
EDUCATION & LABOR COMMITTEE

Congressman George Miller, Chairman

Thursday, March 12, 2009
Press Office, 202-226-0853

Chairwoman McCarthy Statement At Joint Subcommittee Hearing On Lost Education Opportunities in Alternative Settings

WASHINGTON, D.C. – *Below are the prepared remarks of U.S. Rep. Carolyn McCarthy (D-NY), chairwoman of the Healthy Families and Communities for a joint subcommittee hearing on “Lost Educational Opportunities in Alternative Settings” with the Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism and Homeland Security.*

I would like to thank you for being here today. Each of us sitting here knows the importance of education in a child’s life.

Unfortunately there is a whole population of students not receiving adequate education services, and there is little to no accountability. This hearing will focus on youth who, in many instances, need the most help but all too often fall through the cracks.

For them the opportunity for a decent education is lost.

The students we are talking about may be in day treatment programs, residential treatment centers, group homes, foster care settings, juvenile justice facilities or private therapeutic programs. Data reflects that minority youth, low-income youth and youth with disabilities are overrepresented in these systems.

Youth are commonly shuffled from one setting to the next, with education services varying in each placement, locality and state.

A 2007 Report by the Government Accountability Office on residential facilities found state governments that are responsible for the oversight of juvenile facilities often do not monitor the quality of the educational programs in these facilities or monitor them inconsistently. The consequences for the students include a lack of qualified teachers, shortened school days, low quality of curriculum and overall lost opportunities. In fact, data shows that only seventeen percent of teachers in juvenile facilities are fully certified.

We hear stories of teenage students being given coloring sheets as their school work, teachers not showing up to teach class, and lock down situations that leave children without any form of education for days at a time.

One of our witnesses, Dr. Blomberg, will touch on the school to prison pipeline, where students begin in a traditional public school and are referred to alternative placements, many times for minor infractions like truancy.

Another witness, Ms. Steele, will talk about growing up with an undiagnosed learning disability, dropping out of school, and fighting her way back to become an attorney who protects the educational rights of vulnerable and at-risk youth, including those in foster care and those with learning disabilities. I understand Ms. Steele's situation, as I was not diagnosed with dyslexia until my thirties.

These students then receive substandard education and ultimately end the cycle within a juvenile justice facility or incarcerated. It is not realistic to expect students receiving this type of education to graduate high school, let alone go to college. We know a good education is one of the most effective ways to prevent delinquency.

The overall economic costs for individuals in the correctional system are astounding. To address the educational needs of students from the beginning of a child's school career before that child falls through the cracks is not only economically sound, but it is simply the right thing to do.

Though each of our witnesses here today can speak to successes despite the odds, success for these vulnerable youth is not the norm.

Thank you all for joining us on this issue. I look forward to hearing your testimony.

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