

**Testimony – House K12 Appropriations  
Wednesday, February 25, 2009**

My name is Bob Steeh, Director of Community Education for the Novi Community School District. I am here to talk about the proposed new language in Sec. 107 of the State School Aid Act.

There have been many positives to adult ed. The Adult Ed. Division and staff have been very responsive and working hard to bring adult ed. practitioners together to improve the quality of the program. Adult Ed. Task Forces were formed with practitioners across the State. We have been focusing on curriculum, assessment tools, student progress, and accountability through the development of policy and professional development training.

I was a member of the adult learner work group. We first met in March of 08 with representation from many State agencies, adult ed. providers, community colleges, MI Works, volunteer literacy agencies, United Way, and Department of Human Services, etc. This was a good beginning in opening the dialogue between agencies. Our goal was to develop a system that would improve the delivery of services to the adult learner and create an infrastructure that would be seamless to the student, and allow them to make a smooth transition from high school completion to qualify for NWLB, to post secondary education, to vocational training program. NWLB is just what it is, an initiative to train and/or retrain adults for employment. No one can argue that this is important to the success of Michigan. Raising the level of the lower skilled adult and improving the English skills of those who do not speak English, is just as important. For many adults reading below the 9th grade level, there is a great deal that needs to be accomplished before he/she can qualify for the NWLB program or make a successful transition to post secondary education or a vocational training program. There are distinct differences between the needs of a person that qualifies for NWLB and the adult basic education student.

My concern is with the new language that is being introduced.

The State announced a grant of \$2.5M through NWLB in last year's legislature. This grant was to target the adult basic learner. The Request for Funds (RFP) came out in December of 08 and needed to be submitted to the Department by January. Oakland County did not shy away from embracing change, and we were encouraged with the agencies that we were able to bring to the table in that short amount of time to collaborate in this initiative. The partners were 15 school district adult ed. providers, Oakland Schools, United Way, Oakland Community College, Baker University, MI Works, Oakland Literacy Council and Providence Park Hospital.

We were awarded one of the ten grants. It is our hope to develop an infrastructure that would improve the delivery of adult services and improve the communication and referral process between the agencies in Oakland County. Again, the grant dollars were announced in May of 2008; however, the recipients were not notified until Feb. 2009. Therefore, this program has not begun and has not proven to be successful. Before you dismantle an entire adult education system, I would think we would want to make sure the ten pilots statewide are successful. We think we have a great model, but this is still in the beginning phase and has **yet** to be tested.

In the proposed new Sec 107 language, there is no accountability or guidelines for the funds as opposed to the current Sec. 107 where there is a tremendous mechanism for accountability and an incentive to be precise and successful. No other program is held to the same high levels of accountability and reporting requirements as mandated through the Michigan Adult Education Reporting System (MAERS). This did not happen overnight. It has required collaboration between the State Adult Education Office and Adult Educators from across the State.

MAERS has set a high bar of expectations and created a rich database of information for districts to carefully monitor and improve their assessment and instructional practices.

Our economy is crumbling at best. Many people are suffering – experiencing crises of the heart, poverty, uninsured, and uncertainty of what tomorrow will bring. Billions of dollars are being injected into the country and State of Michigan. Will this be the cure and create the sustainability we need, or will education, raising the level of academic skill, be the infrastructure we need to prosper as a State? To move this language forward would disenfranchise thousands of Michigan adults who are on the brink of turning their lives around, undermine all the work that has been done to build a highly accountable statewide delivery system, and ultimately deepen Michigan's economic woes.

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## **How do you build anything without a foundation**

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This grant is to help develop a system that will assist in improving the success of our adult population, but this will not do anything to service those lower level adults' students, nor will this increase the accessibility of program for students. There is no greater need than to raise the level of our adult basic ed. student so they will qualify for NWLB and post sec. ed program. The \$24 M available for last year went to educate the lower level adult. We serviced 43,000 adults at \$558. per student for a full year.