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Before

The House Committee on Education and Labor

On

“Mayor and Superintendent Partnerships in Education: Closing the
Achievement Gap

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Good morning Chairman Miller and members of the Committee on Education and Labor.

Fifteen years ago, the iconic teacher's union leader, Al Shanker, made a point that we are still working to make real in American public schools.

"The key is that unless there is accountability, we will never get the right system," he said. "As long as there are no consequences if kids or adults don't perform, as long as the discussion is not about education and student outcomes, then we're playing a game as to who has the power."

No Child Left Behind focused this nation on accountability. Chairman Miller, you and your colleagues deserve great praise for this. In New York City, we have refined accountability, giving schools and families tools to assess where students are and devise plans to improve and giving administrators the information necessary to ensure that schools are fulfilling their responsibilities to students.

When the right people are held to high standards and expected to meet them, you see results.

And that's what we've been seeing in New York City. We are getting results.

Last September, we won the largest and most prestigious education award in the country, the Broad Prize for Urban Education, largely because of the progress we've made reducing the achievement gap.

Since we started this work in 2002, our students have outpaced gains made by students in the rest of the State in math and reading—and our African-American and Latino students have gained on their white and Asian peers.

In fourth-grade math, for example, the gap separating our African-American and white students has narrowed by more than 16 points. In eighth-grade math, African-American students have closed the gap with white students by almost 5 points. In fourth-grade reading, the gap between African-American and white students has narrowed by more than 6 points. In eighth-grade reading, the gap has closed by about 4 points.

Let's also look at our charter schools: the City's 60 charters serve a population that is more than 90% African-American and Latino and 80% poor, compared to 40% and 45%, respectively, in schools statewide.

Yet charter students are head to head with students who, by anyone's prediction, would be much more likely to succeed. This year, about 85% of City charter students met State math standards, beating students statewide, and about 67% of City charter students met State reading standards, just shy of the statewide average.

What does this show? Achievement for high-needs students is not a dream. It's happening. What we must do now is make this a reality for all students.

We must make sure that as a country, the results we are seeing are meaningful in terms of our students' results. All schools—whether in New York or Kansas—must provide students with the same high-quality education and must be held to the same high standards.

And we must track individual students over time, using a “growth model,” as we do in New York City. Comparing this year's fourth graders to next year's fourth graders as Federal law now requires does little to ensure that we're helping individual students advance.

We must also not lose sight of the importance of our most important asset—our educators. Nationally, this means holding educators to high standards, and by that I mean student outcomes. That means making sure students, particularly those with the highest needs, have teachers who can produce results. Substantial Federal investment in pay differentials to attract the highest performing educators to the highest needs schools is critical. Similarly, substantial Federal financial support to attract successful math and science instructors to schools would help, and a major Federal commitment to reward teachers who get results would have a big impact.

We know that we have much hard work ahead of us, but we are confident that we are on the right track and, with your help, we can get this done..