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Rep. Dave Loebsack's (D-IA) Opening Statement for the Higher Education and Workforce Training and Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary Education Joint Subcommittee Hearing, *"Improving Department of Education Policies and Programs Through Independent Oversight."*

I want to start by thanking Chairwoman Foxx for calling this joint subcommittee hearing.

I also want to thank Ranking Member Hinojosa for sharing the dais with me.

And I want to thank our witnesses for testifying before us.

We are here today to examine oversight of the Department of Education (the Department or ED). Specifically, we will look at the Government Accountability Office (GAO) and the Department of Education Office of Inspector General (OIG), and the recommendations they've made to the Department of Education to improve program quality and management.

My friends in the majority may want to highlight the Department's challenges in responding to OIG and GAO audit findings, challenges the Department is actively working to overcome. Yet, in recent years, the Department has made meaningful progress not only in implementing GAO and OIG recommendations, but also in implementing them in a timelier manner.

In that time, ED has made strategic staffing decisions to more effectively put OIG recommendations into place. It has also established an internal governance panel to address key challenges in the audit process and ways to improve response time.

Since 2004, ED has made more than 90 percent of the changes that GAO has advised—far exceeding the government-wide average for implementing GAO recommendations. According to GAO, taking up these recommendations has resulted in \$2.1 billion in financial benefits and a slew of other programmatic and administrative improvements for the Department.

Recently, the Department has also placed a greater priority on resolving OIG audit reports and ensuring that appropriate action takes place. Under the Inspector General Act of 1978, OIG is authorized to carry out various audits or reviews to "promote economy, efficiency, and effectiveness in the administration of, and ... prevent and detect fraud and abuse in ... [the Department's] programs and operations."

During the Obama Administration, ED has eliminated its backlog of overdue OIG audits and has begun preparing corrective action plans in response to audits more quickly. As of today, ED only has one unresolved audit more than six months old.

The GAO and OIG are vital to the Department of Education's efforts to monitor, review and enhance its administration and its programs. In addition to making recommendations to ED, both the GAO and ED-OIG often uncover problems that can best be addressed by Congressional action. These critical issues fall within our committee's jurisdiction, but, sadly, committee Republicans refuse to act on many of them.

This Republican majority seems to be particularly indifferent to problems within the purview of the Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary Education Subcommittee. In recent years, for example, GAO has identified gaping holes in state laws that leave children and students vulnerable to physical and sexual abuse, both in school and out of school.

Democrats on this committee have sent at least five letters to Chairman Kline requesting committee action on these gaps in child abuse prevention—but four of our formal requests have gone unanswered, and none have resulted in hearings or markups on legislation to address the troubling findings of GAO's investigative work. While Committee Democrats have introduced legislation to protect students and families, we cannot enact such commonsense regulations without the help of our Republican colleagues.

GAO has produced troubling findings on a number of issues, on which our committee is still awaiting action:

- Curbing abusive seclusion and restraint in schools;
- Sex abuse of children in athletics programs; and
- Aligning the definition of homelessness across federal agencies to better serve homeless students

That is just to name a few.

We must not forget that oversight is one of this esteemed body's most essential functions. Congress and Congress alone has the authority to put many of the reforms recommended by OIG and the GAO into action. And as the committee under whose jurisdiction education laws and regulations fall, it is our duty to give those recommendations serious consideration. Agency oversight is important, but we must not lose sight of what we're here to do: protect children and families and set them up for success in school and in life.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today, and, in the future, to working with my Republican colleagues to implement the GAO and OIG's most pressing proposals.

Thank you. I yield back.

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[Committee on Education and the Workforce Democrats](#)