

EDUCATION & LABOR COMMITTEE

Congressman George Miller, Chairman

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**Chairman Miller Statement at Committee Hearing On H.R. 4330,
“the All Students Achieving through Reform Act of 2009”**

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 H.R. 4330, “the All Students Achieving through Reform Act of 2009”*

Good morning.

Today we will examine how charter schools can be used as a tool to drive innovation in our schools.

Specifically, we will discuss legislation introduced by Rep. Polis that would expand access to outstanding charter schools.

This hearing kicks off a larger conversation about how we can “educate our way to a better economy” – as Secretary Duncan says – by overhauling our nation’s primary education law.

Last week, Congressmen Kline, Kildee, Castle and I announced that we plan to do this overhaul in an inclusive and transparent way.

We are starting by holding hearings and asking for input from all stakeholders who want to make meaningful improvements to the law.

I strongly believe that bipartisanship will be the key to getting this rewrite done.

Our committee has a tradition of working across party lines when it comes to education.

Nine years ago, we came together in a historic way to write the latest version of this law: No Child Left Behind.

No Child brought powerful reforms to our schools.

We made clear that it was time to end the inequities and low standards that had come to exemplify schools in our country.

We made it impossible for schools to mask the fact that too many students were falling behind.

This focus on transparency and accountability has forced us to acknowledge some hard truths.

It's shown us how far we have to go to get our schools and students where they need to be.

But we also know the law didn't get everything right.

We all agree, along with teachers, parents, administrators and many others, that it needs significant changes.

Now, with our economy in need of serious rebuilding, we cannot afford to wait to fix it.

It's time to realize our vision for world-class schools that prepare every student to compete in our global economy.

To get there, we need to be open to bold ideas that "disrupt" our current system.

We have to pay attention to what is working in our schools and give other schools the tools to learn from their successes.

Time and again, we have seen this approach work.

Innovation and creativity lead to effective reforms.

Effective reforms transform schools and communities.

One of the best examples of this is our high-performing charter schools.

These schools are proving that the low-income and minority students can succeed when given the right tools, challenges and learning environments.

There are now more than 1.5 million children enrolled at nearly 5,000 public charter schools across the U.S.

In some of these areas, students were stuck in struggling schools where 70 percent of students drop out.

The opportunity promised by a quality charter school was their only chance at a better education.

Take the Green Dot Public Charter schools.

Green Dot schools serve students with the highest need in Los Angeles and the South Bronx, areas where only about 4 percent of kids graduate from college.

Eighty percent of Green Dot students graduate and 80 percent of their graduates are accepted to four-year colleges.

Green Dot schools also have their own teachers unions affiliated with the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers.

Their job security is based not just on seniority, but on how well they are teaching students.

These partnerships show that teachers unions can help lead the way in building successful charter schools.

Successful charter schools are also welcoming accountability and data.

They value strong principals and teachers.

They support longer school hours and more school days to help students catch up.

They engage parents as active participants in their school communities.

These are strategies that we should be paying attention to, not just as we think about how to improve charter schools – but how to improve all schools.

President Obama and Secretary Duncan recognize this.

Their Race to the Top initiative prioritizes funding for states that allow more charter schools.

As a result, Illinois, Louisiana, Tennessee and California have already changed their laws to be eligible.

Another six states have also advanced their policies to strengthen charter schools.

We should do everything we can to support these efforts.

Now, for all the charter schools that are doing outstanding things, there are also charters that aren't serving their students well and need to be shut down.

Charter schools are not a silver bullet for fixing our schools.

But I think one of our witnesses at a recent hearing, Colorado's Lieutenant Governor Barbara O'Brien, put it best when she said "Charter schools are the research and development arm of education."

If our goal is to build world-class schools, we absolutely need to look at high-performing charter schools for research and development – and replicate what they are getting right.

That's what Rep. Polis' bill, the All Students Achieving through Reform Act, aims to do.

It would bring to scale what is working in charter schools and improve the quality of existing schools.

It would allow existing schools to apply for grants to help with transportation and hire additional staff.

The bill would also create a new competitive grant program for states and districts that want to expand quality charter schools in high-need areas.

I'd like to thank Rep. Polis, who founded two charter schools in Colorado, for introducing this bill.

I'd also like to thank all of our witnesses for joining us today.

On this and many other discussions to come, I look forward to working with all members of our committee to fulfill the promise of an excellent education for every student.

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