

A Quality Education for Every Child

Improving our Education System

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Learn about the [major education reforms](#) I've worked on.

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As a former high school teacher, principal, and school board member, education has always been my top priority. I believe that the greatest investment a nation can make is the education of its youth. Quality education assures the economic competitiveness of the nation, advances the arts and sciences, and provides the means for people to achieve individual success.

As a Member of the House Appropriations Committee, and its Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, I am working to improve our nation's investment in education in the following areas.

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Educational Equity: A Quality Education is a Civil Right

It is distressed that 50 years after the landmark Supreme Court case, [Brown versus the Board of Education](#) of Topeka, Kansas, we have not adequately addressed segregation or unequal educational opportunities in our schools. To this day, many schools are segregated by race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. Many of our students that face the greatest adversity are being served by schools that are poorly funded and may offer the fewest opportunities for them to succeed.

It is the right of every child to receive a quality education. Therefore, we must address our separate and unequal schools and the funding mechanisms of states that allow educational inequalities to exist. The vast majority of students of color are being served by poor schools - under-funded schools with outdated, dilapidated facilities, crowded classrooms, and insufficient textbooks. Poor schools in America are unacceptable.

Strengthening our Pre-K Education

The care and encouragement children receive from birth provide a foundation for life and greatly influences their future success. Children thrive in safe, nurturing, and healthy environments. That is why I support programs such as Early Head Start and Head Start which provide significant support to young children and their families. By the time many of our most vulnerable children reach school age, they are already significantly behind their peers. If we are to increase opportunities for youth, we must begin addressing the factors that will prepare these children for school. Improving access to high-quality and affordable child care will support working families and ensure their children are ready to enter kindergarten.

No Child Left Behind

Our current education system and current education laws leave much to be desired. Unfortunately, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Reauthorization Act of 2001, the so called “[No Child Left Behind](#)” (NCLB) act, has failed in many respects.

Congress passed NCLB in 2001 with the best of intentions. We saw NCLB as the beginning of a strong national education policy. Many compromises were made for the bill to become law, and too many promises were made by both the Bush Administration and by the bill itself. Unfortunately, the story of NCLB has been a tale of broken promises and unfunded mandates.

This legislation is currently up for reauthorization and I am taking an active role in proposing changes to NCLB in order to meet the challenges of the 21st Century. I have extensive experience understanding the strengths and weaknesses of our educational system and have been meeting with local, state, and national leaders continuing a campaign to make significant improvements to the American school system.

An unfunded mandate

The greatest barrier to improving education is insufficient funding. Unfortunately, President Bush's proposed Fiscal Year 2009 budget has again failed to provide adequate funding to pay for the full implementation of Administration's banner program No Child Left Behind (NCLB) thus denying schools support for critical support services. President Bush's request for Title I, the program that provides assistance to schools serving low-income students, was only \$14.3 billion, far short of the \$25 billion that Congress had authorized. The \$10.7 billion funding shortfall could be used to decrease class size, hire reading and mathematics specialists, and provide extra assistance to children all across the country.

The President proposes a mere .5 percent increase over last year for NCLB, while inflation rose 4.4 percent in 2007 this amounts to a budget cut. The cumulative deficit for NCLB is \$85.6 billion since its enactment in 2001.

As a member of Labor-Health and Human Services-Education Appropriations subcommittee, I will work with my colleagues to realign federal spending to better meet the needs and priorities of all Americans and help fulfill the financial promises we made to our students.

The cornerstone accountability index

One of the most damaging aspects of NCLB is its cornerstone accountability index, [Adequate Yearly Progress](#)

(AYP). AYP attempts to evaluate a school's success based entirely on scores in Mathematics and Language Arts (English). In addition to being too narrow in scope, the AYP metric is not a logical method for evaluating the effectiveness of a school. Currently AYP does not evaluate how much each student has improved in a given area, but instead compares the test scores of the current year's students to those of the previous year. All of the students in a school can improve, but they won't show improvement in AYP unless their scores are higher than the students that came before them.

The current formula for calculating AYP has contributed to several negative trends in K-12 education, such as the narrowing of the curriculum, teaching to the test, and penalties for diverse schools.

