The NCLB consensus that we must truly educate all students, including students from historically disadvantaged groups, is still very fragile. As we move forward, debates over funding are inevitable. But we should be careful not to endanger this still tentative consensus.

Unrealistically high demands for funding increases, coupled with arguments that such expenditures are absolutely essential to achieving improved results, risk diverting attention from the many improvements that research suggests can be accomplished by reforming current expenditures. Further, when the large sums do not materialize, the process could encourage the acceptance of failure.

As someone who has been involved in education at many levels, I agree with those who say that accomplishing the goals of NCLB will be *hard*. Many talented and dedicated teachers, principals, and other educators are already working long hours toward these goals. We must reform our current system to provide them with the training, tools and management they need to succeed.

But as someone who arrived in this country with no English skills and attended an inner city public school, I also believe that failure in this instance is unacceptable—regardless of how much additional spending is provided. There is good reason to believe we could be serving our students far better than we do today, even with current funding. Many of my former classmates were not fortunate enough to receive the same opportunities that I did, and they suffered the consequences. We must not permit another generation of disadvantaged students to pass through our schools without providing all of them with the skills they need to succeed.

Thank you.