
EDUCATION & LABOR COMMITTEE

Congressman George Miller, Chairman

Wednesday, March 17, 2010
Press Office, 202-226-0853

Chairman Miller Statement at Committee Hearing On “The Obama Administration’s Elementary and Secondary Education Act Reauthorization Blueprint”

WASHINGTON, D.C. – *Below are the prepared remarks of U.S. Rep. George Miller (D-CA), chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee, for a committee hearing on “The Obama Administration’s Elementary and Secondary Education Act Reauthorization Blueprint”.*

Good afternoon.

Today Secretary Duncan joins us to discuss the Obama’s administration’s newly released blueprint for rewriting the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

Thank you, Mr. Secretary, for meeting with us again.

Two weeks ago, you outlined President Obama’s vision for providing a world class education to every child in this country.

You told us that the status quo is failing our students.

You told us that a strong education system is key to our long-term economic stability.

Members of this committee, on both sides of the aisle, agree.

Right now, even our best students are performing at a lower level in math than students in 22 other countries.

Nearly 80 percent of U.S. students are entering the ninth grade unable to read at grade level.

This has to change.

It’s time to overhaul and improve ESEA so that the law finally lives up to its promise: to provide an equal and excellent education for every child in America.

These improvements will require dramatic reforms to regain our role as a world leader in education.

But if we are successful, I believe we can build a solid economic foundation for our future generations.

What our students need to succeed isn't a mystery.

They need a challenging and rigorous learning environment tied to college and career ready standards.

They need creative, effective teachers who hold them to high standards – and can adjust their teaching strategies when needed.

Innovative reformers across the country, at the local level, are making significant progress in these areas.

Now, at the federal level, we have to match their courage to disrupt the system and push the envelope.

I believe that the blueprint Secretary Duncan presents to us offers a strong roadmap for this kind of system-wide change.

Eight years ago, I helped write our current version of ESEA, the No Child Left Behind Act.

In many ways, the law was transformational.

It finally helped shine a bright light on what was really going on in our schools.

It told all of us – lawmakers, educators, parents, school boards – that it was no longer acceptable for any student to be invisible.

It showed us how all students and schools were faring, not just the richest districts or the highest-achieving students.

The results were difficult for many to swallow.

But it showed us the value of accountability for our students.

It provoked a conversation about education in this country that has gotten us where we are today.

But we know we didn't get everything right.

The blueprint we'll hear about today rightfully gives some control back to the states and districts to allow them to determine their own best strategies to turn around their lowest performing schools.

And it switches the conversation from one about proficiency to one about ensuring our students graduate ready for college and career.

We now have an incredible opportunity to help reshape the future of this country.

The Obama administration has already launched game-changing reforms for our schools.

Many states are taking unprecedented steps in the right direction.

In my home state of California, the state legislature removed the firewall that prevented student achievement data from being linked to teacher performance – a move that was a long time coming.

And in order to qualify for the second round of Race to the Top funding, California recently released its list of 187 persistently underperforming schools.

But California's recent actions, and the actions of so many other states, have signaled they are ready to help fix the schools that are chronically failing our students.

As we take a close look at the administration's blueprint today, I'd like to lay out some fundamental goals for what we must address in this rewrite.

We need to reset the bar for our students and the nation.

First, we need to ensure that every child can be taught by a great teacher, especially those who need them the most.

Teachers are the single most important factor in determining student achievement.

But 14 percent of new teachers stop teaching after their first year. More than a third leave teaching after three years. Almost 50 percent leave within five years.

We can't expect teachers to stay in a system that doesn't treat them with the same level of professionalism as other careers.

We can support great teaching in classrooms across this country by providing them with the right tools, like extended planning time, and more opportunities for career development.

And by making sure that they have the data at their fingertips on how children are learning so we can understand how to better educate every child.

Second, the quality of a child's education should not be determined by their zipcode. Every school, in every state needs to hold their students to rigorous, internationally benchmarked standards that prepares them for college and careers.

Third, there are districts and schools across the country seeing incredible success after years of stagnant results.

These schools were given the room to innovate. They've kept their focus on achieving at the highest levels and holding themselves accountable for all students.

We must encourage states and districts to innovate, to think outside the box while maintaining high standards for all.

Lastly, we have to ensure we're reaching every student with the right resources in every classroom.

Secretary Duncan, you have said repeatedly that our students get one chance at an education.

One chance.

I think the President's blueprint lays the important markers for as we begin this rewrite.

It will help build the kind of world class school system our economy needs and our children deserve,

Secretary Duncan, thank you again for being here.

Thank you for your leadership and your vision.

I look forward to hearing your testimony.

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