

EDUCATION & LABOR COMMITTEE

Congressman George Miller, Chairman

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Chairman Miller Statement at Committee Hearing on “Mayor and Superintendent Partnerships in Education: Closing the Achievement Gap”

WASHINGTON, D.C. – *Below are the prepared remarks of U.S. Rep. George Miller (D-CA), the chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee, for a committee hearing on “Mayor and Superintendent Partnerships in Education: Closing the Achievement Gap.”*

Good morning and welcome.

In recent years, one of the bright spots in education reform in this country has been the strong interest that mayors and superintendents have taken to improve inner-city public schools. The purpose of today’s hearing is to learn more about these admirable efforts, and their successes in raising student achievement across the board.

At a time when our nation faces extreme economic challenges, we know that providing every child with a solid education is the ticket to building a more competitive workforce, a stronger economy, and a brighter future.

For decades, America’s public education system has not served all children equally. Far too many children, especially low-income and minority children, were allowed to fall through the cracks.

Many of us knew that this type of system was unacceptable – and a serious threat to our democracy.

Six years ago, we set out to close this growing student achievement gap. We enacted the No Child Left Behind Act to increase accountability in our schools and ensure that no group of students could go ignored.

And although the law itself is in need of significant changes, it has provided us with critical information on how our students are learning.

We know now that while the achievement gap has narrowed over the last six years, our schools and students are still not making enough progress. We also know that our students are falling behind students in other countries when it comes to mastering basic skills, like math, science, and reading.

As a nation, we cannot afford to continue on this path.

We know we need to do a better job of providing all students with an excellent education that will prepare them to take on the jobs of tomorrow, to be our next great generation of innovators and leaders.

Today we will hear from the mayors and superintendents of major U.S. cities about the innovative strategies they have used to close the achievement gap among their students.

What is especially striking about the four cities represented here today – New York City, Washington, D.C., Chicago, and Atlanta – is that they have all had remarkable success with the very student populations that No Child Left Behind was designed to help.

In Atlanta, 100 percent of the city’s elementary schools made adequate yearly progress last year, even with 76 percent of students living in poverty.

In Chicago, a city where nearly 85 percent of children live in poverty, the number of students meeting or exceeding expectations on the Illinois Standards Achievement Test rose by 23 percent, to 69 percent proficiency in math over the past two years.

Similarly, student achievement in reading comprehension rose by 13 percent, to 61 percent proficiency over the same period.

In New York City, 74 percent of students were proficient in math this year, up from 57 percent last year. And 58 percent of students were proficient in reading, up from 51 percent last year.

And here in DC, elementary students increased their proficiency in math by 11 percent last year, and increased their proficiency in reading by 8 points.

None of these are small feats. As Congress considers how we can best improve our federal education laws, we need to pay attention to the impressive work you are doing, how you are doing it – and most importantly – what you have learned along the way.

We need to know what tools you have found effective, and what we can do to help empower, expand, and build upon your successes.

I think we can all agree that nothing is more important than making sure that every child in this country – regardless of race or income – receives a world-class public education.

I’d like to thank all of our witnesses for joining us.

I look forward to your testimony and learning more about how – together – we can make this vision a reality for America’s schoolchildren.

Thank you.

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