- Narrowing of the curriculum: School programs in the arts, music, foreign languages, and science are all suffering because of an overzealous emphasis on mathematics and English. We cannot forget that schools should provide a rich, diverse, stimulating curriculum, while still ensuring that every student can read, write, and do mathematics. A recent [UC Berkeley/WestEd study](#)

demonstrates how Bay Area schools have been pressured to focus on preparing students to for tests in Language Arts and Mathematics that are required to meet AYP. Unbelievably, the study found that 18% of the elementary teachers in our area are not teaching science as part of their curriculum. California is a leader technological innovation, but to help students prepare for tests in mathematics and English, schools are substantially reducing, even eliminating, the amount of science instruction our elementary school children are receiving. The narrowing of the curriculum identified in this study solidifies my concerns about an overemphasis on testing literacy and mathematics under NCLB. I am worried that America will lose its competitive advantage in our global economy if this trend continues.

- Teaching to the test: The rote learning and scripted programs that have become popular as a response to standards-based education are not the kind of teaching that will foster the creativity and ingenuity that are so critical in the 21st century marketplace. Educators require academic freedom to engage students in the kinds of creative projects and problem-based approaches that will foster innovation.

- Penalties for diverse schools: Schools that have the greatest racial and ethnic diversity have the most difficult testing requirements. Overwhelmingly, diverse schools are being labeled as “in need of improvement.” The testing requirements are actually discouraging schools from embracing the benefits of a diverse student body.

Accountability is a two way street

In spite of its problems, AYP has also highlighted areas where education is in need of improvement. Perhaps most strikingly, AYP shows that the neediest students in America are not receiving sufficient resources to help them succeed. In fact, by and large, schools that are labeled ‘in need of improvement’ are the same schools that are considered underfunded. Undoubtedly, a more thorough, holistic evaluation method would be better for evaluating schools and informing policy.

If we are going to demand accountability from schools, teachers and students, we must also hold the government accountable to provide the resources and assistance that will actually contribute to success. In addition, we need to hold states accountable for their inequitable funding practices that leave too many schools under-funded. We cannot expect our students to

achieve world-class standards and remain competitive in the global marketplace without providing world-class funding for education.

Improving teacher quality

Requiring a qualified teacher in every classroom is also a desirable goal of NCLB, but the implementation of the Highly Qualified Teacher requirements has left much to be desired. Many under-funded schools are having difficulty hiring teachers that meet the highly qualified teacher requirements. Meanwhile, many capable individuals with unconventional backgrounds have been prevented from teaching mathematics and science, because of inflexible requirements.

To bring more qualified teachers into the classroom, we need to improve teacher compensation, preparation programs, recruitment strategies, and retention. While incentives for qualified, specialized teachers can bring them into high-need schools, we also need to address the working conditions in these schools that are keeping these teachers from remaining where they are needed most.

Inaccurate Assessment English Language Learners and Students with Special Needs

To have a strong K-12 system, we must consider of the needs of English language learners, students with special needs, and students with diverse backgrounds. We need to reward and assist diverse schools, not penalize them. Instead of stamping out second languages, we should encourage every child learn a second language in addition to English.

Improving NCLB

The [discussion draft](#) of the NCLB reauthorization released by the Education and Labor Committee, under the leadership of Chairman George Miller, is commendable. The transparent process provides a unique opportunity for stakeholders to share their views on improving this legislation. The bill remains a work in progress and there is still great opportunity to develop and improve NCLB.

The Federal government faces many challenges in providing direction, encouragement, and support to address the diverse needs of our nation's schools. I am taking an active role in proposing changes to the legislation in order to meet the challenges of the 21st Century by working with my colleagues in Congress and meeting with local, state, and national education leaders.

Student Privacy Protection Act

Did you know that the [No Child Left Behind](#) law requires your child's high school to divulge his or her personal information to military recruiters?

The [Student Privacy Protection Act](#), H.R. 1346, which I introduced on March 6, 2007, seeks to reverse a little known provision of the No Child Left Behind Act which requires school districts to give military recruiters the names, addresses, and telephone numbers of students, unless their parents "opt-out" of the list.

I respect the right of an individual to choose to enter the military. I also respect the duty of the armed forces to engage in a recruiting process. Recruiting efforts, however, should honor the privacy rights of individuals and families. Many constituents brought this matter to my attention in 2005. Parents expressed frustration that their children were persistently being contacted at home by military recruiters, and wanted to know how the military gained access to their personal contact information without their consent.

