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Statement of Senator Edward M. Kennedy
**Joint Hearing on “Elementary and Secondary Education Act Reauthorization: Improving
NCLB to Close the Achievement Gap”**

I join in welcoming our witnesses to this joint hearing on the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Our committees worked closely together on the No Child Left Behind Act, and we look forward to continuing our partnership on this reauthorization.

Our goal in the No Child Left Behind Act was to set high standards, close achievement gaps, strengthen public schools, and enable every child to receive a good education. Our priority this year is to make the improvements in the act needed to deliver on the commitment made in 2002.

Schools obviously need greater help in achieving the Act’s goals, and this is no time to retreat. The Act is based on the fundamental principal that every child counts – black or white, native-born or immigrant, disabled or non-disabled. We cannot allow the great hope of *Brown v. Board of Education* to provide a quality education for all children to go unrealized. We cannot allow rampant inequality to undermine opportunity and progress in our schools.

The No Child Left Behind Act has already enabled schools around the nation to make unprecedented progress toward those goals. All 50 states now have standards, assessments, and systems of accountability to track the achievement of students, based not on the performance of its overall student population, but on its progress in closing achievement gaps and enabling all students to meet specific standards. Schools throughout America now are using data from the Act to develop better ways to improve instruction and meet the needs of individual students.

Our Senate Committee has heard in recent weeks about some of these changes. At the Achievable Dream Academy in Newport News, Virginia, longer school days and a more rigorous curriculum have enabled African American students to pass the Virginia state assessment at rates equal or almost equal to white students. A public-private partnership in Boston has improved the recruitment, preparation, training, and retention of teachers through an intensive, year-long residency program.

We know, however, that we’ve only just begun. At this stage of the reauthorization, we look forward to hearing a range of ideas to build on the initial success of the Act and deal with its problems.

We need more effective ways to measure student growth toward standards, and to recognize schools for that progress. Our goal is to focus on the lowest performing schools, instead of simply classifying so many as failures.

We can’t just label schools. We must help them improve. Over 9,000 low-income schools are confronting their weaknesses as they develop and implement the improvement plans required by the law. The federal role in assisting these schools may be our greatest challenge, and it’s a top

priority for this reauthorization.

We must improve the quality of assessments, so that they better reflect what's taught in the classroom, and are more useful in making decisions about teaching and learning. English language learners and students with disabilities deserve the full benefits of the Act, and that requires fair, accurate, and reliable ways to measure their performance.

We must strengthen the workforce of teachers and close the gap in teacher distribution in high-poverty and high-minority schools. The best way to close the achievement gap for students is to see that they all have good teachers.

We must give young students the support and services they need to come to school ready to learn. We must re-engage parents and whole communities in the process, and make them stronger partners in the education of their children.

We must help states develop high standards that are aligned to rigorous curriculums, so that students who graduate from school are ready to compete in the workforce or do well in college.

Most of all, we must use this reauthorization to give schools the resources they need to implement these essential reforms. If we shortchange our schools, we're shortchanging America.

Time and again, I've heard from teachers, principals, and administrators desperate for financial help to carry out these reforms, especially in low-performing schools. We know we can do better. All we need is the will to do it.

I look forward to hearing our witnesses' recommendations and ideas on all of these issues. Thank you all for being here today.