

EDUCATION & LABOR COMMITTEE

Congressman George Miller, Chairman

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**Chairman Kildee Statement at Subcommittee Hearing on
Improving Literacy and Reading Comprehension**

WASHINGTON, D.C. – *Below are the prepared remarks of U.S. Rep. Dale Kildee (D-MI), chairwoman of the Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary & Secondary Education, for a hearing on “Improving the Literacy Skills of Children and Young Adults.”*

I’m pleased to welcome my fellow subcommittee members, the public, and our witnesses to this hearing on “improving the literacy skills of children and young adults.”

Only 30 percent of our 4th and 8th grade students tested at proficient or higher in reading on the most recent national assessment of educational progress. These scores do not reflect students failing a test, but an education system that is failing its students.

Many of these struggling readers face a grim future without our help. Some are likely to become discouraged and dropout of school, while others will graduate unprepared for what lies ahead. For those who do graduate high school, about 40 percent will lack the literacy skills employers seek. This creates a serious dilemma in an economy where the 25 fastest-growing professions require greater than average literacy skills.

We have taken steps to address this problem at the federal level, investing in a handful of programs to provide intensive reading support for students. While many elements of these programs provide promise, we clearly have more to do.

As a strong supporter of early childhood education, i believe we must start early. We know that literacy development begins early in life and is a strong indicator of student achievement. By investing in our youngest learners, we can prevent students from failing behind at a critical point in their education.

We must also strengthen existing programs targeted at our pre-k and elementary age children to ensure they benefit from the most effective practices. Challenges are not always solved by more money. Sometimes we need to realign resources and empower our educators with the skills to maximize their impact on student learning.

And finally, we need to pay attention to the needs of our adolescent readers. Researchers have documented a fourth grade reading slump for years, yet federal investment in reading programs for grades 4 through 12 remains minimal. In order to reverse the high school dropout crisis and prepare all students for postsecondary opportunities, we need to provide reading support far beyond the 4th grade.

During today's discussion, we will hear from a panel of literacy experts – some who have devoted their entire careers to identifying effective reading practices and others who have worked on the front lines turning these practices into results for children. Their perspectives are unique, and cover the broad range of needs facing today's learners from birth through high school.

I look forward to today's testimony and hope it provides this subcommittee with new perspective as we work to reevaluate the federal role in literacy development.

I now yield to ranking member castle for his opening statement.