Information acquired through NCLB is used by the Department of Defense (DoD) in a massive recruiting database. Under the current requirements, school districts must give lists of students and their personal contact information to military recruiters, on request, unless parents explicitly express in writing that they do not wish their child's information to be given out. Schools are only required to provide a single notice to parents in a letter or obscurely in a student handbook. The process confuses many parents and students, who may not understand the many forms that are sent home, or who may overlook the single notice. If they do not respond to that one notice by explicitly objecting to having their child's personal information released to recruiters, it is assumed that they have no objections. My legislation would honor both the recruiting needs of our military and your family's privacy rights. Parents privacy rights would be preserved since under my legislation information would only be shared with the consent of the family.

Ensuring a Comprehensive Curriculum

I am pleased with the provisions of the NCLB draft that provide assistance to help low-income districts provide a comprehensive curriculum. More must be done, however, to send a strong signal to all stakeholders that the congressional intent of this legislation is to provide a comprehensive curriculum for all students. To this end, I have recommended to the Education and Labor Committee that the following statement be prominently inserted into the bill to declare this intention:

- “No part of this Act shall be construed to require schools to provide anything other than a diverse, comprehensive curriculum to all students, regardless of race, gender, disability, or language ability. Such a curriculum should include the core subjects of Mathematics, Language Arts, Science, Social Studies, Physical and Health Education, as well as diverse enrichment offerings which include courses or instructional units in Visual and Performing Arts, Technical Education, Environmental Education, Foreign Languages, and other subjects that prepare students for the 21st century such as global awareness, information literacy, and financial literacy.”

Improving Assessments of English Language Learners

Navigating the American education system is a daunting task, especially for parents of English Language Learners (ELL) who do not speak English. Often, there is a communication gap between schools and ELL parents/guardians because of this language barrier. In the case that a native language assessment is not available for an ELL, I have recommended that parents and guardians be granted the right to request an assessment in the student’s native language. This right should be clearly communicated to parents/guardians in their native language. In addition to a written notice, I suggested that a community liaison be dispatched to communicate this right to parents/guardians.

In addition, I have been working closely with the House Education and Labor Committee to commission a national study on disparities that exist among Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in grades K-12. Through such a study, we can finally have disaggregated data on the AAPI student population, which policymakers can use on a national level. While this would not require all school districts to disaggregate data, this is an important first step to show mainstream policymakers that such disaggregation is necessary. Furthermore, as states such as California and Massachusetts are taking the lead and beginning to provide disaggregation of data, advocates should push other states to do so to increase momentum on this issue.

Combating the Narrowing of the Curriculum, Improving the Determination of the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)

The NCLB reauthorization draft legislation has provisions that move away from a single test for accountability by allowing states to apply to the Department of Education to use multiple measures or a growth model in their definition of adequate yearly progress (AYP). I have recommended that indicators such as decreases in drop out rates, increases in students passing AP exams, growth in score on state social studies assessments and others be given even more weight in calculating AYP than the draft allows. Specifically, I believe states should be permitted to use these other indicators to account for up to 50% of AYP. This greater weight gives states stronger incentives to develop these alternative means of assessing the

performance of a school.

Improving Science, Technology and Mathematics Education

I am concerned by the narrowing of the curriculum within our K-8 schools. It has been widely documented that schools have adjusted their curriculum to prepare students for the state assessments in language arts and mathematics required under NCLB. As schools focus on the mathematics and literacy assessments, many untested subjects are falling by the wayside. States are currently required to assess students in science, but these tests do not count in AYP. There is no incentive to teach science in our schools. I have asked the committee to count science in AYP along with mathematics and language arts in an effort to combat the narrowing of the curriculum. By including science in AYP, together with my previous recommendation to increase the contribution of multiple indicators to 50% of AYP, we will begin to reverse a negative trend that is narrowing the curriculum and forcing other subjects into the fringes. In addition, including science in AYP will help our students meet the challenges of the 21st Century and ensure our nation remains competitive in the global economy.

IDEA: The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

We will not achieve equality in education simply from equal funding. There are many students who need additional resources in order to receive equal opportunities. To truly grant all students equal opportunities, children from low income households, English language learners, and students with disabilities need special accommodations and assistance. That is why I strongly support strengthening and fully funding the [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act](#) (IDEA).

School districts across the country are struggling to provide special needs students the accommodations they need. This shortage of funding is especially apparent in economically disadvantaged communities, which are likely to have more students with special needs. The Bush administration's Fiscal Year 2009 Budget Request continues to provide insufficient federal funding for IDEA, under-funding it by \$10.2 billion, and districts are being forced to divert funds from other important programs to provide the services that are mandated by law. I have made full funding of IDEA one of my top appropriations priorities for Fiscal Year 2009.

Competitiveness: Improving Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics Instruction

Scientific innovation accounts for about 50% of the increase to the United States' gross domestic product. Our nation must commit to increasing and improving the quality of the STEM ([Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics](#)) workforce if we are to sustain and strengthen America's ability to compete in the global

economy.

The United States is falling behind in international comparisons of mathematics and science literacy. According to the 2006 [Program for International Student Assessment](#) (PISA), the United States ranked 29th out of 57 countries. The 2006 PISA results ranked the United States 25th among the 30 member countries in mathematics, dropping from 23rd of 29 in the 2003 test, and 21st of 30 in science, down from 19th in 2003.

Providing a quality education for every child is vital to maintaining the competitiveness of America's workforce in a growing global economy. To prepare our youth for the jobs of tomorrow we need strong science and engineering education that doesn't begin at the university level, but instead spans across all grades. Good education policy is good for schools, good for teachers, good for students and good for the nation.

Then Senator Barack Obama and I developed the [Enhancing Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics Education Act](#) to enhance the coordination among the state and federal government to improve STEM education across the nation. The bill will provide the infrastructure required to work collaboratively, establish national STEM Education goals, and to coordinate STEM education initiatives.

I support additional initiatives to improve STEM Education and increase research and education funding such as the [Democrats' Innovation Agenda](#). I also introduced the [Innovations for our Nation's Vital Educational Needs for Technology \(INVENT\) Act](#), which would establish competitive programs within the National Science Foundation (NSF) to develop and make available curriculum tools for the use at the elementary, secondary, and undergraduate levels to help foster inventiveness and innovation. Provisions of the INVENT Act were included in the [America Creating Opportunities to Meaningfully Promote Excellence in Technology, Education, and Science Act \(COMPETES Act\)](#), which was signed into law in 2007.

The America COMPETES Act authorizes a doubling of funding for the NSF and the Department of Energy's Office of Science by 2010. The Act also strengthens educational opportunities in the STEM and critical foreign language fields from the elementary to the high school level by encouraging better alignment of elementary and secondary education, providing for the

recruitment of more science and mathematics teachers, establishing new training and education programs for experienced teachers in those fields to enhance their skills, and helping to create and enhance mathematics and science specialty schools available for students across the state. The America COMPETES Act will encourage institutions of higher education, departments of mathematics, engineering, science or foreign languages, teacher preparation programs and needy schools to establish partnerships.

Vouchers are Not the Answer

Parents should have the right to make decisions about the education of their children. Individual children have different needs, and parents should be provided with information and options that will help them find the best education for their child. However, I do not believe that public education funds should be used to supply vouchers. The school voucher movement sidesteps the greater goal of improving schools. If a school is so poor that parents wish to remove their children, then our education policy is failing. When I was a classroom teacher, I provided students that performed under their ability level with additional support to improve their learning—this is the same model we should be using with our schools. Diverting public education funds to private schools will only make the problem worse. Instead, we should focus on measures to improve public schools and the structures that fund them.

Higher Education

In order to ensure a world class workforce, and to stimulate tomorrow's scientific and technological innovation, America needs a robust higher education system, one that is accessible and affordable for all. Federal student loan programs need to be adequately funded in order to make loans and grants available to low income students. We need to be sure that our public universities are not closing their doors to qualified candidates based on their income or background.

For decades, increases in college tuition have outpaced inflation, posing financial challenges to many students and families. To help relieve the burden of college costs, the Congress passed the [College Affordability and Opportunity Act](#) (H.R. 4137) which would continue this Congress' effort to make college more affordable and accessible.

America's colleges and universities are some of our most important institutions for the advancement of science. University research programs lay the groundwork for future innovation by engaging in pure science, and by providing research experiences for our future scientists and engineers. We need to continue to support and expand research initiatives at the university level.

